

Michelle Peterson
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Covid- 19 personal experience

My name is Michelle Peterson. I live in Northern, Utah with my husband and our three daughters. I currently teach High School History at a charter school part time while I am working on my master's degree in history at Arizona State University. This is an account of my experiences when the Covid-19 pandemic drastically changed life as we have always known it.

We had been hearing about the Corona Virus (a nickname for Covid-19) for quite some time before it drastically changed our lives. It started in Wuhan, China in the winter of 2019-2020 where reports of this unusual virus began to circulate. Soon we heard that cities in and around Wuhan were on lockdown, hospitals were overcrowded with sick and dying people. It was hard to know what to believe. We honestly did not know how serious it was, and if the Chinese government was giving us all the facts.

In the following weeks and months, we began to hear about the virus spreading to other areas of the world. Travel seemed to be a catalyst for this spread and countries like the United States began screening people and placing them in a two-week quarantine if they had traveled to China or other places where the virus was present. We began to hear about cities and even countries in Europe such as Italy who shut down their entire countries and placed their citizens in quarantine because the virus had infected so many.

Things didn't really change in the United States until March 2020. We were keeping an eye on what was happening in the world, but we did not think it was going to impact us much as there were only a handful of cases in the United States at the time. I remember chatting with my students, asking them if they were worried about the Corona virus. Most felt like it was something happening on the other side of the world, that it would not impact their individual lives.

As a mother I began to feel a little anxious about sending my children to school and their various after school activities. My husband and I began to take extra measures to keep our home clean and stressed the continued importance of hand washing and good hygiene, but we didn't know what else to do to protect our children. At school, my students and I began wiping down the desks and classroom items several times each day to try to keep germs at bay.

Everything in Utah began to change Utah during the week of March 8th, 2020. We began hearing about an increase in numbers of cases in the United States, some even reaching Utah. That week it was also announced that Utah Jazz players Rudy Gobert and Donovan Mitchell had both tested positive for the virus. These actions led the NBA (National Basketball Association) to temporarily shut down. This was soon followed by the shutdown of the NCAA and the beloved March Madness tournament.

On Thursday, March 12th, an impromptu faculty meeting was called at my school during our lunch hour where we were informed that our school would be shutting down the next day and moving to online learning for the next several weeks. On Friday, March 13th, governor Gary Herbert, declared that all public schools in Utah would be closed for the next few weeks and that students would participate in remote learning from home! As a teacher, I was basically given the weekend to convert my curriculum to a fully online curriculum which was incredibly stressful! In addition, he asked that where possible the public should work from their homes. Large gatherings of over 50 people were restricted.

At first, we thought these school closures and other restrictions would only last two or three weeks. However, this was not the case, the Corona virus or Covid-19 had arrived in Utah! As cases began to soar into the hundreds, businesses began to close, church services were suspended, parks and recreation areas were closed. Gatherings of over 10 people were restricted. Life as we had always known it changed dramatically in a matter of days and weeks! During this time a new term "Social Distancing" became a common phrase that could be seen and heard at almost any moment!

Over the next few weeks our government leaders put several additional safety measures in place. One being the "Stay Home Stay Safe" initiative which urged citizens to stay in their homes as much as possible so that the virus would not spread further, and health care centers would not be overwhelmed. The elderly and those who were already at risk were especially cautioned as the virus seemed especially deadly for them.

Grocery stores became increasingly chaotic places as people began to stockpile goods like toilet paper, water, hand sanitizer and cleaning supplies. For several weeks it became almost impossible to find toilet paper. I always felt lucky if I could pick up even one package. Prices in hand sanitizer went up as cases of price gouging began to occur.

Eventually, it was announced that schools would remain closed through the end of the year! This was not a shock as things were not looking great, but it was still a blow to the students who were hoping to return to school and normal life. This extended closure was also extremely hard for High School Seniors who were getting ready to graduate to accept as the usual festivities could not take place. Senior Prom's and end of year celebrations were cancelled, and Graduation ceremonies were being moved to online formats.

In my own home, things were tricky at times. We tried to stay home as much as possible, but that becomes hard after a long period of time. Long walks, bike rides and hikes became part of our daily and weekly routine. My children, ages 15, 13 and 9 did relatively well with online school but "social distancing" was tough for them as they could only communicate with teachers and especially friends online. A common sentiment in our home began to be, "I wish we could go back to school!" One I told them I would remind them of one day!

On May 1st, 2020, many states in the U.S. including Utah decided it was time to begin reopening businesses and other services if safety precautions, such as wearing masks, was mandatory.

This has come with mixed feelings by many as new cases in Utah and the United States are still occurring daily. As I write this, Utah now has around 5,000 cases and close to 50 deaths. The United States now has over 1 million cases and around 65,000 deaths. I agree with others who believe it is too soon to try to return to normal life.

I do however understand the worry over the economy that others are experiencing. The closure of businesses, recreational areas, movie theatres, and shopping malls, to name a few, has taken a tremendous toll on the economy. Unemployment rates are soaring, it is speculated that they could reach as high as 20%. This would likely be a temporary state as businesses begin to open, but we wonder how it will impact the economy long term as it will be necessary to find a “new normal” in the coming months and years.

It remains to be seen how long these circumstances will last and what will happen over the next few months and even years. As a historian, I cannot help but look to the past at similar circumstances. For example, the Spanish Flu Pandemic which impacted the world between 1918 and 1922 stands out in my mind. Similar precautions like isolation and quarantine were put in place but in many cases these strict measures were lifted too quickly causing a surge in cases. Another concerning fact is that the sickness came in three different waves, the second being the deadliest. In the end 50 million people died around the world.

I don't want to be negative about our circumstance, but I feel like we cannot ignore history. Our current experience could be only the beginning. We could yet experience several waves of the virus just like the Spanish Flu. It might be a long time before life returns to normal, even then it seems like daily life will have to be adjusted. I just hope our knowledge of history, our technology and medical knowledge can help us to move forward through these unprecedented times.