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Jonathan Shi

February 26 ·

Northern Italy COVID shutdown, Day 6.

There's no sign of a food shortage anymore: people have stocked up as much as they wanted to I guess. Hand sanitizer prices online have dropped from over 300€/bottle two days ago to about 15€/bottle... it's getting better. There's still a curfew on bars and clubs, but at least one is trying to skirt that rule by calling itself a "restaurant" instead.

Maybe 1/5 to 1/2 as many people were out today as usual. A few of them have masks, or scarves wrapped around their face. Some move to the very edge of the sidewalk before they pass you, while others will step right next to you. People seem chattier now compared to the grimness a few days ago.

It turns out sneezing and runny nose are NOT symptoms of COVID, since the disease attacks the lungs and not the sinuses. Which is good, since I've had a sneeze for ~8 days that's gotten worse today. Instead, the main signs of COVID are a persistent cough, fever, and muscle ache/fatigue, and I have none of those (not that the chances of me having gotten it were awfully high anyway, considering the numbers). Still not a good time to be sneezing in public though....

With 424 cases detected and >8000 tests run, I feel confident that the disease control team will soon find and quarantine most of the active cases of COVID. Probably not enough to outright stop the contagion, but enough to put it into Hong Kong or Singapore mode maybe, where there's just a handful of new cases each day instead of an exponential growth to thousands. Maybe we'll repeat this process with a new undetected cluster or two of infections in another 2-3 weeks, though next time hopefully we catch it before they've spent a week in the hospital already. Either way, I think it's under control in Italy, for now.

But France today announced a death near Paris in a man who was only tested for COVID yesterday and has not traveled to affected areas, meaning he caught it 2-3 weeks ago, so I expect Paris is about to have this same process happen. And a preprint estimates 10,000s of cases in Iran right now, and both Iran and Italy have been exporting cases. The CDC has asked Americans to prepare for a local outbreak.

I've been thinking about what it means to prepare for COVID. It's triggered a lot of supply disruptions so far... but really mostly because of our response to it, not directly because of the illness itself. Once we give up trying to lock down and quarantine entire cities or countries, it ought to leave supply chains weakened maybe, but intact: at least 80% of cases are "mild" and last only two weeks, the severe cases are concentrated in retirees, and Spanish flu was worse than this and didn't bring down civilization. There's no apocalypse or anything like that.

Really I wouldn't expect dangerous shortages in anything except for health care. We'll continue trying to slow outbreaks to space out the need for hospital care: so we might expect and prepare for remote work, distance learning, and cancelled events. It might be a good time to practice preventative hygiene like not touching your face, staying a meter away from persistently coughing people, and washing your hands with good technique. Be prepared to be sick possibly without access to professional care (call before showing up at a hospital), and get ready to take care of ill loved ones, especially the elderly. Getting some extra food before a panic might be good in case of a store run or a temporary shortage (especially in small towns with fewer supply lines), and because it'd suck to be out of food while having a high fever.

Better to get panic out of the system now rather than during an outbreak, and hone preparation and resiliency instead. Some more preparation reading from virologists:

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So you think you're about to be in a pandemic?

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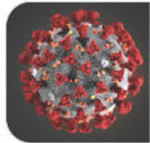
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Looks like a local outbreak has more-or-less been confirmed in NorCal: <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/.../new-case-of-novel.../2242792/>



NBCBAYAREA.COM

New Case of Novel Coronavirus in Northern California: CDC

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Thank you for this. That's good news right?

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Jonathan Shi there's good news and bad news.

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