

When will the next pandemic be?

Introduction

We have passed two years since the start of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic (first report from China December 29, 2019)¹, and there are still patients hospitalized in intensive care units due to COVID-19. The advance of vaccination, the variants (Ómicron) and the recent news of oral antiviral drugs, predict the end of this pandemic and the goodbye to masks.²

If for a moment, we close our eyes to make the following reflection, did you imagine that an inert being (virus), would bend a planet and all its humanity during these years to confinement and different public health care? Perhaps the answer is NO. In some science fiction movies, apocalyptic scenarios were predicted where the inhabitants of the earth were subjected to superior forces or by microorganisms (zombies, viruses, annihilations, planets destroyed by a plague, others).³

The coronavirus, to date, has caused more than 5,052,358 deaths in the world. Its variants appear, new vaccines and innovative public health measures, updating of health regulations. However, as vaccination advances in all continents, its eradication or epidemiological control is a reality.⁴

“Coronavirus effect” All industrial sectors were affected. All economies, especially low- and middle-income countries, had a significant drop in their gross domestic product (GDP). All health systems could not meet the demand for infected patients and in emerging countries this impact was catastrophic on their inhabitants. All students in primary, secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate education changed their teaching and learning modality. Product manufacturing and delivery, with supply chain disruptions in the industrial sector, top concerns as the biggest risks and challenges for global corporate growth going forward.⁵

The Black Death (1347-1351) considered one of the most devastating epidemics in the history of mankind, ended the lives of 75 to 200 million people in the fourteenth century and the ravages of its consequences at the economic, political and social levels. They were overwhelming.⁶

The Spanish Influenza (1918-1919), generated an average of 40 million deaths worldwide. Some calculations put total deaths closer to 70 million. Lots of stories of people dying within hours of first feeling sick. The mortality rate was highest among adults under 50 years of age, who were vulnerable to this strain of influenza.⁷ At that time the average world population was 1.8 billion.

In both pandemics, the infection process had a natural behavior, that is, infection and subsequent herd immunity. There were no interventions with pharmacological treatments, diagnostic tests, health supports, vaccines, use of integrated and open data for interventions in public health, among others. In the end, only the most robust human immune systems survived these pandemics. Now let's imagine how many deaths we would have had in this pandemic without these interventions? Consider that the current world population is greater than seven billion population (7,905,773,849 population). I leave this answer for epidemiologists, evolutionary virologists and experts on the subject.⁸

So when will the next pandemic be? In November 2002, nineteen years ago, a viral epidemic generated the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) that spread through 26 countries with 8,098

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confirmed cases and 774 deaths. Ten years later, another viral outbreak caused the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in Saudi Arabia in April 2012, reaching 27 countries with 2,494 confirmed cases and 858 deaths. Seven years later, SARS-Cov-2 appears on the scene with the pandemic of the century that we all already know.

Perhaps the next pandemic is not far away, however, its legacy is unquestionable, especially in the lessons learned in terms of public health. “This forces governments and ministries of health, especially in low- and middle-income countries, to strengthen their health systems, with a greater focus on primary care or first level.” May the legacy of this pandemic not be in vain; for our societies and for our planet.

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Conflicts of interest

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