

WHAT COMES NEXT

EXPERTS PREDICT HOW THE PANDEMIC WILL CHANGE OUR LIVES BY DAVID HOCHMAN

C OVID-19 will change everything, from how we greet each other to what's on our bucket list. "It's the single greatest disruption of our lifetime," says Jeffrey Cole, director of the Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California. "The kind of change that's occurred over a few months will change how we do things for years." Here's what's coming, what's on the ropes and—sigh—what we may lose forever in this crisis.



THE PURELL YEARS

Calling Mr. and Mrs. Clean (and maybe the Jetsons)

► **Americans will be increasingly fixated on washing away deadly germs.** If sneezing into your elbow took some adjustment, brace for what's on the hygiene horizon. "Especially for older people, hand scrubbing, mask wearing and hyper attention to surface disinfection will be the norm at every turn," says Eric Toner, M.D., a senior scholar with the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security.

You won't enter a supermarket or office building without a sanitizing wipe or blast of Purell (or another gel-based hand cleanser, products that saw a 73 percent spike in U.S. sales in March). But that's just a gateway to a spark-

ling new realm of electrostatic sprays and ultraviolet-light wands aimed at sterilizing a nation where some 1 in 3 of us now identify as germophobes.

That government order for hundreds of millions of N95 masks won't just make it harder to hear each other on socially distant walks. "Masks could soon draw lines, both personal and political, and between young and old," says Rob Kahn, a law professor at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota who studies mask ordinances. "If you wear one or don't wear one, it sends a message about how seriously you take public health warnings, about your views on personal liberties, even about generational differences" at a time in which adults 70 and older rate the threat of COVID-19 as more serious than younger people do, according to a



WAVE GOODBYE TO HANDSHAKES

The very personal greeting of clasped hands that dates back to ancient Greece is "out the window for the foreseeable future," says Harvard epidemiologist William Hanage, M.D., who recommends a sanitary *Star Trek* salute and a hearty, "Live long and prosper."

survey published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine*.

"Clean" is the new "green" as businesses begin to "make a show of elevated hygiene," says Boston architect Rami el Samahy. Expect lots of public mopping and swabbing; plexiglass walls between you and your cashier or barista, maybe even temperature-check stations. "These cues bring comfort as more infectious diseases emerge," Toner says.

With that vigilance comes an entire "touchless" or "distance" economy, as online ordering becomes the norm for millions and a true lifeline for vulnerable older adults. If you've Zoomed,

or ordered DIY meals from Blue Apron, bistroMD or HelloFresh—or dinner itself via an app like Postmates, Uber Eats, Grubhub or DoorDash—you're a contributor. Additionally, downloads of shopping apps like Instacart, Walmart Grocery and Peapod as much as quadrupled in one month, according to one survey. "It's using online sources for things people never considered before—everything from buying shoes, steaks and bourbon, to exercise classes, and it's here to stay," says Tim Wu, a *New York Times* opinion columnist and author of *The Curse of Bigness*.

Then there's the truly hands-off: UV-emitting robots, like

those scouring hospitals in China and Scandinavia, will roll here soon. Amazon has been testing the delivery of packages with sidewalk rovers in Snohomish County, Washington, and Irvine, California. FedEx and UPS are testing same-day drone service to fly in items. “We’ve seen a fourfold increase in our restaurant and grocery delivery orders using robotic vehicles since precrisis,” says Matthew Johnson-Roberson, CEO of Refraction AI, which builds bots.



THE KNOCKOUT PUNCH

Sectors of the economy that

were teetering with tech disruption may now topple

► **The mall, your morning newspaper, dinner and a movie on Saturday night—COVID-19 has put them all on the endangered list.** Already reeling from online competition, J.C. Penney, J. Crew and Neiman Marcus finally declared bankruptcy during this crisis, though they won’t be the last retailers to cry uncle. More than 15,000 stores could close, according to retail research firm Coresight Research.

Likewise, digital media hasn’t been kind to the newspaper and magazine biz, but COVID-19 could bury it. Gannett, the largest owner of local papers, lost nearly 94 percent of its value between August 2019 and April—much of that since mid-February. Media analyst Ken Doctor calls the pandemic “an extinction event” for print, as newsstand sales, subscriptions and

ad dollars shrivel, and “beloved columnists you’ve been reading for years quietly disappear.”

In a world where nobody’s going out, age-old diversions are going bye-bye. The restaurant industry was already strapped by minuscule margins. Without a quick recovery or massive bailout, 1 in 10 establishments could shutter before the coronavirus is done. In March alone, restaurants and bars accounted for about 60 percent of total job losses in the U.S. Those waiters and dishwashers may never return. Nor will certain items on the menu. In May, Sweet Tomatoes and Souplantation said all 97 soup-and-salad locations might close permanently. “We won’t see buffets, salad bars or serve-yourself-anything anytime soon,” says chef and food writer Ruth Reichl, “and don’t expect older people like me”—she’s 72—“to feel that comfortable sitting in a bar or an intimate dining room until there’s an all clear.”

Back home, all that streaming you’re doing is great for Netflix and Amazon Prime, but it could spell curtains for the long-declining theatrical movie business. Moviegoing ranked second to last on a list of 15 activities people said they miss the most while stuck in their homes, according to a study by the Center for the Digital Future. “We thought half the movie theaters would disappear before the pandemic,” says USC’s Cole, who oversaw the study. “Now staying away from theaters is an issue of life and death.”

Though it might depend on the theater type: Drive-in movies are



RETHINK TRAVEL

“Younger generations are spending more time than ever with parents and grandparents right now,” says The Points Guy founder Brian Kelly, who suggests intergenerational travel will boom, and that RVs may be safer than hotels for at-risk older people. For more on travel, see page 34.

thriving, with first-run releases, concessions by phone and “a chance to have fun out and about while also social distancing,” says Spencer T. Folmar, whose proposed 500-spot, five-screen outdoor cinema near Orlando would be the world’s largest, he says.



A FEAR OF PEOPLE

It’s more than concern about contagion: Our

collective mindset is shifting on everything from stadium gatherings to our dream trips

► **Take me out with the crowd?**

Not now. “I don’t see any timeline where athletic events have fans packing the stands,” says Abraham Madkour, publisher and executive editor of *Sports Business Journal*, who believes baseball, hockey and the NBA may play to empty arenas at least into 2021. “The exception might be football, which needs fans to work,” he says. But even there, you’ll likely see 25 to 30 percent capacity, higher ticket prices, segmented arrival times and cordoned-off sections to give cautious attendees the luxury of distance.

“Nobody’s excited about being around 75,000 people right now,” Madkour says.

Convincing home team hordes to use mass transit will be tricky, too. Public transportation ridership demand has dropped 75 percent nationally during the crisis, according to statistics compiled by the Transit app. New York City subway traffic is down a staggering 93 percent. “It took six years for transit ridership to return to normal after 9/11, and that didn’t involve a bunch of contagious people in an enclosed bus or train,” says Bert Sperling, founder of BestPlaces.net, an online resource about city livability. “Society is about to do a major rethink on commuting, now that telecommuting is a real option and the status around clustering in a city center has gone away.”

Just as Paris was remade after thousands died in the 1832 cholera epidemic, “American cities will reassess and reevaluate the width of our sidewalks, better access to parks and nature, and why cars get so much space when it’s people who need to roam,” says Nicola Twilley, coauthor of a forthcoming book on the history of quarantines. Early evidence: New York City is planning to close up to 100 miles of streets for pedestrian use. “It will be hard to give all that opened space back,” Twilley says.

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—Abraham Madkour, *Sports Business Journal*

Cover Story



THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

It turns out the safest place in a pandemic is right at home—and now that we've reexperienced its joys, we may choose to stick around more.

► **Sourdough loaves are rising, seedlings are sprouting and that sweet hempy smell around sunset might just be your retired weed-loving neighbor.**

“With the grim news of the day, people are crying out for a respite, or at least a jumble or a rebus,” says Ben Bass, a lawyer based in Chicago and three-time *Jeopardy!* winner. His twice-weekly Cryptogram is part of an April shutdown-induced crossword page expansion in the *New York Times*. “Games keep you sane.”

The *Times* also reported a resurgence of so-called victory gardens as grocery shelves grew bare. Puzzle sales at game-maker Ravensburger jumped 370 percent as the outbreak initially shut things down. In a study, 87 percent of Americans reported enjoying “catching up on TV and movies,” according to USC’s Center for the Digital Future. Online sales at Vermont-based King Arthur Flour soared in March; the company had to put a two-

“It’s hard to guess the depth of the downturn.”

—Joseph Stiglitz, economist

bag limit on orders from home bakers. Guitar Center saw online sales double as Eric Clapton wannabes sheltered in place.

Boston home goods company Wayfair reports roughly 90

percent revenue growth since April 1, as homeowners invest in improvements. Spirits are being refreshed, too: Online alcohol sales spiked 243 percent nationwide during one week in March, according to Nielsen, and home cannabis delivery is booming. “On average, with COVID, we see 50 percent more people over age 50 ordering, and they’re buying 15 percent more per order,” says Elizabeth Ashford, a spokeswoman for online cannabis marketplace Eaze.



OH, THAT SOUNDED GREAT AT THE TIME

Major living trends hit a viral snafu

► **In the good old days—say, February—staying in a stranger’s guest unit was the smartest way to avoid high-priced hotels.** Now Airbnb and other rental shares “are at a huge disadvantage,” says The Points Guy founder Brian Kelly. Airbnb, which recently laid off a quarter of its workforce, is implementing rigorous cleaning guidelines, including a new category of listings that block out 72 hours between guest visits for sanitizing. “When we asked guests in March whether they’d choose to stay in a home where they had more control of their surroundings or a densely populated hotel, 74 percent chose a home,” says a spokesperson for Airbnb. Still, Kelly says, “Do you really want to sleep in a room cleaned by someone who’s doing this as a hobby?”

Retirees who were considering ditching their home or downsizing are reevaluating, too. Before the lockdown, swapping out the family house for an apartment in town made perfect sense for empty nesters. Now? Maybe not. “Aging in place is going to mean



BEST PLACES TO RETIRE (NOT)

“Older people don’t want the risk that comes with crowding,” says Nora Super of the Milken Institute. “They don’t want to be crammed into tight quarters, and there’s renewed interest in natural surroundings.”

aging with more space,” predicts Nora Super, senior director of the Milken Institute’s Center for the Future of Aging, who is revisiting the institute’s “Age-Forward Cities for 2030,” a report about how cities can work best for tomorrow’s older population.

Nearly a third of Americans are considering moving to less populated areas in the wake of the pandemic, according to a new Harris Poll. “Those of us who are aging experts thought the best place to retire would be somewhere dense, where you have access to museums, transportation, restaurants and places to walk, even with limited mobility,” Super says. But that changed, she says, as New York and other cities became COVID-19 epicenters.



THE UNKNOWN UNKNOWN

There’s really no predicting what’s coming to Americans next

► **Pick a concern and it’s punctuated by question marks.** The economy and Medicare? “It’s hard to guess the depth of the downturn, but it will be the worst since the Depression,” says Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, author of *People, Power,*

and Profits. “Unless we provide significant support to states and localities, which are front lines on Medicare and Medicaid, the availability of social services is going to be very stretched.”

Voting? “We’ll learn more through primary season,” says Nancy LeaMond, AARP’s chief advocacy and engagement officer. “We do know the 116 million American voters over age 50 have views across the ideological spectrum, and they intend to vote.”

A coronavirus cure? That’s the most critical question, and it’s still too early to say. The 1967 mumps vaccine took a record-short four years to produce. There are more than 250 therapies and 100 vaccines related to COVID-19 being explored, but we’ll need to build factories to produce hundreds of millions of doses. “If we’re lucky and fast-track this, we may have a vaccine within a year or two, but it could be three or five years or longer,” says Johns Hopkins’ Toner. “My hope is we can learn from this painful lesson. We’re not going back to how things were, but with new precautions and new habits, we’ll be better prepared for the next superbug du jour.” ■

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