A year into coronavirus, we're still counting the dead

A year ago this week, *The Verge* published our first story about the virus. It was January 21. The first case had arrived in the US. We'd only heard of about 300 cases reported in China and six deaths.

We still knew there was a chance it could get bad. "It's bringing back SARS flashbacks for me," coronavirus expert Timothy Sheahan told *Verge* reporter Nicole Wetsman at the time. The 2002 SARS outbreak taught researchers speed, but was only a deadly teaser to the still-unnamed pandemic that was about to begin.

One year and almost 1,000 coronavirus-related articles later, we've passed more grim milestones than we ever should have. More than 97 million people have contracted the virus and 2.1 million people have died. In just one year, more people in the US have died than US soldiers did in *four* years in World War II.

One year and almost 1,000 coronavirus-related articles later
There are moments where I stop and look back at the broken path behind us — potholed with incompetence, arrogance, and ignorance. In my head, the milestones are rough and faded, and pass by in a blur — sun-stained photos hanging limply at roadside memorials. People that didn't have to die, but who are nonetheless gone in a crash, in a silence, in a breath.

This week, we finally got a chance to slow down and remember them. 400 lights lit up around the reflecting pool in Washington, DC. One for each of a thousand lives extinguished by the virus in the US.

The roll of the dead keeps growing. But in the creeping darkness, there's also a growing feeling of hope. It was the nursing homes that terrified me eleven months ago. I remember that pit in my stomach in late February when I first saw the reports of an outbreak in a Washington state nursing home — one of the first known outbreaks in the US. Even then, we knew that the people there were especially vulnerable to the virus, which thrives where people congregate and preys on people fighting other conditions.

Less than a year later, that same nursing home is fully vaccinated.

> *Update on this story: Residents and staff at Life Care Center of Kirkland received their second dosage on Monday. The very first outbreak site in the U.S. is fully vaccinated. https://t.co/D4boxbiX3A*
>
> *— Paige Cornwell (@pgcornwell) January 19, 2021*

Across the country in Connecticut, case numbers in nursing homes have dropped sharply after residents and staff got vaccinated. These are small, stolen moments of joy in a year that has been both frantic and sad.

After a year of covering this, grappling with the pain this tiny virus is causing hasn't gotten any easier. Every obituary to a life lost is still a heartbreak. I still tear up when I see the joy of a nurse getting vaccinated. I still ache for the living whose lives have been upended by crisis for a year or more. Overall, I'm still going, and so are all of you. We're still not there yet, but we can hope that the road ahead of us is shorter and smoother than the one we've just come down.

Here's what else is happening this week.

Research

A troubling new pattern among the coronavirus variants
Three coronavirus variants from around the world all feature the same mutations. Here's why that's worrying for scientists. (Bonus: a good description of how to read the names of different mutations.) (Sarah Zhang */ The Atlantic)*

Rogue antibodies could be driving severe COVID-19
This virus doesn't treat all humans equally. Some infected people have no symptoms, while others endure symptoms that last for months. Researchers think that some severe cases of disease may be caused by autoimmunity, or the immune system attacking the body instead of the virus. (Roxanne Khamsi */ *Nature*)

Development

Pfizer Will Ship Fewer Vaccine Vials to Account for 'Extra' Doses
After extra doses were found in some vials of Pfizer vaccines, the company pushed for the US federal government to count the 'extra' towards the 200 million doses that they'd committed to provide to the government. The FDA recently changed the language in Pfizer's vaccine authorization – now each vial will count for six doses instead of five. (Noah Weiland, Katie Thomas and Sharon LaFraniere */ The New York Times*)

CDC quietly changes Covid vaccine guidance to OK mixing Pfizer and Moderna shots in 'exceptional situations'
The CDC recently changed their guidance for COVID-19 vaccines. In certain extraordinary situations, they say that doses can be given up to six weeks apart, and that the two brands (Pfizer and Moderna) may be mixed. But officials emphasized that if at all possible, providers should stick to the authorized dosing schedules. (Will Feuer/*CNBC*)

Black Americans are getting vaccinated at lower rates than white Americans
Chaos has defined the vaccine rollout in the US. It's also been an unequal chaos, and Black Americans are getting vaccinated at much lower rates than their white counterparts. (Hannah Recht and Lauren Weber */ Kaiser Health News*)

Mobile labs take vaccine studies to diverse neighborhoods
Vaccine studies are still ongoing for several different candidate vaccines. In an effort to make these studies equitable, some researchers are bringing mobile labs to underrepresented communities. (Lauran Neergaard, Joseph B. Frederick */ AP)*

Eli Lilly says its monoclonal antibody prevented COVID-19 infections in clinical trial
In a press release, pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly said that their antibody treatment prevented infections in a clinical trial. The company hopes that the IV treatment could be used to prevent infections during active outbreaks. (Matthew Herper */ STAT*)

Perspectives

> *For months, I have had a bag of baby monitors under the cramped desk in the tiny room that serves as my office at the hospital where I work as a high-risk obstetrician. They are not special baby monitors; they are the same ones you could buy on Amazon or at CVS. They're stacked alongside a plastic bin full of clogs and a box of unused printer paper—the kind of things you can't quite throw out, because you might need them.*

— Physician and author Chavi Karkowsky writes for *Slate* about how her colleagues made do with what they had during COVID surges.

> *As quickly as the chills, fever and fatigue appeared, they were gone. Like the movie "Groundhog Day," I would relive the worst of Covid over and over until, one day, hopefully, I would not.*

– Laura M. Holson writes about her experience with "long COVID" in *The New York Times Magazine.*

More than Numbers

To the more than 98,100,314 people worldwide who have tested positive, may your road to recovery be smooth.

To the families and friends of the 2,104,778 people who have died worldwide – 413,818 of those in the US – your loved ones are not forgotten.

Stay safe, everyone.

https://www.theverge.com/2021/1/23/22245233/year-into-coronavirus-covid-still-counting-dead