

Webisode 57DHYAFZZFLHO March 19 2026 6 years ago COVID hit the US and US had high infection rates

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[1A United States Covid 19 six years later Excerpts edited for brevity and clarity by Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates a 501C3 nonprofit organization](#) Your Local Epidemiologist Newsletter by Katelyn Jetelina March 19 2026 Six years ago today COVID arrived A lot has changed since then I do not do many deep dives on Covid 19 anymore because the landscape has dramatically changed for the better but also because honestly it brings back some overwhelming emotions But this anniversary matters not only so you can protect yourself from this virus that is still circulating and not only to honor the 1 point 5 million people who died but also because this moment deserves serious reflection So six years later this is where we stand A lot has changed and continues to do so [Covid 19 is no longer the third leading cause of death In fact it now carries roughly the same severity as the flu](#) While flu is nothing to brush off this virus not being a top killer is genuine relief Even better news Peaks are getting smaller and smaller Each successive wave has been lower than the last a pattern reflected in almost every metric including hospitalizations see below This is not surprising as our collective immunity builds the virus has a harder time breaking through SARS CoV 2 continues to evolve along the same narrow path which is unusual but very helpful in reducing the number of people with the disease The Covid 19 cousins we call coronaviruses are now responsible for the common cold and there is a hypothesis that this virus may eventually follow the same path We are clearly not there yet as hospitalization rates tell us but the trajectory is meaningful Interestingly seasonality has recently shifted We now reliably see two waves each year one in winter one in summer [But nationally over the past two years the summer wave has been larger than the winter wave see above We do not know why Unfortunately vaccination rates continue to fall](#) Roughly 3 point 5 million fewer older Americans were vaccinated this year compared to last year That means 3 point 5 million people in the highest risk group are now less protected from a largely preventable disease With all the federal vaccine confusion I expect this to continue to decline Some patterns have not changed though For example those most at risk for severe disease remain the same Adults over 65 and infants under one year old continue to be the most likely to be hospitalized The vast majority 80 percent of hospitalizations are still for Covid 19 not incidentally with it Risk increases with the number of chronic conditions a person has Long Covid physical symptoms persisting weeks or months after infection is also still a risk Also the vaccines continue to provide additional protection about 50 percent against emergency room visits and hospitalization Protection does still wane dropping to roughly 18 percent at around four months The decline is slower than before particularly for hospitalization among adults aged 65 and older There is still a lot we do not know It is striking how much remains unknown about this virus six years in Long Covid is still poorly understood with millions of people living with fatigue cognitive impairment and cardiovascular effects that medicine is only slowly grappling with We know risk has decreased alongside the decline in severe acute disease but we still lack reliable data on the extent of that decline and we still have no effective treatments Vaccine dosing for older adults is another gap Current guidance recommends two updated vaccine doses per year for older adults one in the fall and one in the spring But robust data on whether two annual doses offer better protection than one is still extremely limited In fact I could not find any data that are actually useful for guiding people like my grandfather to make evidence based decisions about getting a second dose and when I am still telling him to get two doses because the benefits outweigh the risks but man we need evidence We also still do not have a

clear honest accounting of which interventions worked which did not and why during the biggest health emergency this country has faced in more than 1 hundred years For example we still do not know what works best to slow the spread of Covid 19 This is mind boggling given all we sacrificed as a society let alone indicating how not well prepared we are for next time Today what worries me most is deeper than the science When researchers compared countries that fared well during Covid 19 to those that did not they looked at health care infrastructure population density universal health care age distribution how many vaccines they got and a ton of other factors But the strongest predictors of Covid 19 infections were not any of these It was trust of different kinds Trust in government trust in institutions and trust in each other Countries where people broadly believed their neighbors and leaders were acting in good faith did measurably better The United States ranked among the lowest among high income countries Six years later it is getting worse Federal leadership has promised to restore trust But the latest data show record low levels of trust in government overall and specifically in health agencies trust is eroding further day by day Lack of transparency full on destruction of systems and capabilities partisan attacks lack of accountability performative acts without real change and a failure to listen to the public are all contributing to it Public health on the outside though is not providing an alternative path forward either Many institutions and leaders are stuck in defense mode circling the wagons to preserve the status quo or paralyzed afraid to take even one step forward Wishing we could return to 2019 is not a plan Public health systems saved many people but they also failed many I am finally starting to see some appetite for change peppered here and there and it is giving me hope that things might improve but not at the pace that meets the urgency of the moment The health of Americans and biosecurity depend on it Bottom line Six years! Six years with a complicated data story of real progress alongside real stubbornness This anniversary is striking to me for two reasons The first is the virus itself it continues to surprise us and we remain humbled by how much we still do not understand The second is what has happened to us in its wake Six years ago I sat down at my dining room table because I deeply believed things needed to be done differently I still believe that today The question now is whether this country has the wherewithal to do it I think we do we need to but it is going to take all of us Love YLE PS A lot of you have Covid 19 related questions My team pulled the top 7 Here are some answers for you! What do we know about long Covid in 2026? The risk of developing long Covid has decreased significantly compared to early pandemic years but it is not zero Millions are still living with it and we still have no proven treatments Here is the Your Local Epidemiologist YLE last dive into long Covid Will we still be able to get updated vaccines this fall? This is uncertain in a way it has never been before The vaccine policy of the federal government is highly unstable Are home rapid tests still reliable? Yes but timing still matters Tests are most accurate a few days into symptoms not at the first sign of illness So a negative on day one is not a green light Test again 24 to 48 hours later for a clearer picture There are no longer free Covid 19 tests through the government but you can get one at a pharmacy or online Where do I find trustworthy data now? I still trust the CDC data for these reasons and they have a great respiratory dashboard that is updated weekly here I do not trust CDC guidance around vaccines from the past year How much damage does Covid do to the heart brain and vascular system? Covid infection is associated with an elevated risk of heart attack stroke blood clots and cognitive decline even after mild cases The elevated risk appears to diminish over time for most people and vaccination reduces the likelihood of these outcomes Who should take Paxlovid and is it still effective? Paxlovid remains effective at reducing the risk of severe disease particularly for people over 65 and those with underlying conditions It may also reduce the risk of long Covid though if it does the effect is probably small The 8 hundred dollar out of pocket cost for Medicare patients is a serious largely unaddressed barrier that keeps it from those who need it most Metformin has shown some promise in preventing long Covid but the benefit for vaccinated people is less clear probably because the vaccines already reduce the risk so much that it is hard to see additional benefit on top of them When are we getting a vaccine that prevents infection not just severity? This is a complicated question and scientists are still working on it Right now many researchers are excited about nasal spray vaccines The idea is that if you can build up immunity right in your nose and throat where the virus first enters your body might be able to stop the infection before it even starts But there are a few catches If you have already had Covid 19 getting a regular vaccine already sends immune cells to your nose anyway so a nasal vaccine might be less of a leap forward than we hope On top of that it likely would not protect you for long and would still

require regular boosters as the virus mutates. The good news is that nasal and mucosal vaccines are being developed right now and early results look promising. Scientists are also working on a universal coronavirus vaccine that could protect against many variants at once but that is a longer term goal. The bottom line better vaccines are coming but a widely available next generation option is probably still a few years away.

**1B** A legal win for vaccines. But chaos is the point. Excerpts edited for brevity and clarity by Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates a 501C3 nonprofit organization. Inside Medicine Newsletter March 19 2026. On Monday a ruling of a judge delivered a blow to the HHS Secretary RFK Kennedy overt attack on US vaccine policy. The Inside Medicine Newsletter for today comes in four sections. Note that we will be going live with the lawyer behind the key legal win of the American Academy of Pediatrics on Friday at 2:30 pm ET which is 1:30 pm Central Standard Time. A judge delivers for vaccines in favor of vaccines. But for RFK Junior Chaos is the point. We are talking to the victorious AAP lawyer tomorrow! Since taking office Kennedy has in essence hijacked the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices ACIP. A judicial stay earlier this week means that for now important changes Secretary Kennedy jammed through over the last year have been reversed including sudden changes in the CDC Covid 19 vaccine recommendations outside of the usual transparent process involving ACIP. The ACIP revised pediatric vaccine schedule which included eliminating the recommendation for routine administration of the Hepatitis B vaccine birth dose. The RFK Junior newly installed ACIP member appointments were recalled. They did not genuinely go through the legally required vetting. Because its voting members have now been benched the scheduled ACIP meeting this week has also been canceled. This is all good news for obvious reasons. But there is a larger problem. Chaos is the point. Regardless of the final outcome the Trump administration will certainly appeal the decision long term damage has already been done. Because of the Trump executive orders and the RFK Junior policies the CDC website is chaotically unreliable in the most confusing of ways. It is neither reliably reliable nor reliably unreliable. It depends on the page. So how is the public to tell which CDC webpages to believe and which to ignore? It is not easy it is not like there is any indication that the information on a page has or has not been tainted by the RFK Junior edicts. Yes most of the pages are dated so older pages remain accurate. But newly edited ones could either reflect genuinely data driven updates from CDC scientists or be updates reflecting Trump era nonsense. It often takes careful scrutiny to make the distinction and people are on the CDC site looking for efficient answers. It would actually be easier though tragic if I knew I could not refer patients to the CDC website. But I cannot abandon it entirely because so much of what is there is really good. If you Google lead poisoning heart disease prevention or smoking risks excellent CDC websites appear at the top of the search. But do not Google "CDC vaccines and autism" unless you want an ulcer. I think that is the point. RFK Junior wants us to keep using the CDC site as a trusted source of information. He just wants some of the pages his hobby horses to reflect his warped view on vaccines. He wants genuine CDC expertise to next to his drivel. Even in light of the latest legal victory the part of the public that still believes in science for example most of us actually is wary of the CDC now thanks to RFK Junior and Trump. As Doctor Danielle Ofri wrote last year the concept of medical expertise summarized simply by using the word "we" that is "we recommend" is now lost. Now that the CDC website is no longer reliably reliable the public has entered a medical information diaspora. The information is out there but you have to seek it out curate it and vet it for yourself. Sometimes it is challenging to distinguish a good resource from mediocre or even bad ones. That is what made the pre Trump 2.0 CDC website so great. In almost all instances we knew that what you would find was good. For RFK Junior and his allies this is mission accomplished. Still we must soldier on. This legal victory this week is evidence that we can win. We are talking to the victorious AAP lawyer tomorrow Friday March 20 at 2:30 pm ET which is 1:30 PM Central Standard Time. Richard Hughes the victorious lawyer for the American Academy of Pediatrics will join me in The Doctors Lounge on Substack Live! To join us click this link. Please submit your questions in the comment section. About our guest Richard H. Hughes the fourth JD MPH is a partner with Epstein Becker and Green PC a Washington DC law firm and a professional lecturer in law at The George Washington University Law School. He has devoted the past two decades to improving access to vaccines. Richard was formerly vice president of public policy at Moderna guiding the policy strategy of the company during the COVID 19 pandemic. He is the lead counsel in AAP versus Kennedy.

a lawsuit challenging the actions of HHS Secretary RFK Junior with respect to vaccine policy **He serves on the board of Vaccinate Your Family a nonprofit organization committed to protecting people of all ages from vaccine preventable diseases**

**2** European Union Belgium Brussels Trump and Iran Will not Leave the Agenda as European Leaders Meet **RAWSEP View** Hungary still holds up aid to Ukraine **Excerpts edited for brevity and clarity by Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates a 501C3 nonprofit organization** The New York Times March 19 2026 A gathering in Brussels was meant to concentrate on jump starting the EU economy Instead the fallout of the war in the Middle East is front and center During their talks EU leaders were expected to focus in part on escalating fuel prices European officials brought a hopeful message into 2026 After a tumultuous 2025 which they spent reacting to one crisis after another emanating from Washington they were ready to start setting their own agenda So much for that A summit in Brussels on Thursday put on full display just how profoundly **the plans of Europe have again been derailed by Trump** Leaders from the 27 nations of the European Union gathered for the marathon meeting one that was originally billed as an opportunity to jump start the economic competitiveness of the bloc But since the United States and Israel launched an attack on Iran nearly three weeks ago the focus of the meeting has shifted to **escalating fuel prices** and the fallout of war in the Middle East **The Hungarian insistence on blocking a desperately needed loan to Ukraine has further distracted attention** Here is what the leaders of Europe are talking about **Fuel prices are a big worry** European energy costs have soared since the war in Iran broke out on February 28 After Iranian missile strikes damaged a huge liquefied natural gas plant in Qatar gas prices in Europe on Thursday hit more than double their prewar level Fearing a repeat of the painful cost crunch of 2022 European nations were scrambling to find some way to offset the impact on consumers “We are very worried about the energy crisis” Bart De Wever the Belgian prime minister said as he entered the gathering in Brussels “We were already worried before the start of the war ” The attacks “create further chaos” Kaja Kallas the top EU diplomat said on Thursday morning Various options are being considered to alleviate the pain **Several nations have suggested that to defray costs the European Union should relax rules meant to curb carbon emissions** “Flexibility could benefit our people” Evika Silina prime minister of Latvia told reporters before the meeting **But Nordic countries and some other northern European nations have pushed back against weakening emissions standards** saying that would undermine important progress toward green energy The decarbonization rules are “a cornerstone of our climate policy” said Petteri Orpo the Finnish prime minister “We can and will only be able to get involved once the guns fall silent” Chancellor Friedrich Merz of Germany said Luc Frieden prime minister of Luxembourg said “We want to have safe passage for the ships that are in the Strait of Hormuz but **we should be very careful not to be drawn into a conflict that might escalate** ” European officials have also expressed worries that the Mideast turmoil will **distract from the Russian war in Ukraine at a time when Kyiv urgently needs the support of the West** “My worry is that the events in the Middle East can overshadow the war in Ukraine” Gitanas Nausėda president of Lithuania told reporters before the gathering **Leaders are expressing frustration with Hungary** European leaders will focus on at least one issue related to Ukraine on Thursday that of Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary blocking a 90 billion euro loan about 1 hundred billion dollars to Kyiv that the European Union agreed to in December Mister Orban says he is refusing to allow the loan to move forward because Ukraine is being slow to repair a damaged pipeline that pumps Russian fuel to Hungary and Slovakia “The Hungarians are not able to get the oil which belongs to us” Mister Orban said as he walked into the Thursday meeting saying that he could not support the loan until his nation began to receive the oil Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary in Brussels on Thursday is blocking a 90 billion euro loan to Ukraine citing The Kyiv slowness in repairing an oil pipeline But many European Union officials suspect that **the obstruction has to do with an election in Hungary on April 12 and they are pressuring Mister Orban to allow the money to flow** “It is regretful that we are losing the time” Mister Nausėda from Lithuania said Ms Kallas was even blunter “I am not very optimistic” she told reporters “In the time of elections people are not that rational ” **Leaders have expressed alarm that Mister Orban is holding up a package that he had previously agreed to potentially undermining the value of such EU agreements** **Competitiveness is still on the agenda technically** The economy will still find its way into the discussion on

Thursday The participants plan to talk about steps to simplify regulation and attract companies to the European Union But those issues are taking a back seat to geopolitics “Today the leaders will focus on competitiveness” Antonio Costa president of the European Council said Within a few sentences though even he had to focus on the news of the day “Of course nobody can ignore that we are facing challenging times on energy” Costa said

3 Germany Stavenhagen the German state of Mecklenburg Western Pomerania including Stavenhagen In Some Areas of Germany the Far Right Is Part of the Fabric RAWSEP View The firewall against the Neo Nazi Party still holds The other Germany political parties still refuse to work with the Alternative for Germany the AfD Candidates for AfD make complaints about wind power and linger over concerns about wind power Excerpts edited for brevity and clarity by Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates a 501C3 nonprofit organization The New York Times March 19 2026 The Alternative for Germany party or AfD is shunned in federal politics but is a regional force This fall it could win broader power for the first time Photo of Three AfD representatives Christian Skotnik left Doreen Gärtner center and Enrico Schult before a party meeting in Stavenhagen Germany in October At the height of an election campaign in the German state of Baden Württemberg last month candidates from the main political parties of the area gathered for a televised debate One of them came from a far right party the Alternative for Germany or AfD It was a first for the state a relatively wealthy enclave of the former West Germany that has long resisted far right leaders In the halls of Parliament in Berlin AfD members are pariahs designated as suspected right wing extremists by federal intelligence None of the other parties will work with them to form a government It is a strategy known as a “firewall” and it has kept the AfD from power even as it gains popularity But on airwaves throughout the country and in town hall style gatherings and mundane city council sessions across eastern Germany the AfD is a daily mainstay for Germans in the east who live away from major cities They say they feel ignored by the mainstream parties that have governed the country since East and West Germany reunited in 1990 On a rainy Friday evening last fall about 30 people crowded into a makeshift bar on the outskirts of Stavenhagen a quiet village two hours north of Berlin where the AfD secured about 42 percent of the vote in the 2025 federal election The crowd settled in for an evening of lecture and banter with representatives of the AfD which has become the most popular political party in the region “No one else does this sort of thing” said Klaus Skotnik who watched in Stavenhagen as his brother Christian an AfD state parliament candidate voiced complaints about wind power and vaccination laws That presence in small rural towns has fed a political surge that could vault the party to real power for the first time this fall Polls suggest that the AfD could emerge as the strongest force in a pair of eastern state elections in September in Mecklenburg Western Pomerania which includes Stavenhagen and in Saxony Anhalt to the west and south of Berlin The AfD has built a following by stridently opposing migration from the Middle East and elsewhere over the last decade as part of an antiestablishment populist message That growth has intensified since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 amid AfD opposition to the support of Germany for Kyiv The party finished second in the 2025 German federal elections behind the center right Christian Democrats of Chancellor Friedrich Merz The AfD has built a following by stridently opposing migration from the Middle East and elsewhere over the last decade as part of an antiestablishment populist message Mister Merz and other mainstream politicians have shunned the AfD on the federal level calling its rhetoric inflammatory and anti-democratic The federal intelligence agency of Germany has classified the party branches in the states of Brandenburg Saxony and Saxony Anhalt and Thuringia as right wing extremist in part because of a history of discriminatory statements by their leaders Though working with the AfD to pass laws is largely taboo in the federal legislature it is increasingly seen as necessary to get things done at a local level A paper by researchers at the Berlin Social Science Center found more than 1 hundred instances of city and district politicians cooperating in some way with the AfD from 2019 to 2024 One example In Ziesendorf a village half an hour drive from the Baltic Sea representatives from the Christian Democrats recently teamed up with the AfD to block a plan to convert an abandoned Coca Cola factory into housing for refugees In Mecklenburg Western Pomerania mainstream parties have

promised to keep the AfD out of governing coalitions even if it finishes first in the fall elections there meaning the AfD would need to win an outright majority of seats to take power **Yet that consensus is fraying** Stefan Kerth a longtime member of the Social Democrats in Mecklenburg Western Pomerania left his party over its firewall calling it unrealistic and against the will of the voters **The firewall "is such a big bubble elite ideology project" he said** "At the local level this is downright stupid for democratic culture" **The AfD also enjoys a strong tailwind from Trump administration officials who support the AfD immigration stances** Some of the AfD success stems from history Decades of Soviet rule left East Germans with few civic institutions and no deep relationship with the centrist political parties that grew up in the democratic West experts say "There is a vacuum there for historical reasons and the **AfD is simply managing to fill that vacuum**" said Stefan Merz senior elections director at Infratest dimap a polling firm in Berlin Part of the AfD appeal is the **simple act of showing up** Stavenhagen is home to around 5 thousand people a few logistics companies and a potato processing plant Those residents are not used to much attention from centrist politicians Yet **when Christian Skotnik the AfD candidate held his event in Stavenhagen last fall he gave the impression of taking the town seriously** He discussed a range of topics including **support for apprenticeship programs and proposals to resume compulsory military service in Germany** He lingered on **concerns over wind turbines** a particularly hot topic in the area Stralsund is in Mecklenburg Western Pomerania one of the eastern states where polls suggest the AfD could emerge as the strongest force in elections in September AfD is also building a **higher profile on television** across the country Because of its high polling it has become **more visible on public TV formats** that are reserved for party leaders who have a realistic chance of winning elections One significant moment was when the AfD chancellor candidate **Alice Weidel was invited to a federal leadership debate in 2025** In the recent campaign in Baden Württemberg the local AfD party fared well enough in polls for its leader **Markus Frohnmaier to earn a debate invitation alongside centrist candidates** The AfD does not always make the main broadcast debates in another recent election campaign in the western state of Rhineland Palatinate its candidate failed to reach the polling threshold for inclusion **And the AfD power on the airwaves has not yet translated into a seat in state or federal government** The AfD finished third in the Baden Württemberg race this month not enough to join the local coalition government **RAWSEP View** The Firewall against the neo Nazi Party holds the line in Germany **Back to the article conclusion** The other parties still refuse to work with it

**4 Ukraine** The Russian war against Ukraine **Excerpts edited for brevity and clarity by Residents Against Wood Smoke Emission Particulates a 501C3 nonprofit organization** Kiev Independent March 19 2026 Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez welcomes President Volodymyr Zelensky at La Moncloa Palace in Madrid Spain on March 18 2026 shortly before unveiling a 1 point 2 billion dollar military aid package for Kyiv Spain announced a 1 billion euro 1 point 2 billion dollar military aid package for Ukraine for 2026 on March 18 coinciding with the President Volodymyr Zelensky visit to the country Russian drones hit SBU office in western the Ukraine Lviv Oblast Drones hit the regional headquarters of the Ukraine State Security Service SBU in Lviv Oblast causing damage to the building Governor Maksym Kozytskyi said Command post of elite Russian Rubikon drone unit hit in occupied Donetsk Ukraine says A core part of the Russian unmanned system program to bolster its drone warfare against Ukraine Rubikon specializes in both hunting down Ukrainian drone pilots and shooting their drones in the sky Major Russian aircraft manufacturing plant hit in Ukrainian strike General Staff says AviaStar produces Il 76 MD 90A heavy military transport aircraft and Il 78M 90A refueling aircraft Iran seeking intelligence from Russia in war against US CIA director says "No I do not take Vladimir Putin at his word" CIA Director John Ratcliffe said at a congressional hearing on March 18 Ukraine claims no information about EU Druzhba oil pipeline mission "I am not aware of any specific agreed upon dates or trips I am also not aware of the details of this trip that have appeared in the media" Foreign Ministry spokesperson Heorhii Tykhyi said Ukraine hits Russian aircraft repair plant in Novgorod Oblast General Staff says The plant specializes in the full cycle of repair and modernization of military transport aircraft and their components It has its own runway allowing it to receive heavy aircraft directly on site