



## What have we learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, once it fades away?

*¿Qué hemos aprendido de la pandemia de COVID-19, una vez que se desvanezca?*

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The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic has not been completely defeated. In several regions of the world, new waves of infections have emerged, and in our nation, another outbreak wave may reappear after the Christmas festivities. Perhaps the author of this text has an exaggerated optimism, but anyhow, it seems that the worst is over, fundamentally because of the «herd immunity» caused by both natural infections and the extensive vaccination. Although there is no possible comparison between the great plague epidemics (that of the era of Emperor Justinian and the so-called Black Death of the Middle Ages, that killed one out of two Europeans) and that of smallpox that Spanish conquerors brought to Mesoamerica, that almost extinguished the native inhabitants of this region of the world, COVID-19 pandemic was a worldwide catastrophe that caused millions of deaths and had disastrous economic effects. What lessons can we derive from this epidemiological catastrophe? The following list describes just a handful of these bitter and painful teachings.

1. Some governments of different nations, notorious universities, and the pharmaceutical industry carried out the remarkable achievement of creating a set of safe and effective vaccines in an exceptionally short time. Besides human ingenuity, this extraordinary accomplishment would not have been possible without a vast investment of

financial resources. Medicine and science, like any other human inventions, require considerable resources to bear fruits. Unfortunately, some nations invest more in death and destruction than in health and life. Just imagine the medical, educational, cultural, and social progress that would be achieved with the money that costs a single nuclear aircraft carrier (about USD 13 billion). The yearly military spending of the world's greatest powers would be enough to end the hunger of millions of human beings and would banish or reduce diseases such as malaria, childhood cancer, and cardiovascular and neurodegenerative diseases, among many others.

2. In every country and in the international scenario, the tragedy of the COVID-19 pandemic was used unethically as a political tool to attack constituted governments or harm another nation politically and economically. The pandemic showed that solidarity and love to mankind, raised as sacred by various religious faiths, matters so little to vast sectors of human society. But it is fair to say that the performance of physicians, nurses, support personnel, and workers of no medical but essential tasks was heroic. The pandemic also showed that humanity can act the same, like angels or demons.
3. How the SARS-CoV-2 viruses, living in peace with bats, moved to affect the human population is unknown. But many new viral

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infections (Ébola, Marburg and other severe acute respiratory syndromes caused by coronavirus) are secondary to the invasion to ecological reservoirs of our relatives, the no human animals. If the systematic destruction of the environment lasts, among many other disasters, new epidemic threats will appear, not as a divine punishment, but as a logical consequence of the imbalance caused by humans in the Nature order.

4. COVID-19 affected democratically to both rich and needed, but the latter (individuals and nations) suffer more and had higher rates of deaths and complications. The abysmal difference among rich and poor, individuals and nations, is not only immoral but rather the source of problems that can affect the entire world, from a health, socio-economic, geopolitical, and environmental point of view.
5. Not only in Mexico but in various countries like the United States and several European nations, the completely irrational anti-vaccine movements help to the propagation and persistence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This fact puts on the table of deliberation how far personal freedom can go. The author of this editorial thinks that there is no unlimited freedom, that my liberty ends where that of others begins, and that in many matters, the common wellness must prevail over personal prejudices, conveniences, or beliefs. But it is a rather complex topic that will continue to be discussed in the future.
6. The pandemic caught our weak health system totally unprepared. Neither the hospitals nor the health personnel were ready for a threat of this magnitude. This fact, plus the characteristics of our population ravaged by obesity, diabetes,

hypertension, and dyslipidemia, explain the very high rate of mortality for COVID-19 seen in Mexico. The strongest pillars of society, besides the economy, are education and health. Every modern State must support, finance, and update educational and health establishments. It is known that a healthy and educated population better resists any epidemiological threat. For decades the epidemic of obesity (the mother of the other cardiovascular and cardiometabolic flagella) has been left untouched to not upset important economic power groups. It is time now, based on the teachings of this infectious epidemic, to turn to look at the pandemics that are and will be the main causes of death and disability in our country. Unfortunately, for these chronic-degenerative diseases, there are no vaccines, healthy distance, or face masks that can limit their spread. Cardiovascular and cardiometabolic prevention is more difficult and costly and needs the leadership of the State, the implementation of sounding public health policies, and the understanding and approbation of most of the population. Maybe, our people will see preventive medicine in a different and more rational way after the COVID-19 threat.

7. At the end of the pandemic of COVID-19, a long struggle awaits Mexican society to reduce cardiometabolic diseases that today threaten in the long term the national security and bonanza of our homeland. ANCAM and our allied societies will be there in the first trench of that fight.

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