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The End of the Pandemic Is Now in Sight

For all that scientists have done to tame the biological world, there are still things that lie outside the realm of human knowledge. The coronavirus was one such alarming reminder, when it emerged with murky origins in late 2019 and found naive, unwitting hosts in the human body. Even as science began to unravel many of the virus's mysteries—how it spreads, how it tricks its way into cells, how it kills—a fundamental unknown about vaccines hung over the pandemic and our collective human fate: Vaccines can stop many, but not all, viruses. Could they stop this one?

The answer, we now know, is yes. A resounding yes. Pfizer and Moderna have separately released preliminary data that suggest their vaccines are both more than 90 percent effective, far more than many scientists expected. Neither company has publicly shared the full scope of their data, but independent clinical-trial monitoring boards have reviewed the results, and the FDA will soon scrutinize the vaccines for emergency use authorization. Unless the data take an unexpected turn, initial doses should be available in December.

The tasks that lie ahead—manufacturing vaccines at scale, distributing them via a cold or even ultracold chain, and persuading wary Americans to take them—are not trivial, but they are all within the realm of human knowledge. The most tenuous moment is over: The scientific uncertainty at the heart of COVID-19 vaccines is resolved. Vaccines work. And for that, we can breathe a collective sigh of relief. “It makes it now clear that vaccines will be our way out of this pandemic,” says Kanta Subbarao, a virologist at the Doherty Institute, who has studied emerging viruses.

The invention of vaccines against a virus identified only 10 months ago is an extraordinary scientific achievement. They are the fastest vaccines ever developed, by a margin of years.

*This is a summary of an article published in The Atlantic on November 18, 2020.
You can find the full text at: <https://bit.ly/2UYW31v>*

Pandemic invades nursing homes again

Covid-19 cases in nursing homes saw a more than 40 percent increase from mid-September to Oct. 25 after seven weeks of steady decline, according to the most recent data. Nursing home operators and experts on long-term care say it's basically impossible to keep the coronavirus from seeping in as cases spike in communities across the country.

The administration has improved testing and staff screenings at nursing homes since last spring, yet workers will inevitably bring the virus in with them. "As cases in the community increase, this highly contagious virus finds its way into our buildings," said Mark Parkinson, the head of the major nursing home lobby, the American Health Care Association.

The new infections in care facilities are creating a growing challenge for President-elect Joe Biden, who pledged special attention to nursing homes, including contact tracing in every facility and fully invoking the Defense Production Act to increase the supply of key protective gear.

But Biden, too, will face challenges in a divided, distrustful virus-fatigued nation. Even with the progress toward a vaccine announced by Pfizer on Monday, experts say those public health steps will be the best ways of combating the virus because it will take months to make the vaccine widely available.

This is a summary of an article published on Politico on November 11, 2020. You can find the full text at: <https://politi.co/3m3YuvF>

Coronavirus, COVID-19, and You

The Claude Pepper Center is committed to providing as much accurate and useful information about the pandemic as long as it remains a threat to the health of Americans. We will be posting information daily and modifying previous posts as more recent information becomes available. Click to find out about how COVID-19 is affecting long term care, the economy, public health policy, vulnerable populations, and much more: <https://fla.st/3cwB0Ks>