

If China's coronavirus isn't contained soon, we may be stuck with it permanently

With the [new coronavirus](#) spreading from person to person (possibly including from people without symptoms), reaching four continents, and traveling faster than SARS, driving it out of existence is looking increasingly unlikely.

It's still possible that quarantines and travel bans will first halt the outbreak and then eradicate the microbe, and the world will never see [2019-nCoV](#) again, as epidemiologist Dr. Mike Ryan, head of health emergencies at the World Health Organization, [told](#) STAT on [February 1]. That's what happened with SARS in 2003.

Many experts, however, view that happy outcome as increasingly unlikely.

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Researchers are therefore asking what seems like a defeatist question but whose answer has huge implications for public policy: What will a world with endemic [2019-nCoV](#) — circulating permanently in the human population — be like?

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On the bright side, if a coronavirus infects enough people regularly there will be greater business incentive to develop a vaccine and other countermeasures. That never happened with SARS because it died out, leaving no market for such products.

On the decidedly darker side, a fifth endemic coronavirus means more sickness and death from respiratory infections.

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