

Can herd immunity—and coronavirus-immunity registries—help us restart the economy?

Coronavirus spreads rapidly. One person typically infects two or three other people, who then infect two or three others and so on. Most recover or never have symptoms, and most likely become immune. A vaccine works by mimicking the immune response of a naturally occurring infection. Herd immunity develops when 40% to 70% of a population becomes immune. The “herd” of people who are immune blocks the virus from taking hold and infecting others. A person’s immunity to the novel coronavirus could last 12 months. By then, a vaccine could be ready.

[Editor’s note: Dr. Bill Cassidy is a Republican senator from Louisiana. Dr. Christopher Mores is a professor of global health at George Washington University.]

...When a nurse knows that she is immune, she can care for routine Covid-19 patients without wearing a respirator mask. An immune bartender can serve customers without fearing exposure. An immune insurance agent can have meetings without getting infected.

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To restart the economy, the government needs to set up coronavirus-immunity registries. At the same time, widespread testing is necessary to document immunity in those who haven’t fallen sick. ... Recovering from a known coronavirus infection or having a positive antibody test is likely to indicate immunity lasting for at least some time. Those who so demonstrate that they are immune can be allowed to return to work. The whole community is freer when herd immunity is established.

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