

Even with a vaccine, COVID-19 might be here to stay. Here's what that means for society

It is a daunting proposition — a coronavirus-tinged world without a foreseeable end. But experts in epidemiology, disaster planning and vaccine development say embracing that reality is crucial to the next phase of America's pandemic response. The long-term nature of covid-19, they say, should serve as a call to arms for the public, a road map for the [trillions of dollars](#) Congress is spending and a fixed navigational point for the nation's current, [chaotic](#) state-by-state [patchwork strategy](#).

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Communities should be thinking about installing doors that don't require grasping a handle, and re-engineering traffic signals so pedestrians don't have to push crosswalk buttons, said Eleanor J. Murray, an epidemiologist at Boston University.

In coming years, [robots and automated](#) lines could become ubiquitous in meatpacking plants, which have experienced some of the country's worst outbreaks. Families may have to make diagnostic tests routine ahead of visits to grandparents. [Once-mocked office cubicles](#) of a bygone era may become the rage again, replacing open-floor plans now found at many companies. Paid sick time might become a necessity for jobs of all types.

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More immediately, states should be using this time to craft quick-response systems and protocols. With hundreds of cities and counties reopening, think of each as a mini laboratory yielding valuable data on what will work against the virus in coming years.

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