

Permanent readjustment: Why COVID-19 is here to stay

If there was ever a time when this coronavirus could be contained, it has probably passed. One outcome is now looking almost certain: This virus is never going away.

The coronavirus is simply too widespread and too transmissible. The most likely scenario, experts say, is that the pandemic ends at some point—because enough people have been either infected or vaccinated—but the virus continues to circulate in lower levels around the globe. Cases will wax and wane over time. Outbreaks will pop up here and there. Even when a much-anticipated vaccine arrives, it is likely to only [suppress but never completely eradicate the virus](#). (For context, consider that vaccines exist for more than a dozen human viruses but only one, smallpox, has ever been eradicated from the planet, and that took 15 years of immense global coordination.) We will probably be living with this virus for the rest of our lives.

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[W]hat does the future of COVID-19 look like? That will depend, says [Yonatan Grad](#), on the strength and duration of immunity against the virus. Grad, an infectious-disease researcher at Harvard, and his colleagues have [modeled a few possible trajectories](#). If immunity lasts only a few months, there could be a big pandemic followed by smaller outbreaks every year. If immunity lasts closer to two years, COVID-19 could peak every other year.

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