

Viewpoint: An open economy by April? Why the US could reach COVID herd immunity by spring

[COVID] cases are down 77% over the past six weeks. If a medication slashed cases by 77%, we'd call it a miracle pill. Why is the number of cases plummeting much faster than experts predicted?

In large part because natural immunity from prior infection is far more common than can be measured by testing. Testing has been capturing only from 10% to 25% of infections, depending on when during the pandemic someone got the virus. Applying a time-weighted case capture average of 1 in 6.5 to the cumulative 28 million confirmed cases would mean about 55% of Americans have natural immunity.

Now add people getting vaccinated. As of this week, 15% of Americans have received the vaccine, and the figure is rising fast. Former Food and Drug Commissioner Scott Gottlieb estimates 250 million doses will have been delivered to some 150 million people by the end of March.

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There is reason to think the country is racing toward an extremely low level of infection. As more people have been infected, most of whom have mild or no symptoms, there are fewer Americans left to be infected. At the current trajectory, I expect Covid will be mostly gone by April, allowing Americans to resume normal life.

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