

## Infographic: Is COVID here to stay? Why the virus may never be eradicated

Nature asked more than 100 immunologists, infectious-disease researchers and virologists working on the coronavirus whether it could be eradicated. Almost 90% of respondents think that the coronavirus will become endemic — meaning that it will continue to circulate in pockets of the global population for years to come.

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“Eradicating this virus right now from the world is a lot like trying to plan the construction of a stepping-stone pathway to the Moon. It’s unrealistic,” says Michael Osterholm, an epidemiologist at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

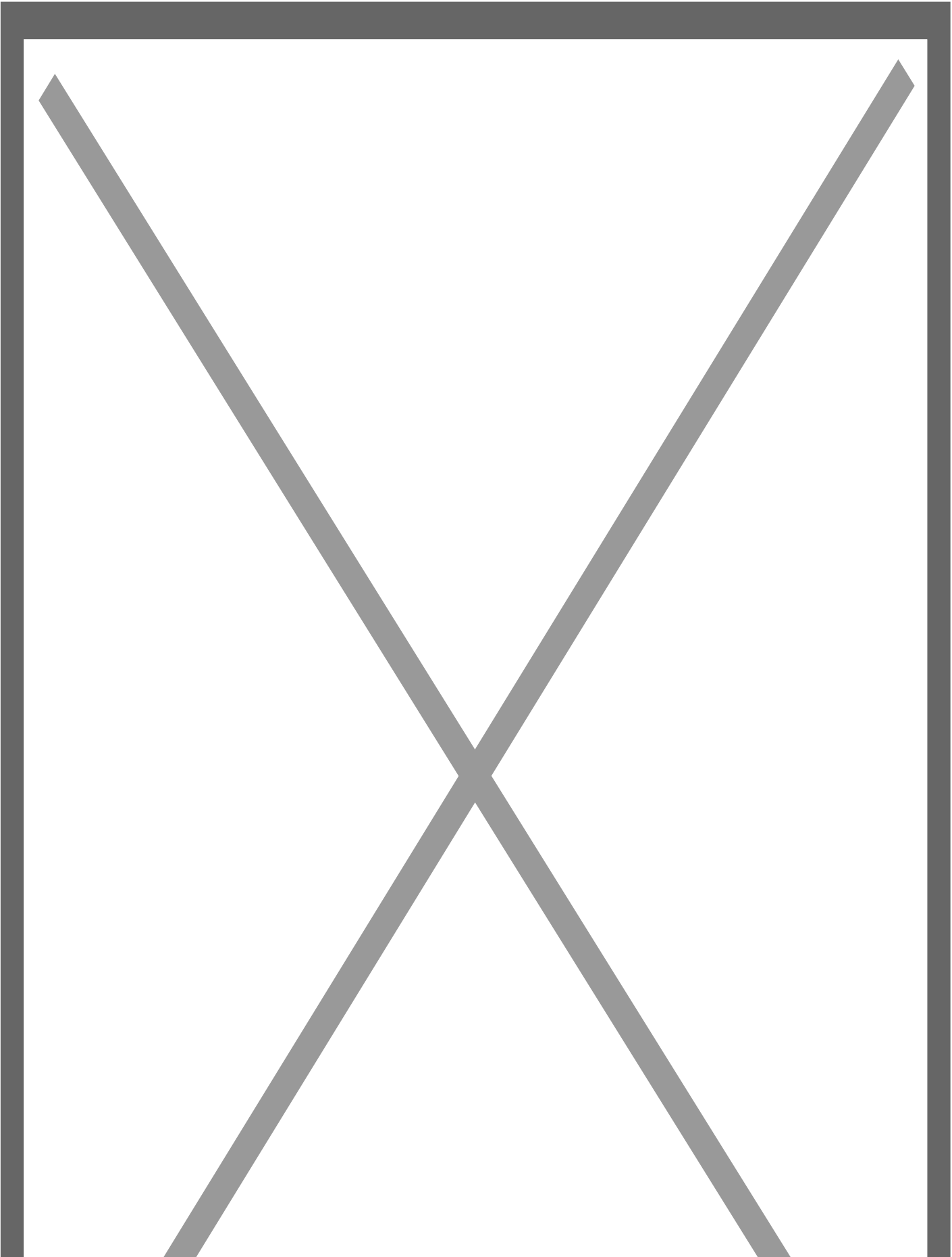
But failure to eradicate the virus does not mean that death, illness or social isolation will continue on the scales seen so far. The future will depend heavily on the type of immunity people acquire through infection or vaccination and how the virus evolves. Influenza and the four human coronaviruses that cause common colds are also endemic: but a combination of annual vaccines and acquired immunity means that societies tolerate the seasonal deaths and illnesses they bring without requiring lockdowns, masks and social distancing.

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“The virus becoming endemic is likely, but the pattern that it will take is hard to predict,” says Angela Rasmussen, a virologist from Georgetown University, who is based in Seattle, Washington. This will determine the societal costs of SARS-CoV-2 for 5, 10 or even 50 years in the future.

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