

COVID's positive side-effect: fewer contagious illnesses. How can we make that last?

Many of us have likely noticed what the data is bearing out: Strict social distancing and masking protocols not only kept us from getting COVID-19—we've barely had the sniffles since the pandemic began.

For example, the United States – the country hit hardest by COVID-19 – usually sees 45 million cases of the flu each year; this year, it was [under 2,000](#). Other common respiratory viruses, including the rhinovirus that causes the common cold, were also [way down](#). And experts say that could have a real impact on the future of disease and how our kids experience the world.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has forced both personal and foundational behaviour changes onto kids and families, everything from mask-wearing and social distancing to strict illness policies at schools and workplaces. Health experts say if they're maintained, those measures could mean more winter seasons without those common childhood illnesses.

"A lot of positive changes came out of this whole experience," says [Susan Little, an infectious disease expert with the University of California—San Diego](#). "We do a lot of things differently, and that could change everything."

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