

What's next for 'living with COVID'? America's path to endemicity is lined with potholes

The answers were simpler when we thought we could vaccinate our way to herd immunity. But vaccinations in the U.S. have plateaued. The Delta variant and waning immunity against transmission mean [herd immunity may well be impossible](#) even if every single American gets a shot.

So when COVID-related restrictions came back with the Delta wave, [we no longer had an obvious off-ramp](#) to return to normal—are we still trying to get a certain percentage of people vaccinated? Or are we waiting until all kids are eligible? Or for hospitalizations to fall and stay steady? The path ahead is not just unclear; it's nonexistent. We are meandering around the woods because we don't know where to go.

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On the ground, the U.S. is now running an uncontrolled experiment with every strategy all at once. COVID-19 policies differ wildly by state, county, university, workplace, and school district. And because of polarization, they have also settled into the most illogical pattern possible: The least vaccinated communities have some of the laxest restrictions, while highly vaccinated communities—which is to say those most protected from COVID-19—tend to have some of the most aggressive measures aimed at driving down cases.

[**This is an excerpt. Read the original post here.**](#)