

Challenging the endemic hypothesis: ‘We have no idea what will happen next’

Endemicity, so the narrative goes, is how normal life resumes. (Some pundits and politicians would argue that we are, [actually, already at endemicity](#)—or, at the very least, we [should](#) be [acting as if we are](#).) It is how a devastating pandemic virus ends up docile.

[Endemicity](#) promises exactly none of this. Really, the term to which we’ve pinned our post-pandemic hopes has so many definitions that it means almost nothing at all. What lies ahead is, still, a big uncertain mess, which the word *endemic* does far more to obscure than to clarify. “This distinction between pandemic and endemic has been put forward as the checkered flag,” a clear line where restrictions disappear overnight, COVID-related anxieties are put to rest, and we are “done” with this crisis, Yonatan Grad, an infectious-disease expert at Harvard, told us. That’s not the case.

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Endemicity, then, just identifies a pathogen that’s fixed itself in our population so stubbornly that we cease to be seriously perturbed by it. We tolerate it. Even catastrophically prevalent and deadly diseases can be endemic, as long as the crisis they cause feels *constant* and *acceptable* to whoever’s thinking to ask.

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