

Light at the End of the Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March, most people never imagined the government-imposed restrictions would be as harsh and arbitrary as they have been, nor that the entire affair would drag on into the new year. Yet glimpses of hope are arriving this week, small pieces of good news we can joyfully carry throughout Advent and into 2021.

The United Kingdom [authorized Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine](#) on Wednesday, becoming the first country to authorize a fully tested vaccine, although Russia and China have already approved vaccines without large-scale testing. America has agreed [to a pre-purchase](#) of 100 million doses of the vaccine from Pfizer, with an option to purchase a further 500 million doses. Currently Pfizer's planned 2020 rollout has been [slowed by supply chain issues](#), but the company still intends to deliver on its original plan to distribute more than one billion doses in 2021.

America's vaccine approval process is much more rigorous than the United Kingdom's, as the UK's system relies more on pharmaceutical companies' own data, while American regulators independently verify the data. Despite this more drawn-out process, the Pfizer vaccine may be approved at a Dec. 10 meeting of outside experts. Meanwhile Moderna is applying to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for emergency approval of its RNA COVID-19 vaccine. If the latter is granted, that vaccine could go into use as early as Dec. 21.

In other news, the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have issued new, less restrictive guidelines regarding quarantine periods. Previously the CDC recommended that *everyone* exposed to someone with COVID-19 should quarantine for at least 14 days. The CDC now says anyone who has not developed symptoms

can end their quarantine after 10 days, while those who have no symptoms *and* a negative COVID test can resume their lives after just seven days, [CNBC reports](#).

These two developments provide a light at the end of the tunnel. First, the availability of a vaccine will bring us over what many pandemic experts have long claimed is the final threshold we must cross before resuming our normal lives. The newly revised quarantine guidelines also promise to be the first step toward the pre-pandemic American way of life. Given the detrimental effects of the virus and lockdowns, the arrival of vaccines should be encouraging, for they remove the last rhetorical tool of the micro-managing politicians who seek to control every aspect of our work, social, and even family lives. If the availability of a vaccine is not enough to end the shutdowns, then nothing is, and the American people will then quickly resume their normal lives even without government's say so.

The government mandated COVID-19 lockdowns have devastated the American public, and the world at large. From [April to October](#), personal income fell by nearly \$1.4 trillion. The [U.S. unemployment rate](#) fluctuated between 3.5 and 3.6 percent between September 2019 and February 2020, the former the lowest unemployment rate since December 1969. But this unemployment rate grew to 4.4 percent in April 2020 after the start of the pandemic, peaking at 14.7 percent in May. October's 6.9 percent unemployment rate, while lower, is still nearly double what it was prior to the lockdowns.

Lockdowns have also caused mental health issues leading to deaths of despair from suicide and drug overdoses. For example, India, which already had one of the highest suicide rates in the world, is [estimated to have suffered several thousand additional suicides](#) under some of the most restrictive lockdown measures in the world. In late June of 2020, [40 percent of U.S. adults](#) reported struggling with mental health or substance abuse, a number "considerably

elevated” according to the CDC.

Meanwhile children are locked into a season of uncertainty as to when, or if, their schools will reopen. Parents who are still working will have a hard time ensuring their kids complete their virtual lessons, and even then, kids are missing out on a wide variety of [social, athletic, and educational opportunities](#) they otherwise would have had.

With the CDC already loosening quarantine guidelines, it seems our leaders can now back off from micromanaging our lives post-vaccine... at least, they *should*. Right now, however, we can rejoice that it appears America may well be free and returning to normal, the *old* normal, shortly after the new year arrives.

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