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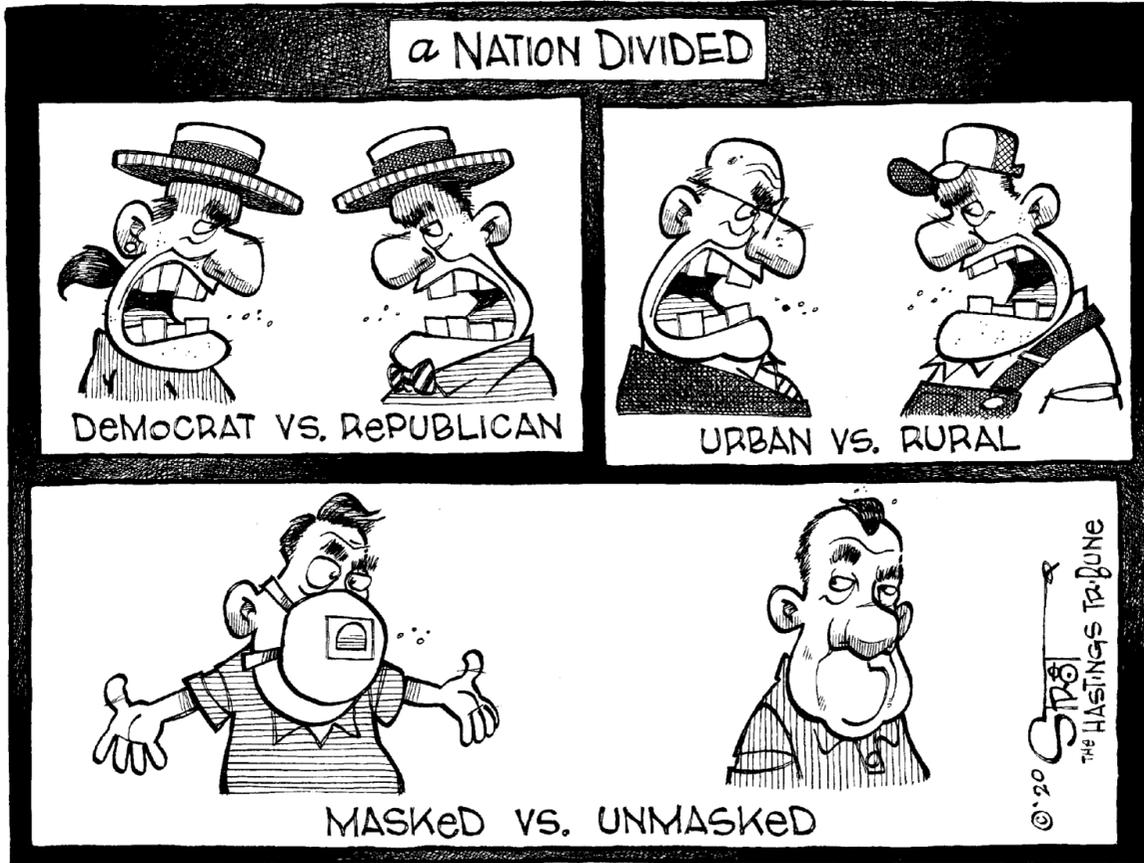
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## 'Superspreaders'

In the pandemic Flu of 1918, everyone who came down with that especially virulent strain of influenza seemed to have an equal chance of spreading it to others.

But for other contagious diseases, some who are infected appear to be major spreaders of the disease, while others do not pass it on despite being in contact with others. Although we are not five months into this pandemic, researchers are finding a few patients spread the disease more than others. These are "superspreaders."

In the May 22 issue of the journal Science, the article "Case clustering emerges as key pandemic puzzle" adds a third measure of disease severity and transmission.

The first was the fatality rate, or the proportion of patients who contract the disease who then die. In the best of COVID-19 cases, that number is 6-10 times higher than for the seasonal flu, and in the more elderly population in Italy, it was much higher.

The rate of reproduction (R) measures how contagious a disease is; it is the average number of new infections that occur from contact with an infected patient. For COVID-19, that number averages about three. And any number above one indicates that the disease will spread more rapidly.

Now epidemiologists are finding that

for some COVID-19 patients, there is no transmission to others. But a few patients infect a much larger number. Thus the R value average hides this difference between patients who are not shedding the virus, and the superspreaders.

And yes, epidemiologists have a number for superspreading: the dispersion factor (k). This ranges from zero to one, with one indicating an even dispersion where everyone infected has an equal chance of transmitting the disease. In the flu pandemic of 1918 that started in Kansas, any person who came down with the influenza virus was equally likely to infect others. But this pandemic is different.

In May 12, the CDC released their analysis of a superspreading event at a church in Mount Vernon in the state of Washington. Sixty-one people assembled for choir practice including one who thought he was suffering a cold. He did not yet know he had COVID-19. "In the following weeks, 53 choir members got sick, three were hospitalized, and two died..." A choir has been shown to be a very effective way to spread the virus in the many invisible droplets that are widely spread during singing.

The Science report continues with data collected by the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine: nearly 800 cases from a Singapore dormitory, 56 cases from attending a Zumba class in South Korea, and 80 cases from a live music show in Osaka, Japan. All started with one or a few superspreaders.

Other serious coronavirus diseases also

appear to be spread by select carriers. A 2005 paper in the journal Nature is cited where the highly fatal SARS coronavirus had a k of 0.16, indicating it was only transmitted by a few of those infected, but those few were highly contagious. While SARS was a coronavirus originating in bats that spread to humans via civet cats, MERS was the coronavirus that spread to humans via camels. MERS has an estimated k of 0.25, still transmitted in clusters but with a lower rate of superspreading.

The current estimate of k for the COVID-19 virus is 0.1 according to Adam Kucharski of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. He simplifies this as "Probably about 10 percent of cases lead to 80 percent of the spread."

More research is needed into why some patients lead to far more contagion than others. Experts who have worked with the different Ebola and HIV point to the main reason for these transmission clusters is that SARS-CoV-2 (the virus that causes COVID-19) is spread by aerosol transmission. There are differences in each patient's immune system. --And how many viruses are shed. --And for how long.

Chinese researchers traced 318 clusters and found only one was transmitted outdoors. A Japanese study likewise found "...that the risk of infection indoors is almost 19 times higher than outdoors."

With this type of medical detective work and research, an intelligent population can begin to resume life in a rationale and compassionate manner.

## Time in June

June 2020. How in the world did we get to June? I've had many instances lately that made me reflect on the past few months after realizing it's now June.

I have caught myself on more than one occasion asking myself, "Did I really complete that project only a few weeks ago?" or "Did that Zoom meeting really only happen last month?" It all seems like a lifetime ago.

Since mid-March, I've been working remotely, the kids have been schooling virtually and my family has practiced social distancing to the best of our abilities. Our daily behaviors and weekly routines have radically changed. Yet, at the same time we have also stayed on schedule with farming.

While jobs that I completed from home in mid-March, April and even May seem like a lifetime ago, the growth on the farm indicates life is still happening in real-time.

The bees are buzzing and making collections from blooms that have appeared

on time just like previous years. Corn planted in April has transformed from seeds below ground into healthy plants gaining height above ground at the same pace as previous years. The wheat is on schedule as it continues to turn from its vivid green into a golden yellow.

The progress indicates the wheat will be ripe for harvest within the month — an event that happens around the same time every year. The continued growth evidenced on the farm maintains its place in time and space as in years before.

These visual reminders show life continues in real-time as opposed to my perceived warp-speed.

The field of wheat I ride past on my evening bike rides serve as an anchor which grounds me and helps me recognize that while it may truly seem like a lifetime ago, the world continues to spin at the exact same rate it always has.

While the dizzying time spent in the farm office tackling school and work tasks in March, April and May seem like a blur now, the growth of the corn that my husband planted during that same time period serve as daily reminders we are, in fact, still living and operating in "normal" time.

I've always appreciated June, and I think this year will be no different. The month has always served as a gateway allowing me to recognize, experience and appreciate time. Time where I can catch my breath and enjoy more moments with my kids who are now "home" for the summer. Time where the sunlight is available to enjoy for an extended period, and where I can walk through a field of growing corn and feel the wind while hearing a train whistle in the distance. Time where we can stop, sit and enjoy a meal in the field together as a family during wheat harvest.

While the world around us may seem to be moving incredibly fast, there are constant reminders time has not changed. Seek out those reminders. Find those things that provide evidence that life continues at a "normal" pace and breathe them in. For me, those reminders are always present on the farm — especially in June.

—*"Insight" is a weekly column published by Kansas Farm Bureau, the state's largest farm organization whose mission is to strengthen agriculture and the lives of Kansans through advocacy, education and service.*

## Plan

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by at least six feet.

"We will continue to monitor the situation, but we are encouraging residents to take personal responsibility for their health needs," Payer said.

As always, all Coffey County residents are encouraged to take personal responsibility for themselves and their loved ones by practicing the following:

• Social distancing – maintain six feet of distance between yourself and strangers

• Infection control measures: wash your hands with soap and water; use hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available; clean and disinfect all touched surface areas; if you are sick stay at home and call your primary care doctor; avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.

• High risk individuals are advised to continue to stay home except when conducting essential functions. High risk individuals include those with underlying medical conditions including chronic lung disease, asthma, heart conditions, severe obesity, chronic kidney disease, liver disease, or otherwise immunocompromised.

"This has been taxing on our department," Payer told commissioners. "We

made the decision we will not have staff on call on the weekend."

Payer's staff will address any cases as they happen. "This has been a huge burden and a lot of work," she added.

"This is not about keeping healthy people away from vulnerable people; it is about keeping the sick and the exposed away from everybody," Payer reminded commissioners. "Again, I would like to thank you for your support."

The Coffey County Health Department has been seeing a lot of patients in the office, by appointment. Payer said a timeline has not been set for a return to Walk-in Wednesdays.

## Local control

Politically, it appears that chances are good that the Kansas Legislature, all members of which stand for re-election

this year, will be handed a new vehicle this week to challenge Gov. Laura Kelly's leadership in battling coronavirus in Kansas.

**At the Rail** Just where that vehicle goes? Well,

we'll learn later this week after lawmakers have had time to consider new legislation dealing with the governor's authority to declare an emergency in the state and just what from a 30,000-foot level she can do to return Kansans to the lifestyles they have had for decades.

She's already shed some of her authority to establish strict limits on just what Kansans can and can't do while the disease is spreading. Her plan for beating the disease has been loosened, and she's given to county health officers — and the county commissions that hire them — more authority.

It turns out that the land looks different from 30,000-feet over a county with no known cases of coronavirus and those that have had sizable outbreaks either at nursing homes or at industries that provide the paychecks that drive those counties' economies.

Basically, look for lawmakers, who have already seen some counties stick with the governor's recommendations to gradually reopen the economy, to have to weigh just what's happening to their constituents — voters — and whether local control that is a key phrase for many lawmakers is going to work safely.

Oh, there are some other issues, like making sure that health care and first-responders have some logical protections from liability for assisting those stricken, or those in danger of catching, the disease. Oh, and delaying property taxes and state income tax deadlines.

But it really comes down to a couple simple issues. Lawmakers need to find the best course to allow someone — that's someone else — to contain this pandemic while allowing cities and counties to reopen for business, to bring back jobs, to make it possible for everyone to make their house and car payments and get on with life in a social-distanced environment.

Now, if you are a legislator, it makes sense to hand that return to Kansas as we know it to someone else. And the choices go two ways. It's either gubernatorial level control over reducing the dangers of the disease, or it is bringing that control down to the local level. Kelly has already reduced her plan to "suggestions."

And local control sounds good. But if one county opens the restaurants and bars and the neighboring county doesn't, or has made it so difficult to operate at a profitable level with the distancing and masks and shields that you have to drive across a county line for that anniversary dinner, have you really dealt with the statewide issue of containing COVID-19?

That's likely to be the choice for lawmakers later this week. Every member has his/her own district and constituents, but they all live in the same state.

Oh, there are some controversial issues to be dealt with, but they aren't generally headline-grabbers. Like liability, always a hot dinner-table topic. Can you not return to work and still get unemployment benefits if it's dangerous or your employer doesn't demand masks and gloves and social distancing? Can you really delay your county property tax and state income tax payments until you are working again? And, of course, what comes down to public health and what comes down to local political/business issues of voters and campaign contributors.

We'll see how this goes...  
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