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Term Paper

Long-Term Implications of COVID-19 Pandemic

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## Long-Term Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The current COVID-19 pandemic is the kind of event that the world did not see for over a hundred years. The last time a pandemic of this magnitude occurred was in 1918, when the Spanish flu raged across the world, infecting around 500 million people and claiming an estimated 50 million people in three years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019). There have been many other pandemics between 2018 and 2020, but none of these equals the scale and swiftness by which COVID-19 swept around the globe and changed the way people lived. In just the span of a few weeks, international borders were closed, massive lockdowns were imposed to restrict social contact, and economic activities came to a standstill. A year since COVID-19 was officially declared as a pandemic by the WHO, a number of countries are still struggling to keep infections down and respond to a burgeoning number of patients. Meanwhile, other countries are gradually emerging from crisis as new vaccines developed to combat the disease are being rolled out at record speed (Haseltine, 2021). Daily discussion about the pandemic often centers on its origins, its effects, and how it can be ended, but not as much attention has been paid to the long-term view. The central question is: what can the world do to avert a similar event from happening again? While the current pandemic will most certainly come to an end too, it has brought to the forefront long-term implications for society including ending activities that increase the likelihood of future pandemics.

### **The Origins of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In order to understand the long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to understand the context in which it emerged. The COVID-19 pandemic was first detected in the city of Wuhan in China's Hubei province in late 2019. The first cases were diagnosed among workers of a local seafood market where live exotic animals were sold and served as food. Such markets are not uncommon in China and other countries. Some markets also sell endangered and or banned species. People infected by the virus show a variety of symptoms, some of which are similar to flu. These include fever, shortness of breath, cough, loss

of appetite, fatigue, and loss of sense of smell and or taste among others. Studies eventually revealed that the disease is caused by a virus from the coronaviridae, a family of viruses that include those that cause the common cold, severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). This coronavirus is currently called the SARS-CoV-2. By the time more information on the new disease was gathered, the virus had already escaped from Wuhan and found its way into other countries. The World Health Organization [WHO] declared COVID as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (WHO, 2020). The surge in cases in many countries also triggered the adoption of widespread measures intended to curb infection rates. But these did not stop the spread of the virus. As of April 2021, the virus has infected almost 130 million and claimed the lives of 2.8 million around the world (Bing, 2021). The acquisition of more information about the virus and ways to combat it along with the development of vaccines has nevertheless helped curb the rise in cases in many countries. The prospect of ending the pandemic gets more certain with each passing day.

### **The Connection Between Pandemics and Human Encroachment**

That the world now has a greater chance of getting back to normal should not be taken as license to change nothing. The massive loss of life and the profound impact the pandemic has had on the economy and society serve as a resounding call for change. Experts warn that pandemics are becoming more frequent due to various factors. In the past two decades alone, humans have faced six major threats including SARS, which was first detected in 2003, and MERS, which was detected in 2012. A major contributing factor to the increase in the frequency of outbreaks is human encroachment on nature. Nature and the wildlife it hosts are natural reservoirs of countless pathogens such as viruses. These microbes, while contained in wildlife, may mutate and eventually jump to humans and cause illness. Hence, the more humans encroach on nature, the more humans come into contact with wildlife that host such pathogens. Not all pathogens will jump, but with the increase in contact comes the increase in chances that somewhere along the way one will jump and cause disease (Gill, 2020; Tollefson, 2020). While it

is uncertain if encroachment directly played a part in the emergence of COVID-19 given the lack of information on its origins, it is entirely possible that it did, and that this mechanism will happen again in the future as more of wildlife loses their habitats to human encroachment.

### **What Society Must Do**

With encroachment regarded as one of the factors that increases the likelihood of pandemics in the future, society must once and for all start taking serious steps towards minimizing contact with wildlife and preserving nature. For instance, deforestation is one of the leading causes of encroachment. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], the rate of deforestation in the last six years stood at around 10 million hectares per year. In the last 30 years alone, the world has lost around 420 million hectares of forests (FAO, 2020). Ending encroachment, however, cannot be accomplished by leaving nature alone; this also requires changing some of humanity's fundamental patterns of lifestyle and consumption. Many societies' preference for consuming meat, for example, is one of the key drivers of encroachment. As the supply and demand for meat increase, forests are cleared to make way for ranching. The capture of exotic animals is another risky practice, with markets such as that in Wuhan found in many countries. Such markets have long been identified by researchers as sites of increased risk of transmitting pathogens between humans and animals (Tollefson, 2020). It also does not help that there are long-standing cultural factors that make eradication of this practice difficult. Finally, urbanization is also another factor that drives encroachment. As humans take up more space by clearing nature, they increase contact with wildlife and thus also amplify risks of having pathogens jump from wildlife to humans. While it is true that these activities are often viewed as necessary for human life to continue, society must find solutions that will cut down human encroachment. Otherwise, pandemics that upend the world such as COVID-19 will continue to take place in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The current COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed the world. Not only has it claimed millions of lives and brought the global economy to a standstill, it has also revealed potentially catastrophic consequences of encroaching on nature. As contact between humans and wildlife increases, the chances of humans acquiring pathogens from nature are also amplified. The COVID-19 pandemic has all but brought many countries to their knees. The prospect of facing more pandemics in the future, some of which may be far more destructive than the one the world battles today, should be enough motivation for people to change their ways.

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