

Mask Up

If everyone had worn face masks at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, then COVID-19's victims, e.g jobs, childhoods, lives, may still very well be here today. Though this disease may have been inevitable, the spreading of it was certainly preventable. According to the CDC, by wearing a face mask correctly (over the nose and mouth) and social distancing in public spaces, the chances of contracting the virus are reduced significantly. COVID-19 is an issue that's birthed many in and of itself. Therefore, it's critical this issue be eliminated for a multitude of problems that stem from this would dissolve.

As time goes on, I've come to learn that a stable reality of normal is just as unattainable as having a perfect life. This year, I attended my school's annual Washington D.C. trip, went to dances with my friends, and went to school five days a week. At least that's how I'd always envisioned how my eighth grade year would go...

Instead, a pandemic pushed me, along with many of the nation's other students out of classrooms and onto virtual platforms such as Zoom and Google meets. I barely grasped enough motivation to attend classes from my bedroom, complete mundane, humdrum assignments, and then repeat the same dull routine the following day. And I was one of the luckier ones; others didn't have access to adequate technology, struggled to manage their workload, and so forth.

Last Christmas, my family and I didn't get to go visit our relatives, a tradition we've been able to carry out in the past. But that paled in comparison to my family and

I's Christmas Eve, when my ten-year-old brother's COVID-19 test results came back positive. Talk about a *horrible* Christmas present! He was stuck quarantining in his room for 11 days while the rest of my family and I wore masks around the house, propped windows open for better ventilation, and ate a socially distanced "Christmas brunch" outside, in front of my brother's room.

A few days later, my dad's COVID-19 test came back positive and the rest of us were stuck quarantining in separate rooms for at least a week. For the first time ever, my family and I spent New Years apart. Fortunately, my mom and I didn't get infected and my brother and dad recovered, though my dad still has lingering symptoms.

Other people haven't been as fortunate. Johns Hopkins University of Medicine has reported 2.3 million COVID-19 deaths worldwide. According to the New York Times, over 40 million Americans alone have lost their jobs due to the pandemic. In turn, some of the unemployed are unable to afford housing and are evicted / become homeless.

While COVID-19 continues to plague the world, there's also ways to help solve this issue. First of all, a massive undertaking, like ridding a planet of a pandemic, demands teamwork and collaboration. This means that everyone must follow CDC (Centers For Disease Control) guidelines, which includes wearing a mask, socially distancing, and frequently washing hands.

Second of all, massive undertakings require people to be supportive and charitable, big or small, to one another. Whether that takes the form of purchasing meals for frontline medical workers, who themselves are risking their lives to save

others' , or complimenting someone's mask; which could encourage them to continue wearing masks. Acts like these make a positive impact.

Finally, it's important to stay informed on what epidemiologists and other health officials are advising be done. Currently, vaccines are becoming more and more available. The CDC is urging that those who qualify, i.e. healthcare workers, those 75 years and older, etc. get vaccinated. In turn, those vaccinated are less likely to infect those around them because they're less likely to contract it themselves.

By following these three tips, I'm reminded that I'm making a difference and helping bring COVID-19-free days a little closer in the future. Pandemics may mask faces, but they will never be able to mask the beauty of teamwork.