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COVID-19's Startlingly Unusual and Sadly Familiar Characteristics

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Editorial

A symptom can fade for a while before reappearing. “You'll think, ‘Oh, I'm done with that bit, brilliant,' and then it'll be back three days later,” Knowles says. Knowles, who is 38 and lives in Reading, England, has been referred for an examination for long-term COVID-19 complications after more than three months of illness. SARS-CoV-2 is a virus that causes disease. Meanwhile, her husband Dan, who became ill at the end of March, had a high fever and other COVID-19 symptoms for a few days but recovered quickly. It's also perplexing how the disease manifests itself according to age. Children have had few severe cases of COVID-19, but others have developed a serious inflammatory syndrome weeks after infection. COVID-19 continues to put older people at the greatest risk of hospitalisation and death, but young adults are now becoming critically ill.

When it comes to viral infections, this category fared better than the very young and very old (one glaring exception: the 1918 flu pandemic, which killed healthy, young adults at a high rate). In the six months after China confirmed an unidentified pneumonia, doctors have described a growing list of health risks associated with COVID-19. In several respects, COVID-19 stands out: the disease's wide variety of effects and the difficulty of determining how badly it will affect any given individual are unusual. However, some of the COVID-19 symptoms and trends are painfully familiar. Viruses attempt to evade all calls. Influenza, for example, dampens each enough to allow it to reproduce and spread to another host, but not sufficiently to prevent an individual from clearing the infection. SARS-CoV-2 is unique in that it: The call to arms is put on hold, but the call for reinforcements is accelerated.

Although SARS-CoV — the coronavirus that caused the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome outbreak in 2003 — demonstrated the same mismatched response to the call to arms and call for reinforcements, the way SARS-CoV-2 interacts with the immune system sets it apart from other viruses. He claims that the Ebola virus does something similar, but for a different cause. Even though the virus is effective at suppressing the call to arms, it damages so many cells so easily during an infection that it causes a lot of inflammation, despite the fact that it isn't raising the call for reinforcements.

Overall, COVID-19 leaves us with a feeling of déjà vu as well as a sense of exploration. Any of what makes the experience so transformative is that all of us are experiencing a pandemic on this scale for the first time, as we encounter a virus that our bodies have never seen before. Since the coronavirus is fresh, Marcelin says, "we're learning on the job." “That makes things a lot scarier.”

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