

## COVID-19 vs Paranoia: Which Poses a Greater Threat?

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### COVID-19 vs Paranoia: Which Poses a Greater Threat?

Text



image 1 - fear.png

Our generation has the privilege of having the world at our fingertips; able to receive news and information from across the globe, publishing and sharing our thoughts, and communicating with essentially the world – all in a matter of seconds.

I'm sure we are all aware how useful this rise in information and communication technology has been, especially on a personal level. Whether it be sharing our Insta-worthy meals, Skyping our friends across different continents, having instantaneous access to information, we're all using it.

But why am I talking about this in a blogpost about the latest viral pandemic COVID-19 that's swept the world off its feet? The coronavirus arose in the Wuhan province in the very end of 2019, and has since spread to **26 countries outside of China** and resulted in a death toll now **standing at 2,010**.

Social media and mass news outlets have since flooded our feeds and minds with every detail about the virus – speculations of how it started, **which animal it originate from**, who's to blame, what measures are being taken and more. Receiving information straight to our phones, especially in real time, can make you feel like the virus is close in on us — even if it's not. Considering the mental and psychological impact of this as well - being constantly surrounded by panic-inducing headlines, whether true or false can bring detriment to health.

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image 2 - sneeze.png

Stoking fear in the public, these posts have been shared and spread across what seems like the entire global population – that is, anyone with access to the media. I'm sure that the uncertainty surrounding the disease doesn't help either. Dr Lee Riley, professor of infectious diseases and vaccinology at the University of California, has mentioned that the persistent news culture and the rise of social media has contributed to **fear spreading faster than the virus itself**. Comparing it with the SARS viral pandemic of years ago, the coronavirus is being diagnosed far more rapidly with today's technology and infrastructure.

Especially in Europe, where there have been less than **50 confirmed cases**, there has been quite a stir in the public, with people being turned away from places of business, speculations on affected individuals and so on. The "trail" the infected individuals leave have also been commented upon, allowing for further stigmatization.

In addition, there has been a surge of xenophobic prejudice and behaviour as a result of this spread of information and misinformation. In my opinion, the situation can be seen as xenophobic at best—and racist at worst. Apparently, this coronavirus has come to be known as an "**Asian disease problem**", even quoted as such in The New York Times. This stigma, caused by blame and fear, has become quite an issue.

This can be seen in racist incidents linked to the coronavirus, especially toward East-Asian populations in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and countries in Europe. These incidents include verbal abuse, marginalisation, and even physical assault.

"Viruses have no passports or nationality", said Dr Pillay in an opinion post. It is imperative that we keep this in mind.

Let us take a look at the actual severity and fatality of the situation.

Infectious disease experts have yet to know exactly how contagious or deadly the Wuhan coronavirus is. Compared to SARS and MERS – viruses that have historically seemed to have similar characteristics and severity, the Wuhan coronavirus has been rather rampant. The MERS outbreak took about two and a half years to infect 1,000 people, SARS took roughly four months, while the novel COVID-19 reached that figure in just 48 days.

However, current figures indicate that the Wuhan coronavirus is significantly less deadly than its relatives. Although the current outbreak has led to over 1,000 deaths—more than SARS—its fatality rate is around 2 percent; in comparison, the fatality rate for SARS was around 10 percent, and the rate for MERS was around 35 percent.

With that said, we do – of course – have to take into account how with globalisation and the **shrinking world**, and how such diseases are spread more swiftly than ever. People and goods cross national and geographical boundaries like never before with the rise of accessible travel and trade, allowing for potential contact with the virus. It is also important to be vigilant in such times of pressure, all while understanding the gravity of misinformation in situations such as this pandemic. Even the WHO has acknowledged the "**infodemic**" that has come as a result of social media, mass media and the epidemic.

So ultimately, here's my call to action for us to be discerning consumers of information, especially in cases like this outbreak where tensions and stakes are high. In an age where the line between information and misinformation can be faint, it is of utmost importance that we be perceptive and shrewd regarding the information that is "fed" Nevertheless, be sure to stay safe and protect yourself and others from the virus by taking the necessary precautions and health measures.

I'm passing this on to you, dear readers, and I'd love to know your thoughts on what's happening here. What do you think about the weight that technology and media have on our society? What about the imbalance in the dissemination and sensationalism of information? Be sure to leave your comments down below - let's create an open dialog and link several articles below that can shed more light on subjects mentioned in today's blogpost.

[Informative but succinct page](#) on the virus

A brilliant, [interactive map](#) of the outbreak

[Symptoms](#) of COVID-19

How to [protect yourself](#) from COVID-19

If you enjoyed this week's blog and my take on matters, be sure to share it and come back next week!

## Comments

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