

COVID-19: Is a day at the beach the answer?

by Phillip W. Weiss

While New York State continues to impose a lockdown on the economy and despite the state of California having over 41,000 cases of COVID-19, and probably many times more that number infected with the virus but asymptomatic, the people of California, according to published reports, have opted to go the beach. Their action gives cause to wonder if the lockdown is necessary. The beachgoers in California seem impervious to the danger posed by the COVID-19 virus. Should the people of New York State and elsewhere follow suit?

Going to the beach does not change certain facts. Because of the lockdown, 26 million people are unemployed. Because of the lockdown the federal government is frantically spewing out trillions of dollars of (borrowed) money to shore up what is left of the economy (which apparently is doing well in California). Because of the lockdown, people, except apparently the beachgoers in California, feel uncertainty about the future. Because of the lockdown there is rationing of health care services. As a result, medical appointments and surgeries have been postponed. Because of the lockdown the states and localities have accrued substantial budget shortfalls. This could result in major reductions in the delivery of essential public services, such as firefighting, sanitation, and public safety. Because of the lockdown, the entire airline industry is nearly shut down, sharply limiting the ability of people to travel (except to the beach). Yet, despite

these problems, people in California have decided to go to the beach. Is this a reasonable and prudent decision on their part? Or is it nothing more than just foolish acting out behavior?

If beachgoers in California believe that by going to the beach, they can rid themselves of the coronavirus, they are mistaken. According to a published report,

First of all, no one knows how long it takes to deactivate Covid-19 with sunlight, or what strength is needed. And even if they did, the amount of UV in sunlight varies depending on the time of day, the weather, the season, and where in the world you live – especially which latitude – so this wouldn't be a reliable way to kill the virus.¹

It would be so convenient if all we had to do to destroy the coronavirus was lay in the sun. The price of sun reflectors would skyrocket. Everyone would be eagerly waiting for the next sunny day. The weather forecast would take on a new importance. Weather forecasters would become celebrities. The study of meteorology would become a national past time. And best of all, people would be happy. It is a wonderful fantasy but being fantasy it cannot alter the truth which brooks no opposition.

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