

The Atlantic

Lora1 Strum <lstrum@theatlantic.com>

One enormous, uncomfortable job

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The Atlantic <newsletters@theatlantic.com>
Reply-To: subscriber-newsletters@theatlantic.com
To: lstrum@theatlantic.com

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The Atlantic

This is *The Atlantic's* weekly email to subscribers, a close look at the issues our newsroom is watching, just for you. As always, you can talk to us by replying to this email.

As the pandemic in America wanes toward something **resembling an end**, I invited **Paul Bisceglia**, our editor who oversees science, health, and technology reporting, to reflect on the weight of covering a global catastrophe. Paul takes us through moments big and small in the long road to what may—we all hope—be a new, better reality.

—**Lora Strum**

Dear reader,

Fifteen months ago, I learned an important lesson in pandemic journalism by accidentally freaking out my co-workers. Word was spreading that Americans should probably get serious about washing their hands. Some businesses had begun to close. I bumped into two colleagues, neither of them science reporters, by the office coffee machine. They wanted to know: How worried should they be about this whole coronavirus thing, on a scale of one to 10? Hoping to avoid any panic, I offered what I thought was a gentle, conservative six.

I still remember their eyes widening. “Oh my God, I thought you’d say two!” one of them yelled.

My alarmed co-workers’ reaction made clear to me from the very start that our team of science and health journalists would have one enormous, uncomfortable job throughout the pandemic: guiding readers through the nightmare the world had been trapped in. It’s been a profound duty—and profoundly exhausting. For more than a year now, the team has worked in overdrive to deliver the best pandemic journalism out there. We’ve chronicled America’s **fatal early failures**, the **vaccination breakthroughs**, the **protracted battles with variants**. We’ve explored what we still *don’t* know (please, never ask me to explain **the immune system**). And, of course, we’ve written about the pandemic’s toll on everyone’s bodies and minds. The **pain**. The **stress**. The **brain fog**.

Globally, the pandemic remains catastrophic. But in the United States, we’re witnessing an extraordinary shift. Thanks to the vaccines, the “**quite possibly wonderful summer**” we’ve anticipated truly seems to be coming for many people. This has made room for some refreshing stories. Americans are about to **vacation like the French**. We’re about to go **Botox wild!** This isn’t to say the pandemic is over; far from it. Our focus will stay on the tragic effects that persist well beyond America’s emergency phase—the **mysteries of long COVID**, the enduring psychological traumas of living through this awful year. You’ll also notice a little more fun and whimsy creeping back into our science pages. See: all the elaborate scientific theories of **why cats are obsessed with boxes**.

We’re as eager as ever to help you navigate this strange, new, hopefully better 2021. And I, personally, am eager to be fully vaccinated, and to reunite with my coworkers in person. I’m going to try not to freak anyone out.

— **Paul**

UNLOCKING THE MYSTERIES OF LONG COVID, BY MEGHAN O'ROURKE

A growing number of clinicians are on an urgent quest to find treatments for a frighteningly pervasive problem. They've had surprising early success.



Jonno Rattman

THE WAY OUT OF BRAIN FOG, BY PAMELA WEINTRAUB

One of COVID-19's most persistent and mysterious problems finally has some treatments.



YIFEI FANG / GETTY

FOR ONE GLORIOUS SUMMER, AMERICANS WILL VACATION LIKE THE FRENCH

Workers are on the verge of going bonkers with their PTO.



GARRY OWENS / GALLERYSTOCK

WHY DO CATS LOVE CLIMBING INTO BOXES? BY KATHERINE J. WU

A handful of theories have been tossed around.



Getty

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