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## **Anti-Vax Positive COVID patient – the day after I got back from vacation from Italy**

Last Thursday, I returned from vacation from my birthplace Italy. One of my first patients Friday was a long-time patient, anti-vaxxer, who was having mild shortness of breath. He did a home COVID test which came back positive, but he had heard that there was cross-reactivity with this test and the flu. While I said that this was not true, he could repeat the test. It came back positive, and he is about to receive monoclonal antibodies as he is morbidly obese. His oxygen level is borderline; I told him that he should go right to the ER if his breathing deteriorates. From the time his symptoms started, he had contact with at least 100 individuals before I told him his COVID results.

In Italy, one cannot work without being vaccinated. For those who don't want to be vaccinated they have to be tested every 72 hours – at their own expense. The result is clear. Last week there was an average of 50 deaths in Italy; in the United States with just over 6 times the population, there were more than 20 times the number of deaths per day in the past week (1100 vs 50!). Both countries are experiencing an uptick in cases, in the range of about 30%. But the bottom line – deaths and hospitalizations are widely divergent. The answer is vaccination rates. The United States is at 60% (with many states lower than 50%) while Italy is closer to 85% (with the lowest closer to 75%).

As travelers in Italy, my wife and I had to show our CDC vaccination card virtually everywhere we wanted to go. I saw people turned away at restaurants who could not demonstrate a “Green Pass”, the Italian telephone app documenting vaccination status. The COVID pandemic in Italy is now endemic and it will stay that way throughout the world with ebbs and flows.

What's the response been in the U.S. and Italy to the uptick in COVID? Italy is [planning on more rules](#) to encourage vaccinations and address other COVID issues; in contrast, most recently, [Disneyland](#), for example, suspended its vaccination requirement in response to Governor DeSanctis's recent legislation. Puerto Rico [took an approach](#) different from that of Florida and has a remarkably high vaccination rate.

Meanwhile on the global stage, no one is seriously addressing the issue of global vaccine access and transparency. If anything, the [U.S.](#), Europe and [China](#) have retreated. While the Washington Post [writes](#) about looking at ourselves in the mirror when talking about the 5% vaccination rates in the developing world, the reality is that self-interest should also be at play as new variants will continue to emerge.

AND continues to focus on vaccine hesitancy/mandates using as a basis excellent articles such as [this one](#) from The Lancet and expanding our health professional network. We continue to try to influence the pending health care legislation including controlling pharma prices and including funding for global vaccine access via contacting legislators. In the meantime, I hope that the coming days are meaningful for all of you from a family and friends point of view.

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