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## **Not Ready for Next Pandemic; New AND Brochure and Actions**

We've come to the end of this phase of the pandemic. One day everyone was masked at the medical office. The next (May 11) only [I and a few others](#) were masked; the CDC does not require states to report Covid infections anymore; a whole host of other consequences. On the positive side, I've had no Covid positive patients in the last few weeks. But would I really find out? Data is in short supply; but [this website](#) provides updated data. Covid is still a [leading cause of death](#) with approximately 1000 hospitalizations per week.

What can we learn? I have a [book](#) coming out this Fall on the topic, based in part on my Covid Notes. But in the meantime, [this article](#) makes some good points on best practices: **Get the messaging right** (problem is that social media together with aspiring politicians will make this difficult, if not impossible, to do); **make it easy to share data** (we are far away from realizing this objective); **think carefully about school closures** (which means that you need adequate ventilation, which most states have not yet done); **stockpiling vital supplies** (we've largely done this); **quickly set up large randomized trials** (still a work in process).

Governor DeSantis [signed](#) what he calls a "[medical-freedom bill](#)"; I call it a "death and disease bill" which prohibits business from requiring masking, testing or vaccination and allows health professionals to prescribe whatever they like such as ivermectin. And in contrast to De Santis' efforts, [a recent article](#) demonstrated that teaching critical thinking is one of the few interventions to decrease belief in conspiracies. And then there is Dr Ladapo, the Florida Surgeon General, who [fabricated](#) key findings in a recent report. As Peter Hotez, a renowned vaccine expert stated in the same article: "200,000 Americans died because of this shit." Or to put it differently, as highlighted by the just released excellent [Lessons from the Covid War](#): in the first two years of the pandemic, U.S. excess mortality — deaths over and above what would normally be expected — was 40% higher than what European countries experienced. **Spain, they wrote, performed 50% better than Florida** in preventing premature deaths among its citizens. What is DeSantis' definition of freedom? Countries with higher a percentage of people espousing "traditional or conservative" values did better during the pandemic — [all except the United States](#). While I and others [advocated](#) that Fauci should have resigned in protest, he gave a [touching exit interview](#). The Director of the CDC also resigned; she had a [mixed record](#).

What about a second bivalent (booster) Covid vaccine? For individuals with moderately to severely immunocompromising conditions, [Up to Date](#) suggests a second bivalent vaccine dose, given at least two months after the first ([Grade 2C](#)). For adults aged 65 and older who have already received a bivalent vaccine dose and do not have a moderately to severely immunocompromising condition, a second bivalent vaccine dose is optional. I haven't gotten a second booster because I recently had Covid; otherwise I would.

Pharma costs are skyrocketing. [There are Congressional efforts](#) to cap insulin consumer cost at \$35. Costs will continue to rise in health care for many reasons; not the least of which is that health care organizations [continue to gobble each other up](#) – creating at least oligopolies.

And gun violence [according to an interesting article](#) in Politico by Colin Woodard, “the region the Big Apple comprises most of is far and away the safest part of the U.S. mainland when it comes to gun violence, while the regions Florida and Texas belong to have per capita firearm death rates (homicides and suicides) three to four times higher than New York’s.” Some Republican governors such as Bill Lee of Tennessee [have taken action](#).

Another Southern state, North Carolina, just [expanded Medicaid](#); saving many lives. Medicaid access is not sufficient; average life expectancy [dropped 4.6 years](#) in 2020 in New York State.

On the addiction crisis, the NYT [reported](#) that the Sackler family donated significantly to the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. “As the Sackler donations grew, a Purdue Pharma lobbyist was trying to make inroads with the Academies, according to [records released](#) in lawsuits against opioid makers. The Pain Care Forum, a group co-founded by a Sackler lobbyist, [pushed for](#) legislation ... that included [calling for a](#) National Academies report to “increase the recognition of pain as a significant public health problem.” The legislation passed.

With the mental health delivery system in total chaos, we need to think outside the box – such as [this model pioneered in Belgium](#). But in the meantime, [we can do a better job screening](#) for suicide risk.

To return to the Covid pandemic. The bottom line: When asked if the country was prepared for a new pandemic, Dr. Francis S. Collins, the former director of the National Institutes of Health, [simply replied, “No.”](#) Or let's put it differently, as Derek Thompson of the Atlantic recently asked: “The true test of a civilization may be the answer to a basic question: Can it keep its children alive? For example, the average American my age, in his mid-to-late 30s, is roughly six times more likely to die in the next year than his counterpart in Switzerland.” Compared to other industrialized countries, [Thompson documents](#) why the answer is “no.”

[These](#) and many other articles/events document the health-related political challenges we face in the United States. AND is responding in both a practical and ambitious manner. In addition to working on Paid Family Medical Leave pending legislation in Maine, which has a good chance of passing in this legislative session, we at AND, among other activities, have worked on a new version of our brochure – [see it here](#). From an ambitious point of view: Comprehensive health system reform may not happen

in my lifetime but AND will continue to fight for policies against [headlines](#) such as this: “The CEOs of seven major health insurers together made more than \$335 million in 2022. Molina's CEO brought in \$181 million alone.” Please contact us if you would like to work with us on our practical and ambitious plans. Join/comment on our [Linked In](#) or [Facebook](#) pages! As described in more detail in the brochure and [web site](#) “if you have one hour a month, we can help your candidate win”; our aim is to have at least 25 health professionals engaged with AND in each swing state by the fall. If you are a health professional and live in a swing state and/or know people living in a swing state, contact us!!

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