

PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY



CURRENT NEWS ON ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS AND GLOBAL HEALTH

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March 26, 2020

Hi,

As the coronavirus pandemic becomes more serious with more than 50,000 new cases globally in the last 24 hours, we still saw so many this last week not taking it seriously. How about the Mexican president who says he's relying on amulets and charms, or the Vancouverites still flocking to their beaches, or the gamers lining up in downtown Toronto to get the latest video game? Well, that behaviour in Canada is now coming to an end, with almost complete lockdown across the land and penalties for disobeying. The global infections now number about 500,000 and that's all mostly in the richest countries in the world and I, of course, include China in this (as you'll understand if you've ever visited China in the last decade). Just wait until it spreads deeper into the poor countries where health care is sketchy at best. But even the richest country in the world, the USA, is failing and failing us all. Its government's 'themselves first or alone' policy and lack of leadership at the very top is leading to one of the greatest ever economic and health disasters, and there is really no end in sight, yet. Will it be months (this seems certain to some extent) or years? How many more will die or get really sick? The number of new COVID-19 cases is now approaching that of other giant global diseases.

How is that health professionals and scientific experts are now being respected after being so derided publicly for the last three years? And how sorry I feel for Dr. Anthony Fauci with the compromises he must be making. Will anti-vaxxers now line up for a vaccination, should one be discovered? It still behoves me to understand how the www can still be crowded with lies and fabrications. Who does this? These are interesting and crazy times.

Don't forget, too, about Earth Hour this Saturday, March 28, at 8:30PM wherever you are, and turn off your lights in global solidarity. <https://www.earthhour.org/>

And read below for more about the coronavirus and many other important issues not to lose sight of in today's **Planetary Health Weekly** (#13 of the year), including:

- Coronavirus updates including vaccine hopes in Saskatchewan, new drugs, new tests, new diets, an affected UN, and Canadian government online resources,
- Egypt's 100,000,000 population milestone and its Nile River,
- Problems with electric hand dryers,
- Bailing out the Canadian oil and gas sector,
- Housing nightmare in New Zealand,
- Locusts swarming east Africa,
- Solar and wind over coal,
- Pulling finances from fossil fuels,
- British Columbia needed to wake up, Social distancing illustrated and Jane Goodall,
- Climate change driving men from Central America,
- Quotes by Bill Gates and Yuval Harari,
- A short video for World Animal Day,
- The second patient to be cured of HIV infection,
- UN's Human Rights Council loaded with rights abusers,
- The discovery of the first animal not to breathe oxygen,
- Earth's new mini-moon,
- A new book on trade agreements and public health, and
- UNESCO's updated distance-learning guide.

I hope you'll take a look. Best, david

David Zakus, Editor and Publisher

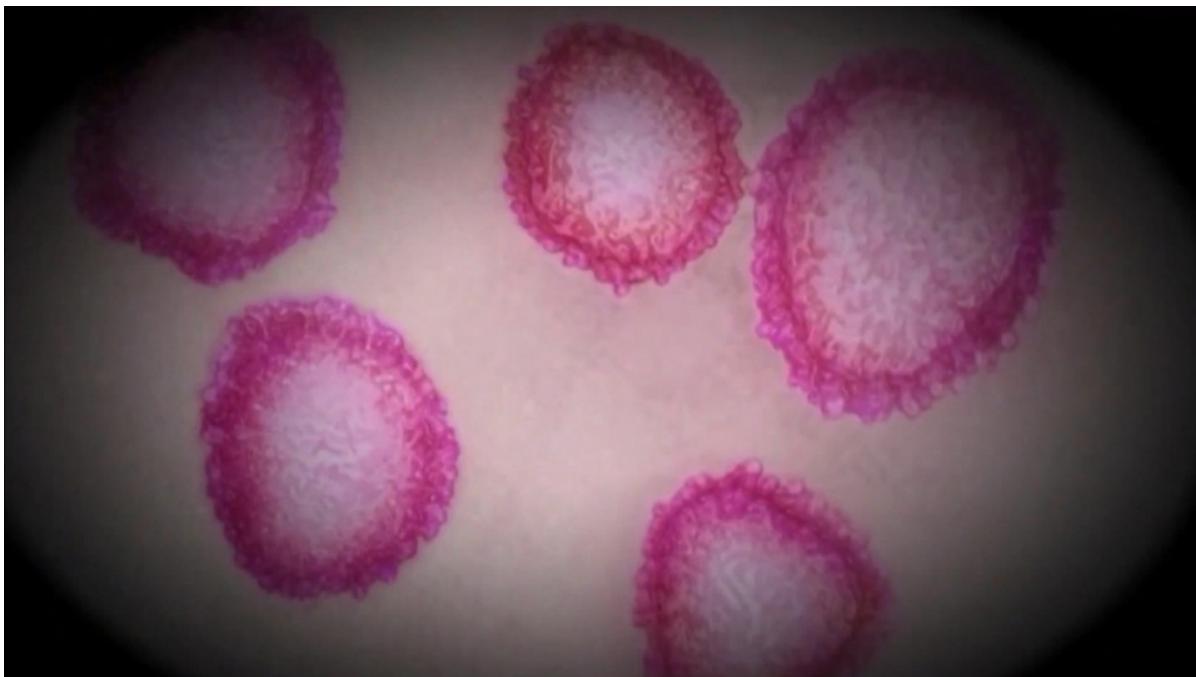


Nearly A Ghost Town

Toronto, Ontario - March 22, 2020

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS & COVID-19 UPDATES

**Canadian Researchers Making Headway
On COVID-19 Vaccine**



Credit: CTV News

Canadian researchers have made gains on the COVID-19 virus this week. Researchers at the University of Saskatchewan's Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization - International Vaccine Centre (VIDO-InterVac) have been working toward a vaccine since January. "Within hours (of talking with Canada's Public Health Agency) we were given permission to handle the virus. I have never seen such speed before, and it shows how institutions can and should work together," Dr. Volker Gerdts said back in January. "We immediately used that information to launch the vaccine work." The potential vaccine is moving to animal testing and the VIDO-InterVac centre is hoping to be able to start human trials shortly.

Tina Beaudry-Mellor, Minister of Advanced Education in Saskatchewan, said the centre has worked with the World Health Organization, Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. VIDO-InterVac has contributed to work on vaccines for SARS and Zeka virus in the past. [Read More at Western Standard Online](#)

See Also:

[Saskatoon Research Lab Gets \\$200,000 To Find COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

[How The Coronavirus Pandemic Is Impacting The United Nations](#)

[UN Refugee Agency To Suspend Resettlements Because Of Coronavirus](#)

[Don't Blame Bat Soup For The Wuhan Virus](#)

[Taiwan Is Beating The Coronavirus. Can The US Do The Same?](#)

[Japanese Flu Drug 'Clearly Effective' In Treating Coronavirus, Says China](#)

[Two New Tests For COVID-19 Have Been Approved In Canada To Speed Up Results](#)

[Coronavirus: What Canada Can Expect To Happen In The Next Two Weeks](#)

[Why Outbreaks Like Coronavirus Spread Exponentially, And How To "Flatten The Curve"](#)

AND FINALLY, here are a number of continually updated resources available on the Government of Canada website for the public, as well as for health professionals, including its Outbreak Update: [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#) and:

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): [Being prepared](#)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): [Travel advice](#)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): [For health professionals](#)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): [Guidance documents](#)

[Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\) in Canada](#)

[Risk-informed decision-making for mass gatherings during COVID-19 global outbreak](#)

[Public Health Guidance for Schools \(K-12\) and Childcare Programs \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Summary of Assumptions](#)

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): [Awareness resources](#) – resources are available in PDF Format in multiple languages

[Vulnerable populations and COVID-19](#)

[How to isolate at home when you have COVID-19](#)

[About coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Know the facts about coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Be prepared infographic \(COVID-19\)](#)

[Be prepared factsheet](#)

[Information sheet - Travellers returning to Canada](#) (includes contact information for public health authorities in each province and territory)

[Information sheet - Travellers returning from Iran and Hubei Province, China](#) (includes contact information for public health authorities in each province and territory).

As Egypt's Population Hits 100 Million,

Celebration Is Muted



Credit: Laura Boushnak for The New York Times

Somewhere in Egypt, last month, the country reached a major milestone: its 100 millionth citizen was born. The birth of that citizen — whom officials identified as a girl named Yasmine Rabie, in a village in Minya governorate — was noted in Cairo by a giant counter outside the country's national statistics agency that has been ticking upward for years. Hitting 100,000,000 marked human plenty, certainly, but also an uneasy moment in a country gripped by worries that its exploding population will exacerbate poverty and unemployment, and contribute to the scarcity of basic resources like land and water. [Read More at NY Times](#).

See Also:

[Without The Nile, There Is No Egypt](#)

Wash Your Hands—But Beware the Electric Hand Dryer



Credit: GETTY IMAGES

The spread of Covid-19 has turned us into a nation of hand-washing obsessives, citizens who vigorously interlace our fingers and circle-scrub our thumbs with an exacting, anxiety-fueled intensity. But it's not over when you flip off the faucet. Drying your hands matters too, because damp skin provides a hospitable environment for microorganisms and, as a result, might increase the likelihood that you'll pass on pathogens.

A [2018 study](#) produced even more troubling results, finding that "potential pathogens and spores" could be "dispersed throughout buildings and deposited on hands by hand dryers." It tested conventional hot-air models with and without filters and determined that the filters "most likely reduce the number of potentially pathogenic bacteria with the potential to colonize hands but do not eliminate the risk entirely." A [2015 study](#) found that super-aggro hand-dryers like the ones made by Dyson, which use higher-speed jets of air at room temperature, "produced significantly greater aerosolization of virus on the hands" than the traditional kind. Paper towels, meanwhile, were found to cause about the same amount of viral spread as hot-air models.

A [2012 analysis](#) of 12 studies over four decades published in *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* concluded that "[f]rom a hygiene viewpoint, paper towels are superior to electric air dryers" and that they should be used in "locations in which hygiene is paramount, such as hospitals and clinics." Though it could be argued that hygiene should be paramount in the restroom of, say, your neighbourhood coffee shop, too. The

analysis did find that dryers like Dyson's "led to much less bacterial transfer than hot air dryers." [Read More at Wired.](#)

Ottawa Prepares Multibillion-dollar Bailout Of Oil And Gas Sector



Credit: JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS

The federal government is preparing a multibillion-dollar bailout package for Canada's oil and gas sector that is expected to be unveiled early next week, sources say. Federal and Alberta government insiders are saying little about the details – citing the sensitivity of the options under discussion – but the oil and gas sector can expect to get more access to credit, especially for struggling small and medium-sized operations, and significant funding to create jobs for laid-off workers to clean up abandoned oil and gas wells.

Natural Resources Minister Seamus O'Regan held a three-hour talk with the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP) last Thursday. "We know that the oil and gas sector has been particularly affected, and specific help is needed. We're looking at all options – including helping maintain jobs in the industry by enabling workers to put their skills to use remediating the environmental liabilities associated with orphan wells," Mr. O'Regan's communications director, Carlene Variyan, said in a statement to The Globe. [Read More at The Globe and Mail](#)

'They Allowed The Perfect Storm': UN Expert Damns New Zealand's Housing Crisis



Credit: Chandan Khanna/AFP/Getty Images

When Leilani Farha touches down in a new city, the first thing the UN special rapporteur on the right to adequate housing does is look up. In Melbourne, Toronto, London and Dublin, the skies above are filled with cranes, Farha says, soaring across the skyline to construct new homes for their booming populations.

Last month Farha arrived in Wellington on a fact-finding mission, lured by the headlines of a housing crisis, chronic homelessness, and motels bulging with desperate families for months at a time – all occurring with a new progressive government at the helm. “I didn’t see cranes in the sky, which is suggestive of not a lot of development – that struck me right away,” says Farha, a plain-talking Canadian. “They allowed the perfect storm, and that’s successive governments. It’s really a bit tragic. It’s a human rights crisis.”. [Read More at The Guardian](#)

Locusts Swarm Into Crisis-hit South Sudan As Plague Spreads Across East Africa



Credit: Luke Dray/Getty Images

Swarms of locusts ravaging crops and grazing land across east Africa have reached [South Sudan](#), already reeling from widespread hunger and years of civil war, says the country's agriculture minister. Kenya, Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti are battling the [worst locust outbreak in decades](#), and swarms have also spread into Tanzania and Uganda.

Desert locusts can travel up to 150km (95 miles) in a day and eat their own body weight in greenery, meaning a swarm just one kilometre square can eat as much food as 35,000 people in a day. The invasion is worsening food shortages in a region where up to 25 million people are suffering after three consecutive years of droughts and floods. [Read More at The Guardian](#)

GOOD NEWS

Energy From Renewables Will Soon Be Cheaper Than From Coal In Many World Regions



Credit: [STEPHEN EDELSTEIN](#)

Renewable energy is not just better for the environment, it's also becoming cheaper than coal for electricity generation in many parts of the world, according to a new report. Over 60% of current coal-fired power plants are producing electricity at a higher cost than new wind or solar installations would, according to findings of the [Carbon Tracker Initiative](#), a self-described "not-for-profit financial think tank" focused on needling capital markets to adopt more climate-friendly policies. More renewable energy generating capacity would also help further lower the overall carbon emissions of electric cars charged from the grid. By 2030, it will be cheaper to build new wind or solar generating capacity than to continue operating coal power plants in all markets, according to the report. [Read More at Green Car Reports](#)

MORE GOOD NEWS

(More) Global Financial Giants Swear Off Funding An Especially Dirty Fuel



Credit: Ben Nelms/Bloomberg

Some of the world's largest financial institutions have stopped putting their money behind oil production in the Canadian province of Alberta, home to one of the world's most extensive, and also dirtiest, oil reserves. In December, the insurance giant The Hartford said it would stop insuring or investing in oil production in the province, just weeks after Sweden's central bank said it would stop holding Alberta's bonds. And last month BlackRock, the world's largest asset manager, said that one of its fast-growing green-oriented funds would stop investing in companies that get revenue from the Alberta oil sands.

They are among the latest banks, pension funds and global investment houses to start pulling away from fossil-fuel investments amid growing pressure to show they are doing something to fight climate change. [Read More at NY Times](#)

OPINION

CCPA: B.C. MUST PLAN FOR MANAGED DECLINE BEFORE INTERNATIONAL FOSSIL MARKETS SCALE BACK



Credit: Gina Dittmer/PublicDomainPictures

British Columbia may be running out of time to plan for a managed decline of its fossil fuel industry, given the prospect that the Asian governments the province is counting on to buy its products may soon be making their own transition to a green economy, warns a new report issued this week by the B.C. office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). The report by CCPA B.C. Senior Economist Marc Lee and public policy researcher Seth Klein [urges](#) the province to set carbon budgets and fossil fuel production limits, invest in a domestic transition based on a green industrial strategy, ensure a just transition for fossil workers and communities, and reform its current royalty regime for fossil extraction.

“Imagine it’s 2025 and because of the escalating climate crisis, governments in Asia have declared ambitious new climate action plans and an aggressive transition off natural gas,” Lee and Klein write in a CCPA policy note based on the report. “B.C.’s fossil fuel exports would soon dry up, workers would be laid off, and local communities would lose public and private sector jobs.”

It’s that type of scenario that “needs to inform planning for B.C.’s fossil fuel industries (coal, oil and gas), not the government’s continued interest in expanding their production and export,” they add. “The government has shown little willingness to contemplate a managed wind-down so long as there are external buyers for B.C. fossil fuels.” But that attitude is risky when market conditions could suddenly change (as they have today), other countries could shift to more ambitious climate policies, or importers could cut their fossil fuel consumption. [Read More at The Energy Mix](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY

Coronavirus: Social Distancing Explained



Credit: ITV Channel TV

Governments and health officials suggest that 'social distancing' is essential to curbing the spread of Coronavirus. While the government now mandates or advises all people to practice social distancing, health experts suggest that more people doing it will help minimize further infection. But what is it and how do we do it? Here's an explanation...

Watch this 2.5 minute video on [How To do Social Distancing](#).

See Also: [Jane Goodall Is Self-isolating Too](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS WELLNESS

When Climate Change Drove All The Men Away



Credit: Jean-Claude Teyssier

Kilometres short of the Mexico-U.S. border, rough hands yanked Javier Hernandez from the trunk. They beat him, fractured his skull and then buried him with straws poking from his nostrils for air. Known as coyotes, Javier's smugglers threatened to abandon his bloodied body in the desert unless his family paid a hefty ransom. Javier had been on the road for three days. He'd left his rural farming village in central Oaxaca, one of Mexico's poorest states, to find work in "El Norte." One by one, Javier's siblings had quit the family's rain-dependent corn patch to slip over the border as undocumented immigrants. His eldest brother had immigrated to California before Javier was born. The summer Javier turned 19, drought withered the corn on the stalk. With no employment possibilities, Javier hired a coyote. He was the seventh Hernandez child to bid his teary-eyed mother goodbye. He didn't make it this time. [Read More at National Observer.](#)



Credits: Mueller/MSC and Livetalksla.org

Quotes Of The Week

Here's Bill Gates in 2015:

"If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it's most likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than a war. Not missiles, but microbes."

And this week in an interview this week with Chris Anderson, the curator of TED Talks, Gates seems to take aim at U.S. President Donald Trump, who has started suggesting that society ease off the "shelter-in-place" guidelines that are keeping new infections at bay but hammering the economy.

"It's very tough to say to people, 'Hey keep going to restaurants, go buy new houses, ignore that pile of bodies over in the corner, we want you to keep spending because there's some politician that thinks GDP growth is what counts,'" Gates said in the interview. "It's hard to tell people during an epidemic... that they should go about things knowing their activity is spreading this disease."

Read more at Futurism: [Bill Gates Is Pissed: "We Should Have Done More" To Stop Covid-19](#)

AND from Yuval Harari, an Israeli historian, prolific best-selling author and professor in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem,

on surveillance and privacy:

"The coronavirus epidemic is thus a major test of citizenship. In the days ahead, each one of us should choose to trust scientific data and healthcare experts over unfounded conspiracy theories and self-serving politicians. If we fail to make the right choice, we might find ourselves signing away our most precious freedoms, thinking that this is the only way to safeguard our health." Read more at [Financial Times: Yuval Noah Harari: The World After Coronavirus](#)

Upcoming Events

- March 31 - April 2: [World Public Health Nutrition Congress 2020](#) (Brisbane, Australia)
- April 6th -7th, 2020: [17th World Congress on Paediatrics and Neonatology](#) (Tokyo, Japan)
- April 18th -20th, 2020: [CUGH Conference 2020: Global Health in a Time of Worldwide Political Change](#) (Washington, D.C., USA) - Cancelled
- April 24th - 26th, 2020: [PEGASUS IV: Migration - Climate Change - Sustainable Development](#) (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada) - Cancelled
- April 28th - 29th: [Global Health Impact Expo + Exchange](#) (Ottawa, Canada) - Postponed
- April 28th - 30th: [CPHA's Public Health 2020](#) (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada) - Postponed
- May 2nd - 4th: [RESULTS CANADA National Conference: From Action to Impact - Working Together to End Extreme Poverty](#) (Ottawa, Canada) - Cancelled
- May 21st - 23rd: [Indigenous Health Conference: Building Our Future](#) (Niagara Falls, Canada)
- November 9th-19th: [2020 UN Climate Change Conference](#) (UNFCCC COP 26) (Glasgow, Scotland)

FYI#1 SPOTLIGHT ON MEDIA: LIVE GLOBAL MAPPING OF THE CORONAVIRUS

Short Slideshow For World Animal Day - From The Environmental Defense Fund



Credit: EDF

EDF was founded in 1967 by a group of lawyers who loved wildlife and saw a way to help them. Their efforts led to a national ban on the deadly pesticide DDT, saving iconic North American birds of prey like the bald eagle, ospreys and peregrine falcons from the precipice of extinction.

Asian and African elephants may live on different continents, but they have in common a tremendous appetite: both elephants require hundreds of pounds of vegetation every day and plenty of water to drink and bathe in. Unfortunately, global warming-related drought and heat waves are drying out their traditional watering holes and choking out plant life, making the outlook bleak for elephants on both

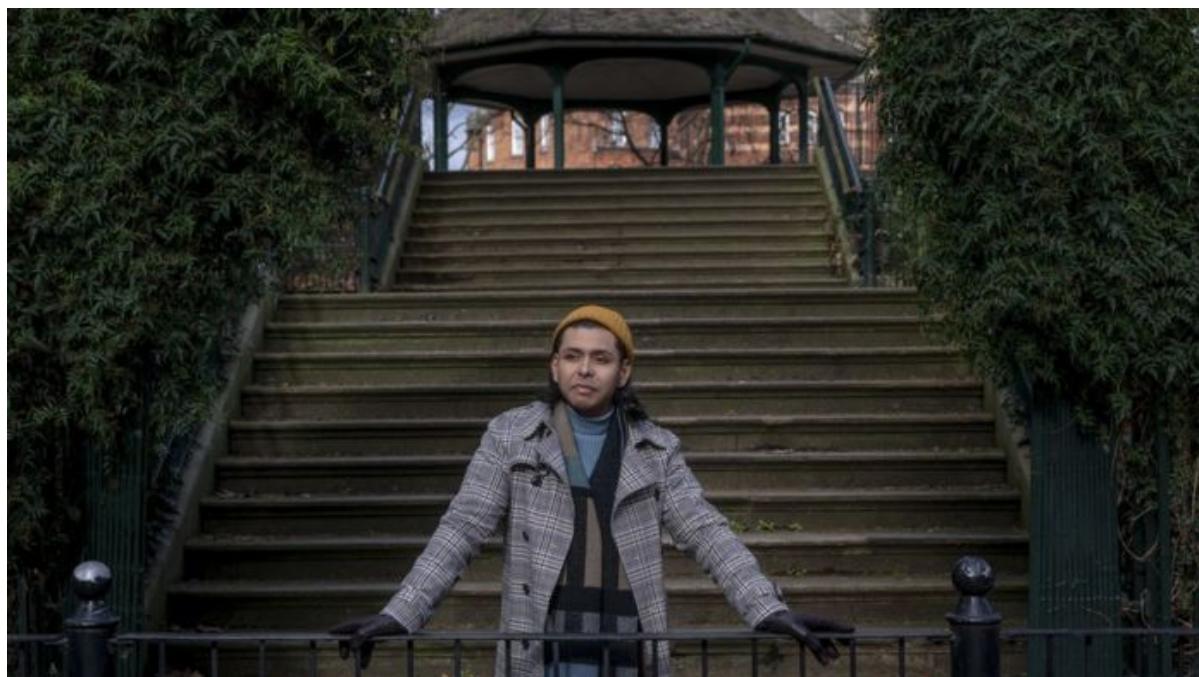
continents.

Today, global warming poses one of the greatest risks to animals and ecosystems around the world. From Antarctica to Africa, melting ice caps, drought, heat waves and unpredictable weather patterns lead to food shortages and habitat loss

Read More at the Environmental Defense Fund

FYI #2

Second Patient Cured Of HIV, Say Doctors



Credit: ANDREW TESTA/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE

Adam Castillejo, a man from London has become the second person in the world to be cured of HIV, doctors say. Adam Castillejo is still free of the virus more than 30 months after stopping anti-retroviral therapy. He was not cured by the HIV drugs, however, but by a stem-cell treatment he received for a cancer he also had, [the](#)

[Lancet HIV](#) journal reports. The donors of those stem cells have an uncommon gene that gives them, and now Mr Castillejo, protection against HIV. In 2011, Timothy Brown, the "Berlin Patient" became the first person reported as cured of HIV, three and half years after having similar treatment.

Is it a permanent cure? The tests suggest 99% of Mr Castillejo's immune cells have been replaced by donor ones. But he still has remnants of the virus in his body, as does Mr Brown. And it is impossible to say with absolute certainty his HIV will never come back. Mr Castillejo told the New York Times: "This is a unique position to be in, a unique and very humbling position. I want to be an ambassador of hope. I don't want people to think, 'Oh, you've been chosen.' No, it just happened. I was in the right place, probably at the right time, when it happened."

[Read more at BBC](#)

FYI #3

The UN, Where Rights Abusers Get To Be On The Human Rights Council



It would be a sufficiently damning indictment of the United Nations that on the 75th anniversary of the global body's founding, the state of international multilateralism is in utter disarray and mass murderers, war criminals and their torture states enjoy almost total impunity from the reach of international law. But it gets worse.

Headquartered in the pleasant surroundings of the Palais des Nations overlooking Lake Geneva in Switzerland, the UN Human Rights Council, which replaced the thoroughly discredited UN Commission on Human Rights 14 years ago, has become as comfortable and welcoming as its predecessor was for many of the worst human rights abusers on the face of the earth.

[Read more at Macleans](#)

FYI #4

Scientists Discover 1st Animal That Doesn't Breathe Oxygen



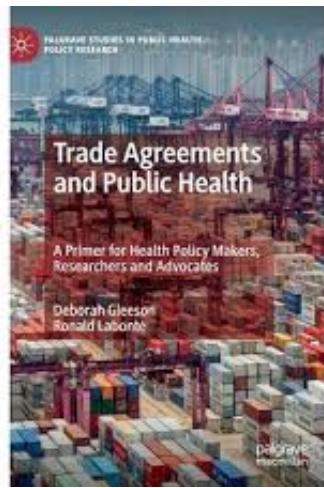
Scientists have discovered something they didn't think existed: an animal that can't breathe oxygen, and obviously doesn't need to. That animal is a parasite called *Henneguya salmincola*, distantly related to jellyfish. It lives in the muscles of salmon and trout, causing unsightly little white nodules known as "tapioca disease." The parasite has just 10 cells and is smaller than many of the cells in our bodies, but it has an extraordinary superpower — the ability to live without the machinery to turn oxygen into energy, researchers [reported this week in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*](#).

"In a way, it changes our view of animals," said senior author Dorothée Huchon, a zoology professor in the Faculty of Life Sciences and the [Steinhardt Museum of Natural History](#) at Tel Aviv University, who worked with collaborators in Israel, the U.S. and Canada. While many microbes have evolved the ability to live without oxygen, animals tend to be much more complex, with many different kinds of cells and tissues combined in one organism. As far as scientists knew, until now, all animals were powered by organelles called mitochondria, which convert sugar and oxygen into energy through a process called respiration, and have their own "mitochondrial" genes.

Read more at CBC

FYI #5: FIRST SPRING READING: NEW BOOK BY DEBORAH GLEESON AND RONALD LABONTÉ

Trade Agreements and Public Health - A Primer for Health Policy Makers, Researchers and Advocates



Credit: Palgrave Macmillian

Trade Agreements and Public Health is the first easily accessible, plain language text on international trade agreements and public health, suitable for readers unfamiliar with the field. It spans the technical and political dimensions of trade and health, providing an outline of the different issues and agreements, discussion of methods for analyzing the impact of trade agreements on health, and analysis of approaches to advocacy and capacity building towards healthier trade agreements. It presents a digestible yet comprehensive overview of the key thinking and research in the field and provides a valuable starting point and list of key references for those who are interested in delving further.

The need for policy coherence between trade and health has never been greater, yet few business or public health workers are equipped to navigate this complex field. This book aims to fill this gap, providing a focused and readable introduction to the topic. It introduces the principles underpinning trade treaties and examines the implications of trade rules for health services and access to medicines, unhealthy commodities, labour rights and the environment. It explores the trade policy making process, methods for trade and health research, and recommendations for strengthening policy coherence.

Read more at Palgrave Macmillan

FYI#6: SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

UNESCO Updates Distance-learning Guide For The 776.7 Million Children Worldwide Affected By School Closures



Credit: Getty

As schools around the world close or move classes online to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, many parents and educators are scrambling for ideas. The United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) has [assembled an online guide](#) with links to distance learning apps and other resources. According to UNESCO, “an unprecedented number of children, youth and adults are not attending schools or universities because of COVID-19,” with governments in 100 countries having announced or implemented closures. In 85 countries, schools nationwide have been closed, affecting more than 776.7 million children.

In addition to [a list of national learning portals](#), UNESCO is also updating a [list of digital education tools](#), including digital learning management systems like ClassDojo and Google Classroom; apps designed for smart feature phones like KaiOS; and software with a strong offline component, including Can’t Wait to Learn, Kolibri, Rumie and Ustad Mobile. The list also covers MOOCs, self-directed learning platforms, mobile reading apps, educational software development tools and live-video

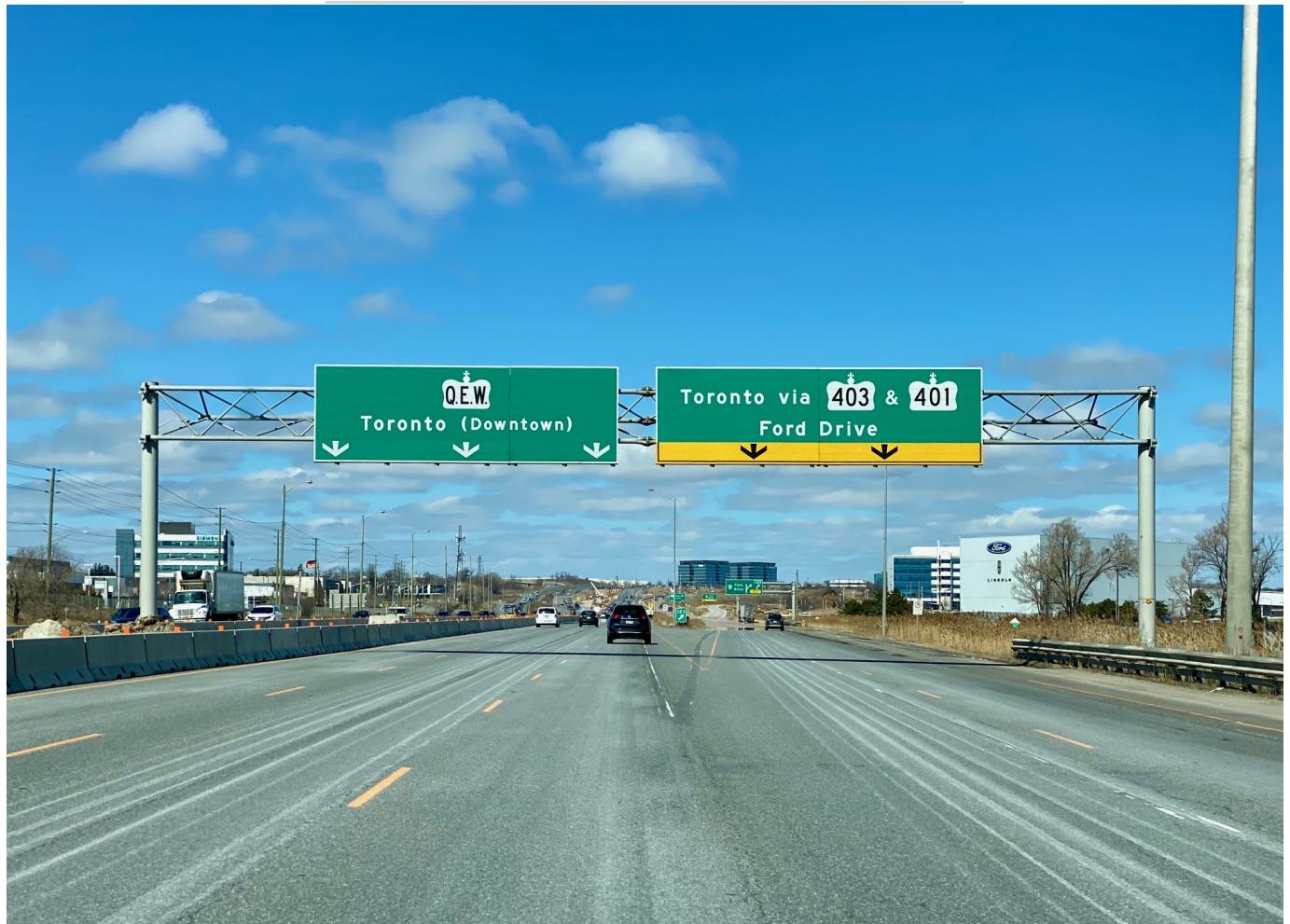
platforms like Dingtalk, Hangouts Meet and Zoom.

Read more at Tech Crunch

END SHOTS

HOST TOWN TORONTO

March 22, 2020



Gardiner Expressway - Normally Packed



Toronto Pearson International Airport - Normally Packed



Terminal 1 - Normally Packed



Terminal 1 - Normally Packed



Sherway Mall - Normally Packed



Gardiner Expressway - Normally Packed



You Know - Normally Packed



Lakeshore Park - Normally Packed



Bloor West Village - Normally Packed

Credits: David Zakus



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