

PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY



CURRENT NEWS ON ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Volume 6, Number 12 <https://planetaryhealthweekly.com> March 19, 2020

Hi,

I was hoping to have insights and photos for you today from a Climate Leadership program I had planned to attend in the USA last week...But, alas, it was cancelled. While it was among the first such 'corona cancellations' that I had heard of, it now is certainly not the last, as almost all sectors of society now have been affected and disrupted by the widely spreading virus SARS CoVid2. The number of closed organizations and businesses here in Canada is astounding. And while the human toll continues to rise so does the economic impact with many facing lost jobs, huge losses and bankruptcy. And how about no sports and all the lack of medical and protective supplies and testing? It seems, at this point, that it is not going to end soon, and likely to last for at least another few weeks even months. While few experts are willing to prognosticate, when listening to the experiences from other heavily affected countries (like Italy, Iran, and China), we should be prepared for the longer term, whatever that means. Three weeks of near shutdown, including all schools and daycare centres here in Ontario, and declarations of 'emergencies' in several provinces, it will hopefully slow down the spread of the virus. But will it stop spreading, will it disappear...not likely until there is a vaccine and enough immunity gained, and then the virus may join the legion of other 'background' diseases we all live with.

It's so interesting, though, that the main sources of death and infirmity in societies around the world are non-communicable diseases (NCDs) which are very much lifestyle dictated: what we eat, drink, smoke and drive determine much of the human lifespan. But, how many people will take changes in their lifestyles to affect those,

what policies will our political leaders do in the future to lessen the impact of the oh so powerful social determinants? Will it just plod along, kind of like with climate change? While climate emergencies have been declared widely, there is no such response as there is to this virus. I firmly believe that what we are seeing now with societal disruption is only a sneak preview of what's to come as we continue to pollute our beautiful world with the remains of life billions of years ago, though this pollution is also slowing down at the moment as airlines, cruise lines and factories close.

I was able to have a couple of days in northern Ontario this last week and share with you a few scenes (see End Shots). Also, in today's **Planetary Health Weekly** (#12 of the year) there is one very short story I can't recommend enough: that by the editor of the highly esteemed journal *Science*, a publication of the huge American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), titled "Do Us A Favor".

I hope you'll take a look at it and the others including:

- Some novel coronavirus updates, including: A positive side perhaps of the pandemic, Social distancing, How the virus kills, & An intel report on U.S. unpreparedness,
- Beaches at risk from climate change,
- No icewine in Germany this year,
- Human transport of thirdhand tobacco smoke,
- Women climate change fighters as targets for misogynists,
- How to build your own nuclear plant,
- Sri Lanka making more huge health gains,
- How MLK jr. was inspired by Ghana's independence,
- The importance of ancient grains (e.g., tef from Ethiopia),
- UBC and FNHA improving Indigenous cancer outcomes,
- Not eating anything that has a mother (Mr. Rogers),
- Many cancelled conferences,
- Deadly Lassa fever viral outbreak in Nigeria,
- The ethics of geo-engineering,
- A socioeconomic portrait of Black Canadians,
- A new book by Ziya Tong "The Reality Bubble", and
- Cancelled post-secondary education.

Read on...Best, david

David Zakus, Editor and Publisher



**Getting Ready For Spring
Woodpecker Pecking**

Humphrey, Seguin, Ontario - March 17, 2020

CORONAVIRUS COVID-19 UPDATES

Do Us A Favor



Credit: Youtube

“Do me a favor, speed it up, speed it up.” This is what U.S. President Donald Trump told the National Association of Counties Legislative Conference, recounting what he said to pharmaceutical executives about the progress towards a vaccine for severe acute respiratory syndrome–coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), the virus that causes coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Anthony Fauci, the long-time leader of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, has been telling the president repeatedly that developing the vaccine will take at least a year and a half—the same message conveyed by pharmaceutical executives. Apparently, Trump thought that simply repeating his request would change the outcome. China has rightfully taken criticism for squelching attempts by scientists to report information during the outbreak. Now, the United States government is doing similar things. Maybe we should be happy. Three years ago, the president declared his skepticism of vaccines and tried to launch an antivaccine task force. Now he suddenly loves vaccines. But do us a favor, Mr. President. If you want something, start treating science and its principles with respect. [Read More at ScienceMag](#)

See Also:

[Coronavirus Will Change The World. It Might Also Lead To A Better Future](#)

[Social Distancing Could Buy Valuable Time Against Coronavirus](#)

[How The Coronavirus Can Kill People](#)

[Secret U.S. Intel Report: America Unprepared For Global Pandemic](#)

Half Of World's Sandy Beaches At Risk From Climate Change



Credit: United States Climate Beaches

Scientists say that half of the world's sandy beaches could disappear by the end of the century if climate change continues unchecked. Researchers at the European Union's Joint Research Center in Ispra, Italy, used satellite images to track the way beaches have changed over the past 30 years and simulated how global warming might affect them in the future. The study, published in the journal *Nature Climate Change*, found that the extent to which beaches are at risk depends on how much average global temperatures increase by the year 2100. Greater temperature increases mean more sea level rise and more violent storms in some regions, causing more beaches to vanish beneath the waves. The study's authors calculated that up to 40% of shoreline retreat could be prevented by reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that are driving climate change, but said that large and growing populations living along the coast will also need to be protected through other measures. [Read More at tconnect](#)

Warm Winter Means No Icewine Produced In Germany This Year



Credit: Eckehard Schulz—AP

Germany isn't known for icewine, but the country's vineyards do manage a small, but lucrative crop most years. However, The German Wine Institute says the country won't produce any ice wine this year at all, for the first time in years, although it's not clear how far back records go. Icewine is made from grapes that have been left to freeze on the vine in very specific conditions, including a period of three days of low temperatures of around -7°C -- which didn't materialize this year. Icewine is a niche product in Germany, accounting for less than one tenth of one per cent of production, but its low supply makes it expensive, and therefore lucrative for producers. Canada is famously the world's largest producer of icewine, particularly the Niagara Region of Ontario, but growers here have run into difficulties as well. With climate change continuing apace, the temperature sweet spot that icewine relies on is becoming less common, with some years faring worse than others. That's forcing producers to find ways to adapt, but the future of the industry in Canada is uncertain. [Read More at The Weather Network](#)

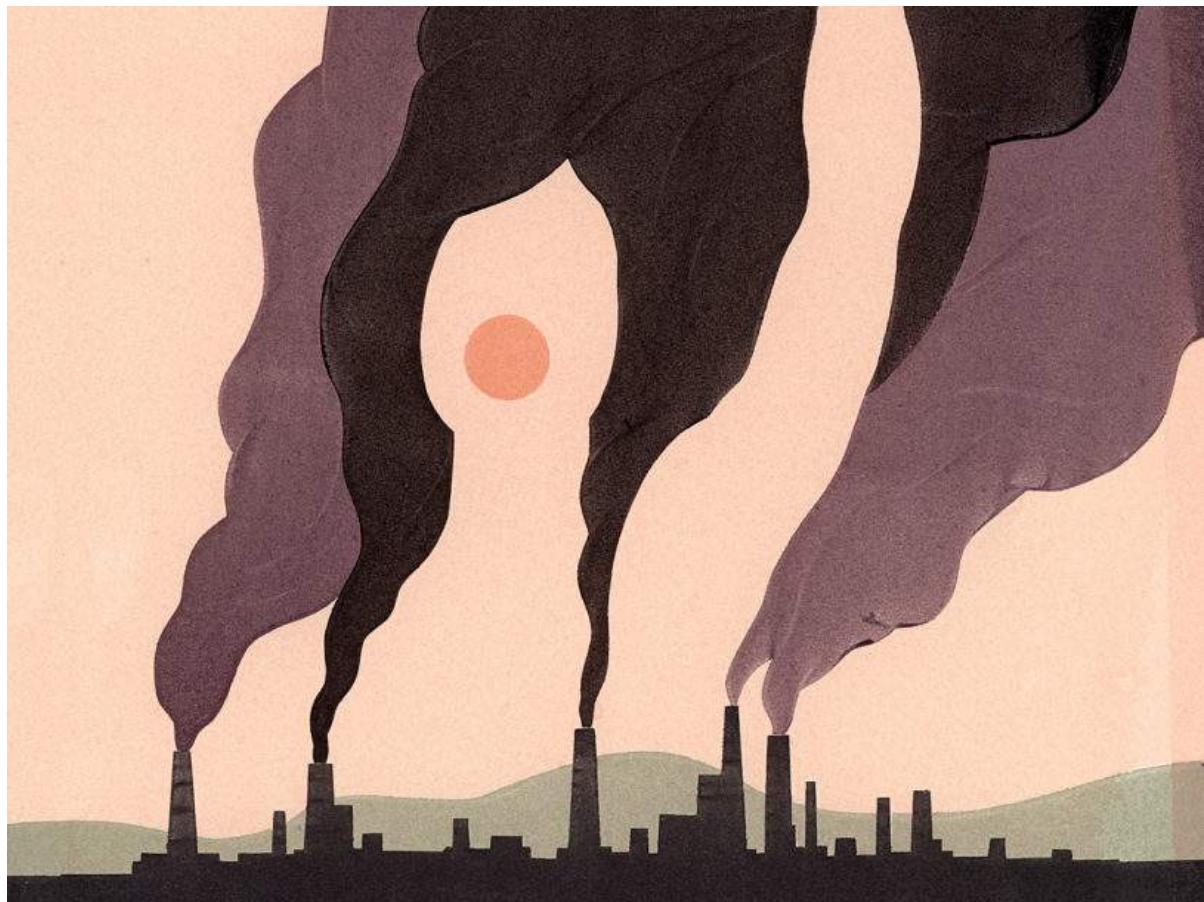
Human Transport Of Thirdhand Tobacco Smoke: A Prominent Source Of Hazardous Air Pollutants Into Indoor Nonsmoking Environments



Credit: Getty Images

The contamination of indoor nonsmoking environments with thirdhand smoke (THS) is an important, poorly understood public health concern. Real-time THS off-gassing from smokers into a nonsmoking movie theater was observed with online and offline high-resolution mass spectrometry. Prominent emission events of THS tracers (e.g., 2,5-dimethylfuran, 2-methylfuran, and acetonitrile) and other tobacco-related volatile organic compounds (VOCs) coincided with the arrival of certain moviegoers and left residual contamination. These VOC emission events exposed occupants to the equivalent of 1 to 10 cigarettes of secondhand smoke, including multiple hazardous air pollutants (e.g., benzene and formaldehyde). Nicotine and related intermediate-volatility nitrogen-containing compounds, which vaporized from clothes/bodies and recondensed onto aerosol, comprised 34% of observed functionalized organic aerosol abundance. Exposure to THS VOC emission events will be considerably enhanced in poorly ventilated or smaller spaces in contrast with a large, well-ventilated theatre—amplifying concentrations and potential impacts on health and indoor chemistry. [Read More at ScienceMag](#)

Women Fighting Climate Change Are Targets For Misogynists

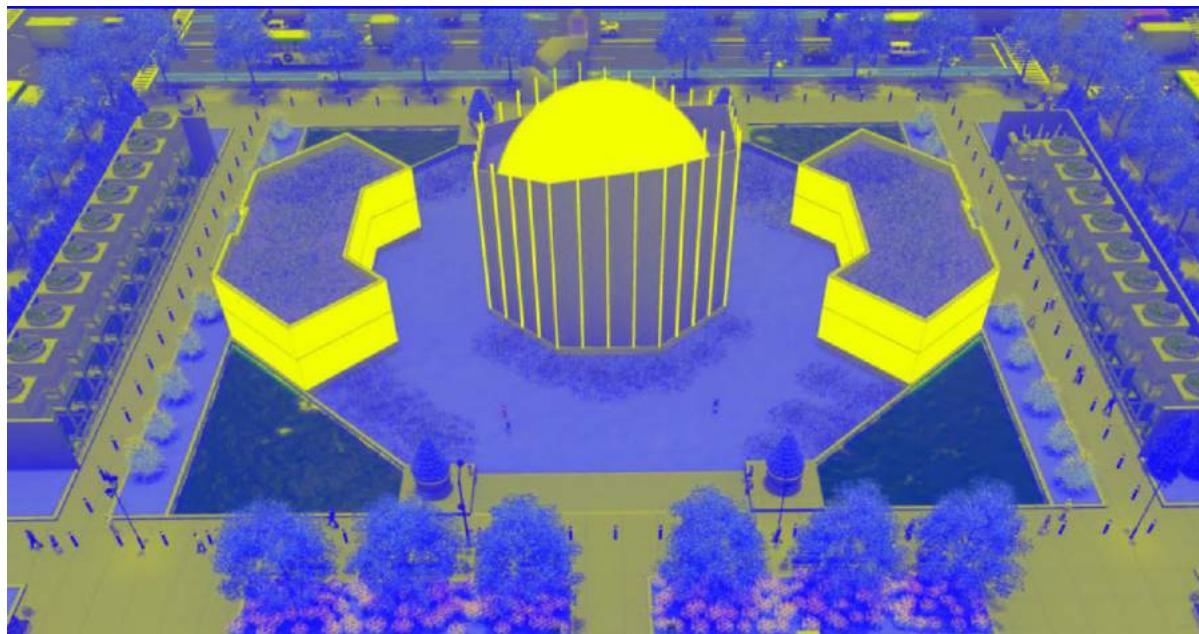


Credit: Alex Nabaum c/o THEISPORT

Rude jokes, hate mail and violent threats—for climate experts, it's all part of the job. That's especially true for the women. Just months after the Alberta NDP's surprise 2015 election win, Shannon Phillips, the province's new environment minister, travelled to Paris for what would turn out to be a historic round of global climate change negotiations. The intensity of the hate endured by women working on climate issues is partially due to the overall tenor of the conversation—deeply divisive, freighted with highly technical terminology and thrown off course for decades by ferocious and well-funded efforts to obscure the basic scientific facts of the crisis. Men working on climate change action, whether as politicians, scientists or activists, also become objects of hate.

In the meantime, there is the everyday heroism of the women engaged in the climate change battle—who are all quick to insist the duty to act and the opportunity to carve out an even larger space for female leadership balances out the abuse. "Change is worth it," says Phillips. "And from my perspective of being a partisan politician, being the boss is worth it." [Read More at Chatelaine](#)

Here's How To Build Your Own Nuclear Power Plant



Credit:Open100

A new site claims to offer a guide to building an entire nuclear power plant, from the reactor vessels to the Homer Simpson-esque control panels. "We only just launched and in the last two weeks we've been flooded with inbound interest from individual engineers, industrial partners, and even international developers," said Bret Kugelmass, managing director of the nonprofit Energy Impact Center, which created the open source designs in a new interview with *Digital Trends*. The goal, Kugelmass told *Digital Trends*, is to provide startups, engineering firms, and other stakeholders a cache of resources to develop new energy resources, with a goal of decarbonizing the global economy by 2040. Advocates say new developments would make new plants much safer, and Kugelmass told *Digital Trends* that the effort has already been met with an outpouring of interest. He also praised "attention we've been receiving from National Laboratories around the world, who are eager to build upon the precedent of the early U.S. nuclear industry when scientific institutions aided private industry in a rapid scale-up of nuclear energy." [Read More at Futurism](#)

GOOD NEWS

WHO Congratulates Sri Lanka For Eliminating Mother-To-Child Transmission Of HIV & Syphilis



Credit: WHO Sri Lanka/Dhanush de Costa

The World Health Organization has congratulated Sri Lanka for achieving elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV and congenital syphilis (EMTCT). "Sri Lanka's achievement once again demonstrates the country's commitment to public health and builds on the strong foundation of primary health care services that it laid several decades ago," said Dr. Poonam Khetrapal Singh, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia. The country has not reported any case of mother-to-child transmission of HIV since 2017 and its congenital syphilis cases has consistently been two per 100,000 live births, much less than fifty per 100,000 live births needed for elimination certification, as per the findings of the Global Validation Advisory Committee. "I would like to particularly commend the health workers for their persistent efforts which have hugely contributed to Sri Lanka achieving EMTCT," the Regional Director said.

Elimination of mother-to-child transmission is the latest in a series of public health achievements by Sri Lanka which includes its victory over polio, elimination of maternal and neonatal tetanus, malaria elimination, measles elimination and rubella control, and elimination of lymphatic filariasis. The country also leads in novel initiatives for addressing non-communicable diseases and promoting mental health. [Read More at WHO South-East Asia](#)

MORE GOOD NEWS

How Ghana's Independence Day Inspired Martin Luther King Jr



Credit: Reuters

Ghana's imminent independence from British colonialism on March 6, 1957 was not only watched closely by other colonized Africans, but by the leaders of the civil rights movement in the United States. Kwame Nkrumah, then prime minister of the Gold Coast (as the colony was known), was intent on making a political point along with the pomp and circumstance of new statehood. While the U.S. government was invited (represented by vice president Richard Nixon), so were leaders of the civil rights movement including Martin Luther King. In his letter inviting King to Accra, Nkrumah wrote: "It would give me great personal pleasure if you should be able to attend." It was important for Nkrumah to have a figure like King attend the independence celebrations because his vision of pan-Africanism extended beyond continental Africa. King reflected on the symbolism of Nkrumah dancing with the Duchess of Kent, who was representing the Queen, at a ball to celebrate independence. "The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community...Ghana teaches us that you can break loose from evil through nonviolence, through a lack of bitterness." Ghana's story also taught King that there is a price to be paid during the quest for freedom. King recalled seeing Nkrumah and his ministers wearing their prison clothes to the last session of the colonial parliament. [Read More at Quartz](#)

OPINION

Can Ancient Grains Save The Planet From Climate-Induced Starvation?



Credit: EDUARDO SOTERAS/AFP VIA GETTY

Sixty miles from Reno, Nevada, surrounded by arid desert land, is Fallon. Historically, farmers here have grown alfalfa. In recent years, besieged by drought, farmers have had to choose whether to plant or not. Now, John Cushman and his research team from the Nevada Agricultural Experiment Station at the University of Nevada, Reno are monitoring approximately 1,200 acres of an ancient grain that originated in Ethiopia called teff (and is still widely used there as a staple). It needs a quarter of the water that alfalfa takes, and has a shorter growing season. "Ancient grains bring diversity, higher nutritional quality, high tolerance to climate change," says Dr. Sven-Erik Jacobsen, the former project coordinator of Protein2Food and a researcher on tropical crops at the University of Copenhagen. [Read More at OZY](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY

New Food Labelling Law Approved By Mexican Government, Opposed By Industry



Credit: Shutterstock

Mexico approved a new warning labelling regulation for food and beverages in January, but industry groups have appealed against it.

After a 2019 reform of the General Health Law and after an open consultation with all sectors, the Mexican regulatory agencies approved modifications to the Mexican Norm NOM-051, the relevant official mandatory standard, for an ambitious front of package (FOP) warning labelling of foods and beverages. This new regulation would replace the current Guideline Daily Amount (GDA) labels in the country, which civil society argue were developed with the support of industry groups back in 2014. The new FOP warning labelling system is modelled following the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) nutrient profile, and the successful warning labelling that Chile adopted in 2015. The Chilean system has obtained worldwide recognition as a powerful policy to alert consumers on products' sugar, fat, sodium and calories levels. After the NOM-051 modifications were approved, the government needed to publish them in the official gazette to start the implementation process, however industry groups appealed against it claiming it didn't consider private sector voices nor the latest scientific evidence. [Read More at NCD Alliance](#)

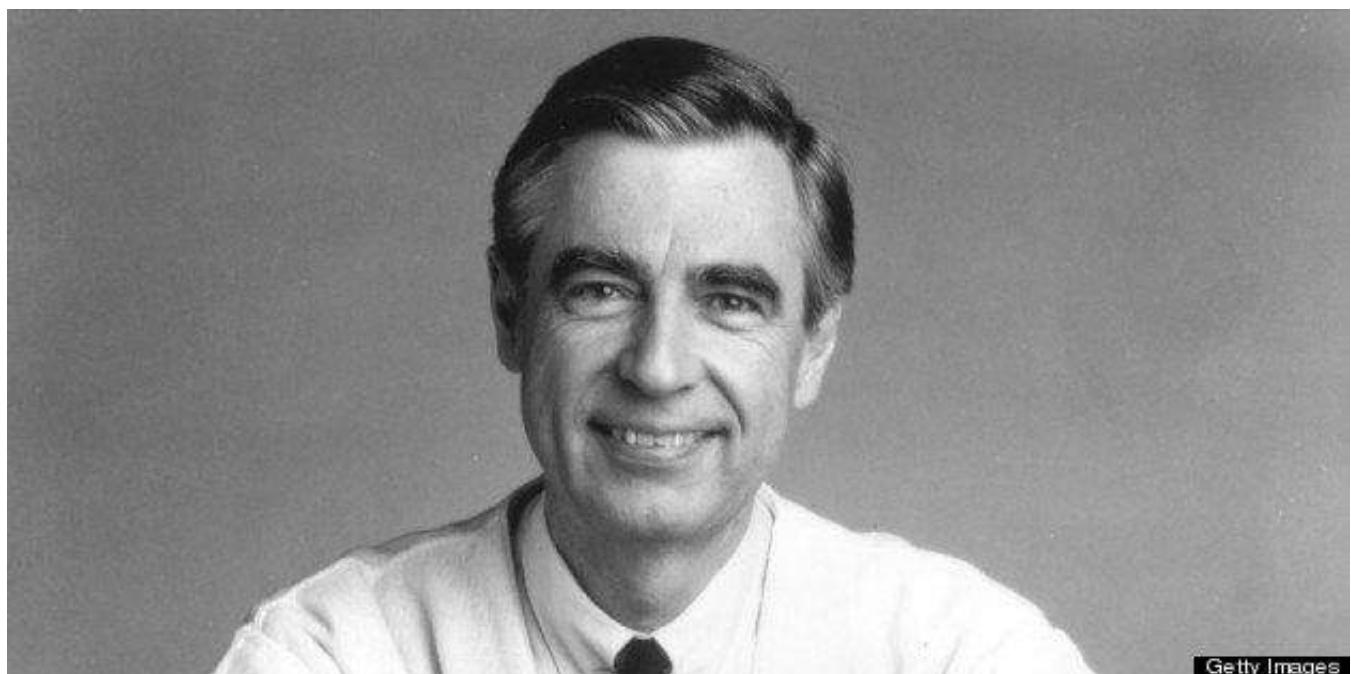
SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS WELLNESS

**UBC & First Nations Health Authority
Teaming Up To Improve Cancer
Outcomes**



Credit: APTN file

The University of British Columbia (UBC) and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) are teaming up to try and improve the outcome for First Nations cancer victims. According to a report by the FNHA, First Nation, Métis and Inuit are less likely to survive a cancer diagnosis than non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. The study showed that cancers such as colorectal and cervical are significantly higher among First Nations in B.C. UBC and FNHA will spend \$3-million over the next five years will examine experiences and outcomes of Indigenous cancer patients to see how the health system is responding to their needs. [Read More at APTN News](#)



Quote Of The Week

“I don't want to eat anything that has a mother.”

Fred Rogers (1928-2003), star children's host of “Mr. Rogers' Neighbourhood” TV show and subject of the 2019 award winning movie “A Beautiful Day in the Neighbourhood”

With this concern in mind, Rogers steadfastly refused to show images of people eating animals on *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*. Although a 1982 episode includes footage from a full-service restaurant, there's not one image of meat, fowl or fish. And an entire 1984 series on food avoids any mention of eating animals.

In the “Neighborhood,” animals are for enjoying, nurturing and loving—not for chewing, swallowing and digesting.

Rogers was one of the rare Christian ministers at this point who believed that treating animals nonviolently and embracing a vegetarian lifestyle are deeply spiritual practices that bear witness to God's love for animals.

“I want to be a vehicle for God, to spread his message of love and peace,” Rogers stated when explaining his vegetarianism in 1983.

For more See: [What Would Mister Rogers Eat? Thanksgiving in the Neighborhood](#)

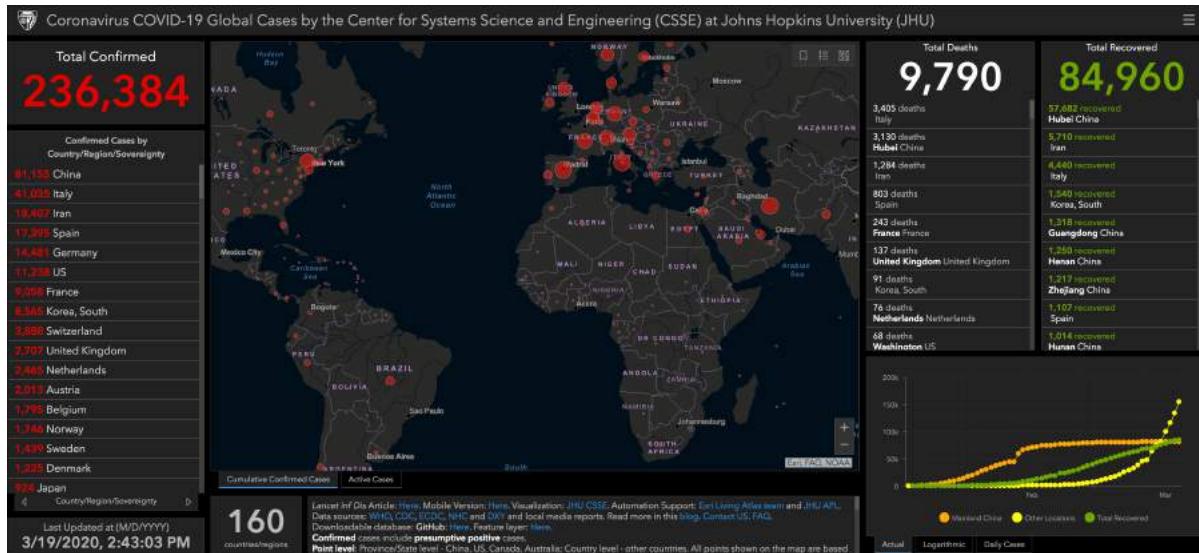
Upcoming Events

- March 21st - 24th: [Oxfam Summit And Day Of Action](#) (Ottawa, Canada)
- March 25: [Health In A Changing Climate - Department of Family and Community Medicine, UToronto](#) (Toronto, Canada) - Cancelled

- 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

Coronavirus COVID-19 Global Cases by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore



Credit: Screenshot

Johns Hopkins University experts in global public health, infectious disease and emergency preparedness have been at the forefront of the international response to COVID-19. This website is a continually updated resource to help advance the understanding of the virus, inform the public, and brief policymakers in order to guide a response, improve care and save lives.

As the media swarms the coronavirus story, most news articles focus on numbers of cases and deaths, new locations of cases, etc. Lost in the shuffle are the important public health insights about how viruses work and humans respond. To help improve understanding of an emerging outbreak's complex dynamics, they have reached out to some of the world's most respected global health experts for their quick "reality checks" on key issues related to the outbreak and present them as well.

Read More at CSSE/Johns Hopkins University

FYI #2

Coronavirus Less Deadly Than Nigeria's Lassa Fever Viral Outbreak



Credit: REUTERS/SIMON AKAM

The detection of Covid-19 coronavirus in Nigeria raised early concerns about the country's capacity to handle a major epidemic but so far local public health officials have been commended for handling the outbreak with aplomb. But the coronavirus is not the only viral outbreak in Africa's most populous country. Nigeria is currently dealing with what is turning out to be the **world's largest epidemic of Lassa fever**, a viral disease deadlier than coronavirus.

Lassa fever is a severe viral hemorrhagic fever (VHF) like Ebola and Marburg that occurs throughout the year in Nigeria and was declared an "active outbreak" by the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) five weeks into 2020. The epidemic which occurs during the annual dry season (roughly November through March) has spread across half the country. "The international health agency and media deserve to give more attention to coronavirus considering its propensity for a pandemic," says Dr. Adewumi. "LFV is our local problem in this part of the continent, hence, it is our responsibility to ensure the epidemic is controlled," he said.

Read more at Quartz Africa

FYI #3

Even If Geoengineering Can Help Mitigate Climate Change, Is It Ethical?



Credit: Sködt McNalty/CBC

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and scientists from around the world have said it time and again: CO₂ emissions need to be radically reduced in order to stop the world from warming to a point where it will trigger catastrophic climate change. But radical reductions aren't in place right now, which is why some scientists and policymakers are considering a **controversial option: geoengineering, or the deliberate manipulation of the environment**. One of the more popular methods of geoengineering is solar radiation management (SRM). In this method, particles of sulphur dioxide or calcium carbonate are sprayed into the stratosphere, which makes solar radiation "bounce" off clouds back into space, creating a cooling effect. It's the same process that happens after a large volcanic eruption.

David Keith, a Canadian professor of applied physics at Harvard University, disputes the findings that state SRM will increase precipitation. "We had a big paper that was very well reported last year in [the journal] *Nature Climate Change* that contradicts that assumption," he said. There is clearly still dispute over the effects of geoengineering, but given the potential differences in outcome, it's unlikely every country in the world will agree on the specifics of SRM. So what happens when one country says it doesn't support it? How ethical would it be for another country to simply proceed? There are

"big philosophical questions here," said Emily Cox at Cardiff University, U.K.. As a result, "there's a real danger of polarization."

[Read more at CBC](#)

FYI #4

A Socioeconomic Portrait Of Canada's Black Population



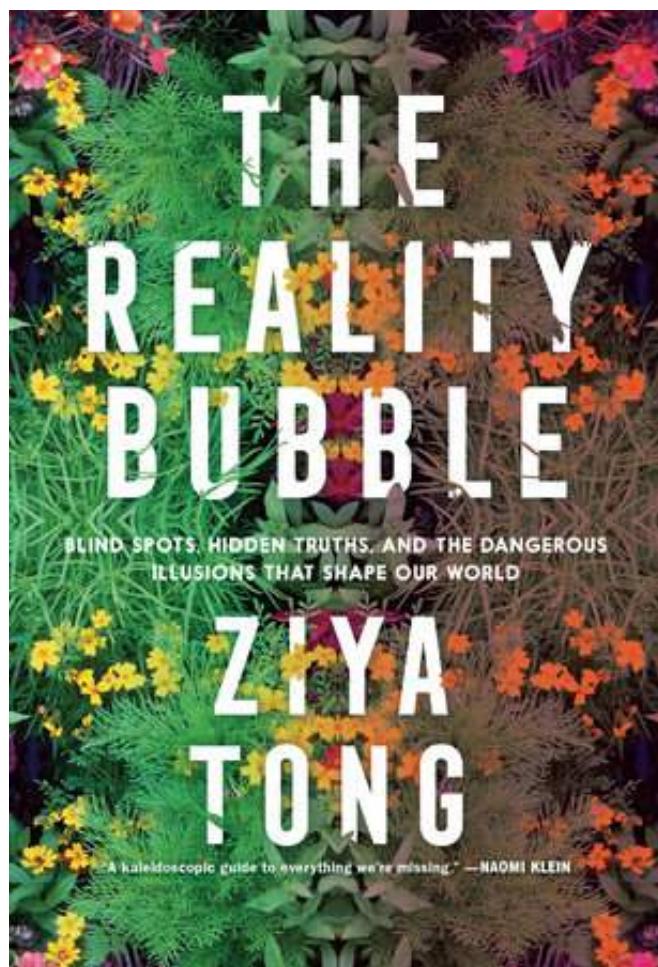
[Credit: Getty Images](#)

In Canada, the Black population is young, diverse and growing. In 2016, almost 1.2 million Black people lived in Canada, and more than 4 in 10 were born in the country. Given the challenges faced by many Black Canadians, examining the socioeconomic outcomes of this population is important. In conjunction with the United Nations' International Decade for People of African Descent and Black History Month, Statistics Canada has released two articles that shed light on the educational and labour market outcomes of Canada's Black population.

Read more at The Daily

FYI #5: FINAL WINTER READING: NEW BOOK

"The Reality Bubble: Blind Spots, Hidden Truths, And The Dangerous Illusions That Shape Our World"



Credit: Ziga Tong

From one of the world's most engaging science journalists, a groundbreaking and wonder-filled look at the hidden things that shape our lives in unexpected and sometimes dangerous ways. Our naked eyes see only a thin sliver of reality. We are

blind in comparison to the X-rays that peer through skin, the mass spectrometers that detect the dead inside the living, or the high-tech surveillance systems that see with artificial intelligence. And we are blind compared to the animals that can see in infrared, or ultraviolet, or in 360-degree vision. These animals live in the same world we do, but they see something quite different when they look around.

Read more at Penguin Random House Canada

FYI#6: SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

Colleges And Universities Cancel Classes And Move Online Amid Coronavirus Fears



Credit: Katherine Taylor for The New York Times

With hundreds of thousands of cases and more than six thousand deaths around the

world, officials are trying to limit its spread in the post secondary education sector and closing their university campuses.

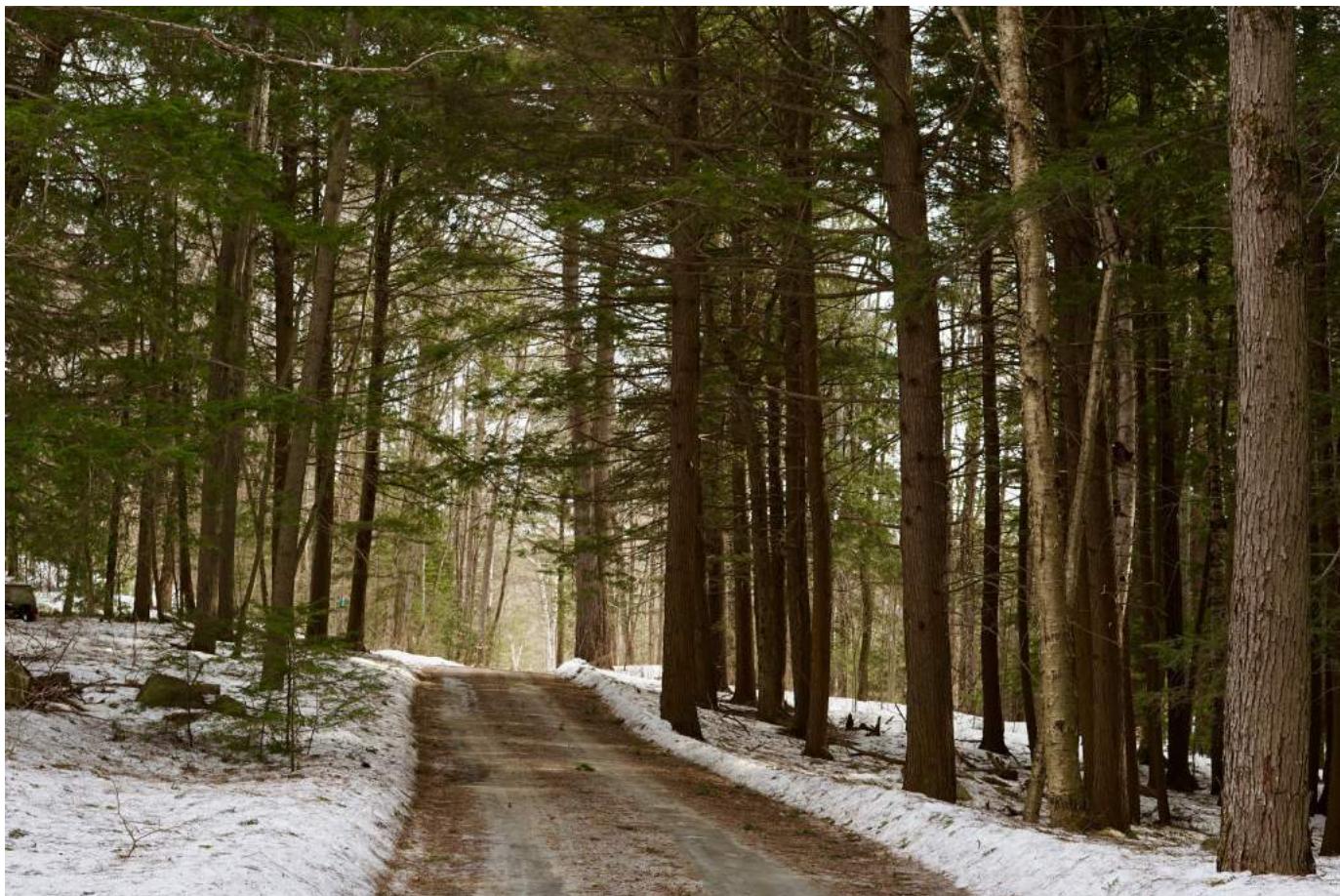
Isabella Kwasnik, a senior at Harvard College, spent part of Tuesday engrossed in a typical form of college stress: sitting for a midterm exam. But there was something else pressing on her mind. She had just learned she would have to soon leave campus — perhaps for good. “You spend four years at a university, and you work incredibly hard and expect that at the end you can tie a bow on it and wrap it up,” Ms. Kwasnik, 21, said, as students across campus fretted about logistics, fumed over what they saw as a chaotic evacuation and even threw one last party. “But there’s this unexpected outcome,” she said. “It’s just a logistical and emotional nightmare.” But colleges seemed to be leading the way in the national experiment with remote learning, with many schools set to start virtual instruction after spring break, lasting at least through the end of March. That raised a number of questions — from housing and finances to international visas, and even meals for low-income students who rely on them, as well as access to computers and broadband.

[Read more at The New York Times](#)

END SHOTS

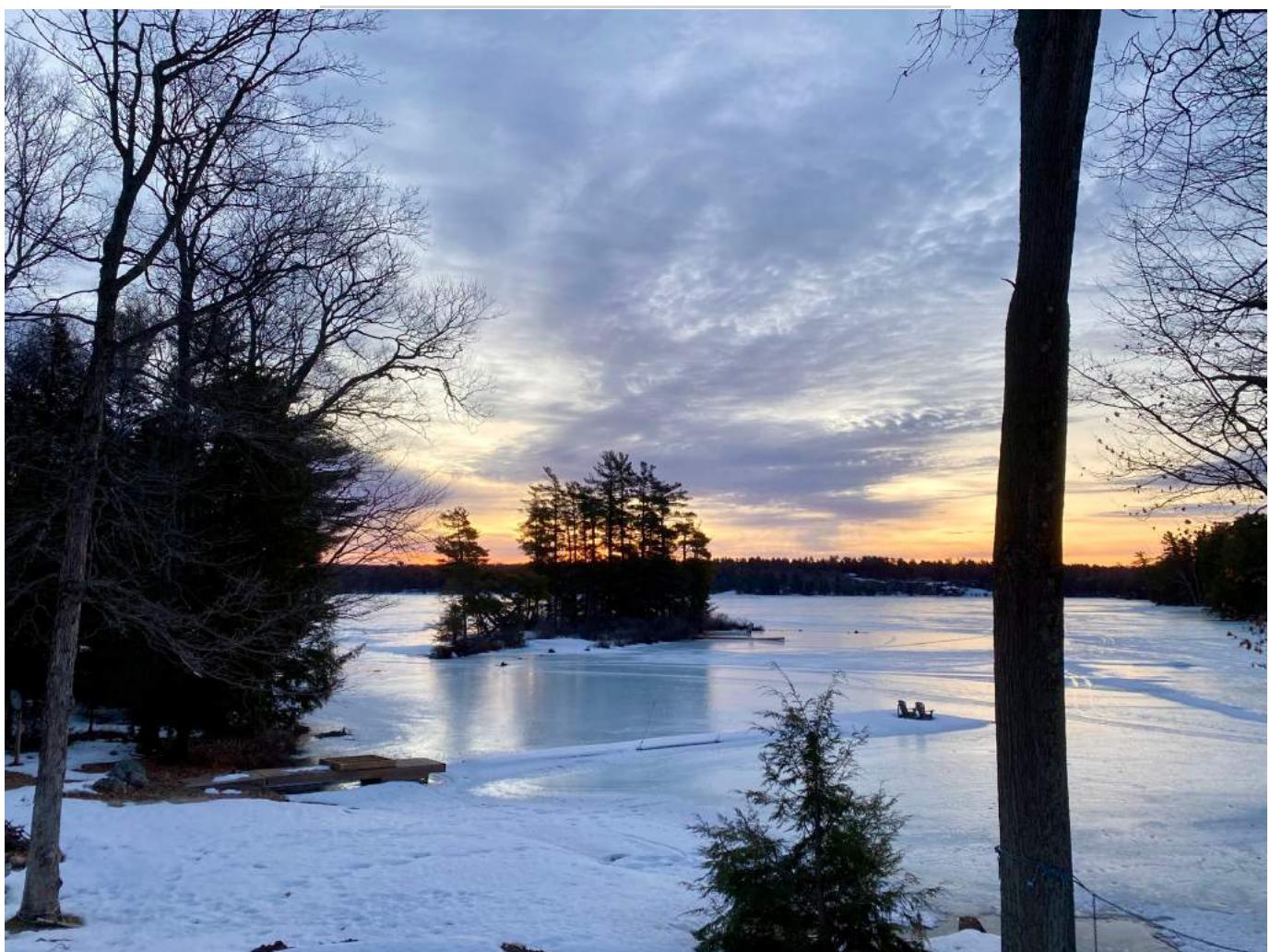
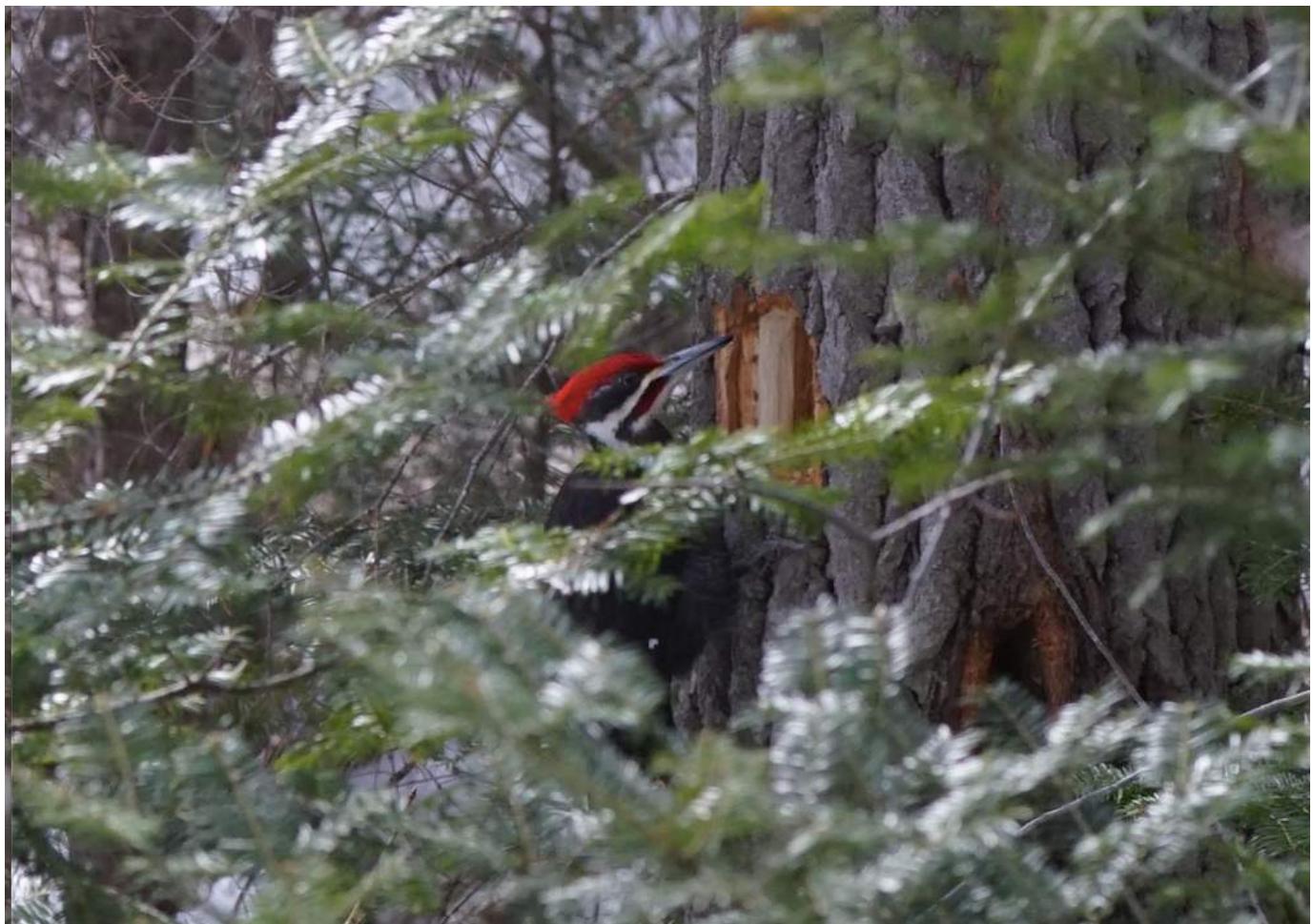
AROUND WHITEFISH LAKE, ONTARIO

MARCH 17, 2020









Sunrise!



Credits: David Zakus



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