

PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY



CURRENT NEWS ON ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS AND GLOBAL HEALTH

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April 2, 2020

Hi,

I can hardly think beyond one thing now, and for sure you know what it is. The pandemic is everywhere, not just all nations, but in every community, in every mind. And in just the last 24 hours about 100,000 new cases worldwide, a 10% increase in just one day, giving a cruel total of one million. And how about the USA with now a quarter million cases and New York City with 4300 new ones this last day alone? Everyday is a knew record there and here in Canada. What to do? How to carry on? This is getting worse daily and I'll likely being saying the same next week. I'm lucky in my situation with no other big impending issues to worry about, unlike millions in Canada and around the world suffering from this new disease and/or unemployment, the compounding of already existing poverty, lack of food, home schooling, doubts, fear of the unknown. I know that from having worked in global health all my career that this pandemic is a supremely important and defining issue, on many levels. But, while I was always one to say 'just wait, be aware' (especially after having some direct experience with SARS in Toronto in 1993), another will surely come. Now a big one is here, though it's not even the nastiest of viruses, but incredibly nasty enough. It now seems clear that this will just keep getting worse and won't be going away for at least a few months, if ever. How long can we last in this slow down, this stay at home, this lock down before even more emergencies strike? And what about our brothers and sisters in poorer countries, who are on their way to the disaster we now have? I am really beginning to worry.

And who can believe it's already April...where did the winter go? Not that I'm complaining, and I did get out cross-country skiing a few times, but now we are into the time when the sun is to be shining warmer and longer, and we look to have our

sleepy winter spirits raised. Somehow, though, I can't yet feel the usual exuberance of past years. So, while social distancing to a strict two metre minimum, I now take good long walks around my neighbourhood, to feel the sun, the mild warmth and look for first signs of Spring to share with you (see End Shots).

Sharing too today's **Planetary Health Weekly** (#14 of 2020) with several novel COVID-19 updates, as well as other interesting stories of global health and environmental importance, including:

- Coronavirus exposing the limits of populism, Telling what Indigenous Peoples have known for ages, At the EPA business as usual on hold, Great apes too being threatened, and Lessons from astronauts for surviving C-19 isolation,
- Nigerian's population boom,
- How a small nuclear war could trigger an apocalypse,
- Unfair trade and tax evasion by Dutch rose growers in Kenya,
- Jeff Bezos commits \$10 billion to the earth, but taxes?
- A six hectare fruit glasshouse in the UK,
- Planting trees is important and helpful,
- Fighting female genital mutilation with a new cost calculator,
- Robots easing caregivers' loads,
- No to biomass to enable a post-coal Europe,
- Online threats and racism against Indigenous women,
- A quote from successful South Korea,
- Chris Hadfield's short video guide to self-isolation,
- Changing adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights,
- How long could we last with geothermal power?
- Fine dining chefs fight climate change,
- A new book on death and dying by Kathryn Mannix, and
- Educating kids at home.

Do take a look. Keeping my distance...Best, david

David Zakus, Editor and Publisher



'RED' ROBIN RETURNS

Toronto, Ontario

NOVEL CORONAVIRUS & COVID-19 UPDATES

The Coronavirus Is Exposing The Limits Of Populism



The coronavirus, which causes the disease now called COVID-19, may be another once-in-a-century event. If some of the gloomier projections of COVID-19 play out, the world will face one of its worst peacetime crises of modern times. Unfortunately, this crisis occurs in a dark political climate, more similar to that of the early '30s, when many governments pursued nationalist, beggar-thy-neighbor policies and international cooperation was very limited. Over the past decade, the world has grown more authoritarian, nationalistic, xenophobic, unilateralist, anti-establishment and anti-expertise. The current state of politics and geopolitics has exacerbated, not stabilized, the crisis.

Wuhan officials' failure to acknowledge the scale of the problem early on, and their suppression of medical personnel, meant that valuable time to contain the virus was lost. China is not alone in its initial missteps. President Donald Trump, a self-acknowledged germophobe, sees the outbreak through the prism of the stock market and his own reelection. Other governments are struggling too. Japan failed to deal with the rapid spread of the virus on board the Diamond Princess cruise ship. In addition, information and disinformation flow freely on social media, promoting panic-buying and herd behaviour.

COVID-19 is becoming the third major crisis of the post-Cold War period, following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the financial collapse of 2008. This crisis may exact a greater toll than the other two and has demonstrated the limits of populism as a method of government. Expertise matters. Institutions matter. There is such a thing as the global community. An enlightened response, even if it's unpopular, matters. The system must be made to work again. [Read More at Brookings](#)

See More:

At the National Observer: [COVID-19 Crisis Tells World What At the National Observer: Indigenous Peoples Have Been Saying For Thousands Of Years](#)

At the New York Times: [Coronavirus Doesn't Slow Trump's Regulatory Rollbacks](#)

At the Washington Post: [Coronavirus Could Threaten Endangered Great Apes](#)

At Futurism: [Surviving Isolation: A Lesson From 5 Astronauts](#)

"Covid-19 is the greatest test that we have faced together since the formation of the United Nations," said António Guterres, the secretary general of the United Nations, on April 1.

The 77 Percent – The Need To Tackle

Nigeria's Population Boom



© Reuters/A. Sotunde

Credit: Reuters/A. Sotunde

Family planning, an issue that calls for discussion in countries with booming populations, is considered a taboo in many. DW Africa's The 77 Percent took the subject to the streets of Kano in the north of Nigeria. Africa is currently experiencing a population explosion. Over the next 30 years, the number of people on the continent is expected to double from 1.2 billion to 2.5 billion. Nigeria, which is currently Africa's most populous country, will then have 400 million inhabitants, and become the third most populous in the world.

Too many children: On average, a Nigerian woman gives birth to 5.5 children. In the conservative, Muslim-majority north, the number goes up to eight children. Experts see many reasons why the population boom in Nigeria is going unchecked. But a lack of political will and poor policy implementation are uppermost on the list.

A change of mindset needed. The future of the youth in Nigeria's north is under threat as they are exposed to high and rising levels of unemployment and a struggle for resources. Many are already part of the rural exodus to megacities, risking their lives on the treacherous journey to Europe or being recruited by the Islamic extremist group, Boko Haram. [Read More at DW \(German Radio\) Africa](#)

Even A Small Nuclear War Could Trigger A Global Apocalypse



Credit: GETTY IMAGES

Alan Robock, a climate researcher at Rutgers who's been studying nukes for three decades, and a few colleagues have, for years, been running the numbers on what scientists in the 1980s called "nuclear winter," the idea that multiple nuclear detonations would send enough dust, soot and smoke into the atmosphere to literally block out the sun. In 2007 Robock's group tried to do the math. They approximated India and Pakistan's arsenals at the time and imagined a war involving 100 Hiroshima-sized nuclear bombs—15 kilotons—over cities. But now Robock's back, and his news is not good. India and Pakistan, he says, "have more weapons and they're more powerful. "They can't tell us what their targets are. That's secret. But we want to build a tool so they can put in the targets and calculate the climate response," Robock says. "They're obligated not to kill civilians, but right now they don't have any way of knowing." [Read More at Wired](#)

Unfair Trade: How Dutch Rose Growers Avoid Paying Taxes in Kenya



Credit: Farmlandgrab

Dutch growers who dominate the flower sector in Kenya were already in the news because of environmental violations and poor employment conditions. Now, as investigative journalists Romy van der Burgh and Linda van der Pol found out, they are also being accused of avoiding taxation in Kenya while proudly wearing the "fair trade" badge. "Fair trade – that is an oxymoron," says Alvin Mosioma, director of Tax Justice Network Africa. "There is nothing fair about this trade. Not to the workers who cut the flowers, nor to the government. "Dutch flower farmers moved to Africa because of the prosperity that was promised. But in Kenya that landscape has since changed considerably; flower cultivation is also in decline there. We wrote, in accordance with the law, a letter to the Kenya Chamber of Commerce, asking for copies of the file – but the papers that the Kenyan student saw a few days before suddenly got "lost". According to the OECD, Africa misses 46 billion euros in tax revenues every year from evasive multinationals. The United Nations estimates that amount to be 92 billion euros. [Read More at The Elephant](#)

Jeff Bezos Commits \$10 Billion To New Bezos Earth Fund



Credit: AP Photo/Pablo Martinez Monsivais

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos pledged \$10 billion to fight climate change through the creation of the Bezos Earth Fund. According to a post Bezos made to Instagram, the global initiative will fund activists, scientists and NGOs in an effort “to preserve and protect the natural world.” “I want to work alongside others both to amplify known ways and to explore new ways of fighting the devastating impact of climate change on this planet” he said in his post.

The commitment comes on the heels of increasing pressure from employees unhappy with Amazon’s current contributions to climate change and who believe that Amazon itself is complicit in exacerbating the existential crisis. So how should his money be spent? Bezos could certainly put the cash towards hard infrastructure. \$10 billion would buy 10 Gemini solar farms – the largest such farm in the U.S. at 690 megawatts – or two London Array wind farms – the largest offshore project in the world and capable of powering 750,000 homes. Bezos is right in that he can’t do it alone. Hopefully, the huge donation will be more than virtue signalling, and will promote real policy and tech solutions. [Read More at Forbes](#)

See Also at The Guardian:

[Why Doesn't Jeff Bezos Pay More Tax Instead Of Launching A \\$10bn Green Fund?](#)

Agritech Promises Fruity Future For Beeswax Dyson Farming

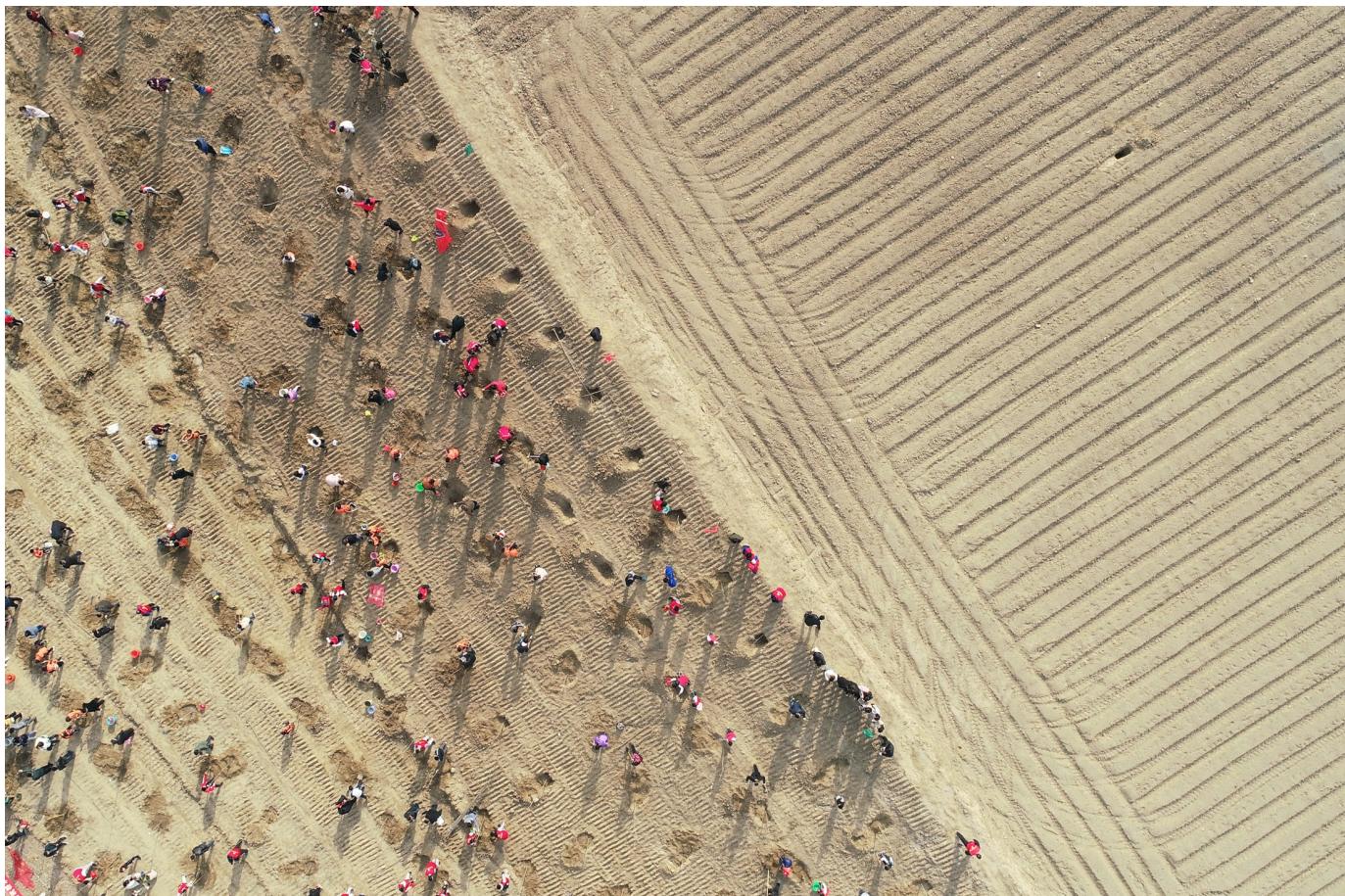


Credit: Large Scale Agriculture

Beeswax Dyson Farming has been granted permission to construct a state of the art six hectare glasshouse with associated infrastructure at their farm in Carrington, U.K. "This is a big step toward achieving our ambition for a high output, lower input farming model with technology and data at the core," say the farm. Strawberries and other soft fruit will be grown utilizing heat generated by an anaerobic digester which already provides electricity for nearly 8000 homes. This green energy source will allow the farm to grow over 600 tonnes of produce throughout the year. The site will encompass a processing facility, designed to allow the processing and packaging of other products in the future. The facility will create around 60 full time jobs covering a range of roles including management, technicians, logistics and processing. In around 12 months' time Beeswax Dyson strawberries will be available at a range of outlets across the country. [Read More at FPC Fresh Talk Daily](#)

GOOD NEWS

If Each Of Us Planted A Tree, Would It Slow Global Warming?



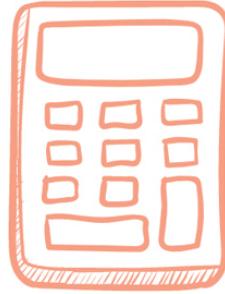
Credit: Getty Images

Humans need to produce less carbon dioxide—assuming we care a fig about our children's well-being. But even that's no longer enough. CO₂ levels in the atmosphere have reached 400 parts per million, a huge increase over historical levels of around 300 ppm. The fact is, we also need to figure out how to remove some of the CO₂ that's already out there. I really want to believe in this. What if every person on Earth took it upon themselves to plant a tree. One treetop per child. Just how much carbon dioxide could we hope to scrub out of the atmosphere? Would it help reverse climate change? Let's do the math! How about one more quick estimation. If everyone planted a tree, how much land would that require? Let's say they're planted in a square grid, five meters apart, so that each tree takes up an area of 25 square meters. With 7.5 billion trees, that requires 1.8×10^{11} square meters of land, or 72,000 square miles. That's roughly the size of North Dakota. [Read More at Wired](#)

MORE GOOD NEWS

The Economic Cost Of Female Genital Mutilation – A New Cost Calculator

Female Genital Mutilation **COST CALCULATOR**

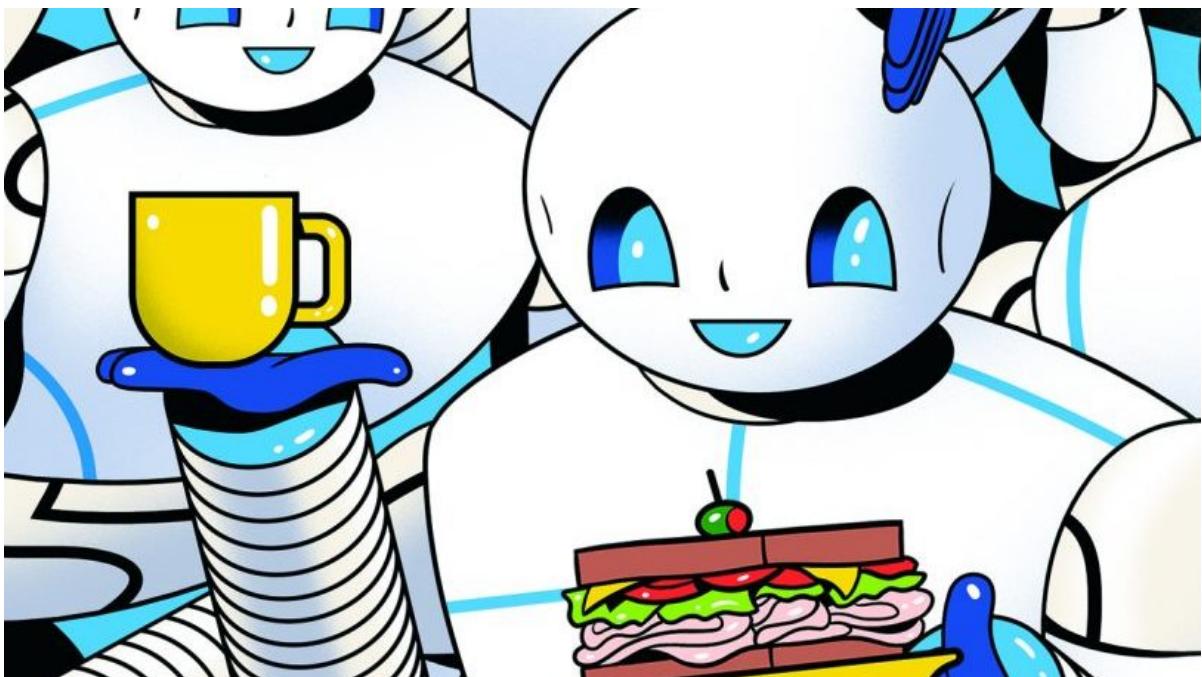


Credit: Ben Nelms/Bloomberg

An interactive data tool just launched by WHO reveals for the first time the current and future financial cost of health care for women living with conditions caused by female genital mutilation (FGM). The total costs amount to USD 1.4 billion annually. The FGM Cost Calculator was launched on this year's International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM. This new tool shows that if FGM were abandoned now the associated savings in health costs would be more than 60% by 2050. This data, available for 27 of the 30 countries where FGM is practiced, will strengthen the economic argument of community activists, policy makers, programme planners and donors working to end this human rights violation. Rates of FGM have declined over the past 30 years, but not fast enough to keep up with population growth. If trends continue, the number of girls and women undergoing FGM will rise significantly in the next 15 years, in turn raising national health care costs of caring for them. [Read More at WHO](#)

OPINION

Can Robots Ease The Caregiver Burden?



Credit: Ryan Snook

A small robot army from the University of Toronto is being test-driven in long-term care facilities throughout Toronto to fill an urgent need—to look after its elderly. But what is lost when we outsource caregiving to machines? The tech sector is poised to help—and profit from—the age of aging. A Belgium-based company called ZoraBots has sold “Zora” miniature companions to nursing homes in Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East. The robots are rising to fill a hole. Our universal healthcare model, if imperfect in execution, generally assures us that the urgent medical conditions of the elderly will be treated. All generations age, and all of us approach this narrowing of time with uncertainty. Yet we seem to be at a defining moment: Deciding how we get old—and how we take care of each other—will reveal deeper truths about our society, its fault lines and strengths. The great hope is human care that’s augmented by automation; the great fear is replacement. Will we get to choose, as Mathieson hopes, the shape of our final years? Or have we ever? [Read More at Chatelaine](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY

Post-Coal Europe Faces A Whole New Dilemma



Credit: Getty Images

Eight EU countries — almost a third of the bloc — plan to phase out coal by 2030, led by France, Italy and Ireland. In the fight against climate change, it's a major step, but it's also kind of a no-brainer, considering that 80% of the continent's coal plants are losing money. That's according to a December report from London-based think tank Sandbag. While nobody is arguing that Europe should be entirely powered by burning wood, as Europe struggles to make its renewable targets, its already huge reliance on biomass may continue to grow. And the depletion of the continent's forests — and everyone else's, eventually — isn't the only argument against wood as a solution to the coal power issue. Environmental policy groups have recommended that Europe — and indeed the world — shy away from burning wood as a replacement for coal, instead focusing on solar and wind energy. A report last year found that converting 1% of the EU's land to solar farms would be enough to supply its energy needs. [Read More at OZY](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS WELLNESS

Online Threats, Racism Causing Fear For Indigenous Women: MMIWG Commissioner



Credit: Jean-Claude Teyssier

Michele Audette feels disappointed when she looks online and sees a barrage of violent threats toward Indigenous women. "It made me so mad that we tolerate this. There's no real ... reprimand," says Audette, who was one of the commissioners for the national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Bardish Chagger, Canada's minister of diversity, inclusion and youth, has called racist taunts and threats directed at Indigenous people following recent protests horrible and ignorant. She says many Canadians are unaware of Indigenous history and rights. "But Cree laws and the laws of our lands say that we have a responsibility to act in situations of injustice and environmental devastation." Erica Violet Lee, a community organizer from Saskatoon, says the treatment of Indigenous people in Canada has always been violent.

Nickita Longman, a Saulteaux woman from George Gordon First Nation in Saskatchewan, says it has been inspiring to see Indigenous people across the country come together in protests, but it has come with alarming backlash. Her main concern is online rhetoric moving offline. "The more these comments find space on the internet, the more they embolden people to act on them in person. "As an Indigenous woman, that is by far the scariest part." [Read More at CBC](#)



Credits: SEUNG-IL RYU/GETTY IMAGES

Quotes Of The Week

“It’s not enough for Korea to do a good job. If Korea stops it but Japan doesn’t, then an infected visitor can come in from Japan. This is a global virus. We need global cooperation. Top government leaders don’t seem to get that yet.”

Dr. Min Pok-kee, head of the novel coronavirus response in the hard-hit city of Daegu, South Korea

For more see: [A South Korean Covid-19 Czar Has Some Advice for Trump](#)

Upcoming Events

- March 31 - April 2: [World Public Health Nutrition Congress 2020](#) (Brisbane, Australia) - Cancelled

- April 6th -7th, 2020: [17th World Congress on Paediatrics and Neonatology](#) (Tokyo, Japan) - Cancelled
- 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 COP26) (Glasgow, Scotland) - Postponed for one year!

FYI#1 SPOTLIGHT ON MEDIA:

An Astronaut's Guide To Self Isolation With Chris Hadfield



Credit: Youtube

Chris provides four useful steps to productive self-isolation in this two minute video:

1. Understand the actual risk. Don't just be afraid of things, go to the credible source and find out what is truly the risk that you are facing right now.
2. What are you trying to accomplish? What are your objectives and mission right now? Choose goals.
3. Look at your constraints. What are your financial resources? What are your obligations?
4. Take action! Then start doing things like taking care of family, start a new project, learn to play guitar, study another language, read a book. It is your chance to do something different

Then Repeat!

[Watch at Youtube](#)

FYI #2

The Changing World Of Adolescent Sexual And Reproductive Health And Rights



Credit: UNICEF/Kiron

The world in which adolescents live has changed dramatically in the last 25 years and the response to their sexual and reproductive health and rights has evolved in important ways. A new supplement in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* celebrates gains, confronts barriers, and identifies key areas of action for countries and key stakeholders to build on progress in the critical decade ahead. The four published articles were developed by technical teams at WHO and UNFPA, along with governments, academia, civil society and funding organizations. They were co-authored by young people from six regions around the world. In spite of greater awareness of the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents, some key issues have not improved. There is still a lack of good data on levels of unsafe abortion among adolescents, and the risk of mortality and morbidity resulting from it. Looking forward, the supplement lays out specific considerations for delivering a comprehensive package of sexual and reproductive health interventions to adolescents.

Read More at WHO

FYI #3

How Long Could The World Run On Geothermal Power?



Credit: MARTIN ZWICK/GETTY IMAGES

Of all the different ways of generating electricity or getting things (like cars) to do work, which of them *don't* use energy from the sun? Fossil fuels? Nope. Wind energy? Well, where does wind come from? Hydroelectric? This uses a decrease in gravitational potential energy as water moves down a river to turn a turbine. That leaves just two major energy technologies, nuclear and geothermal, that aren't beholden to the sun. Now for geothermal. Maybe this is the best power source we have—it uses the thermal energy from the interior of the Earth to create electrical energy. This is great news. Even with low-end estimates, we should be able to get 17 *billion* years of free power—without any carbon dioxide emissions or nuclear waste.

That's longer than the sun will survive. I, for one, look forward to our geothermal-powered overlords.

[Read More at Wired](#)

FYI #4

Fine Dining Has A Horrible Carbon Footprint. These Chefs Are Fighting Against It



Credit: Cartoon

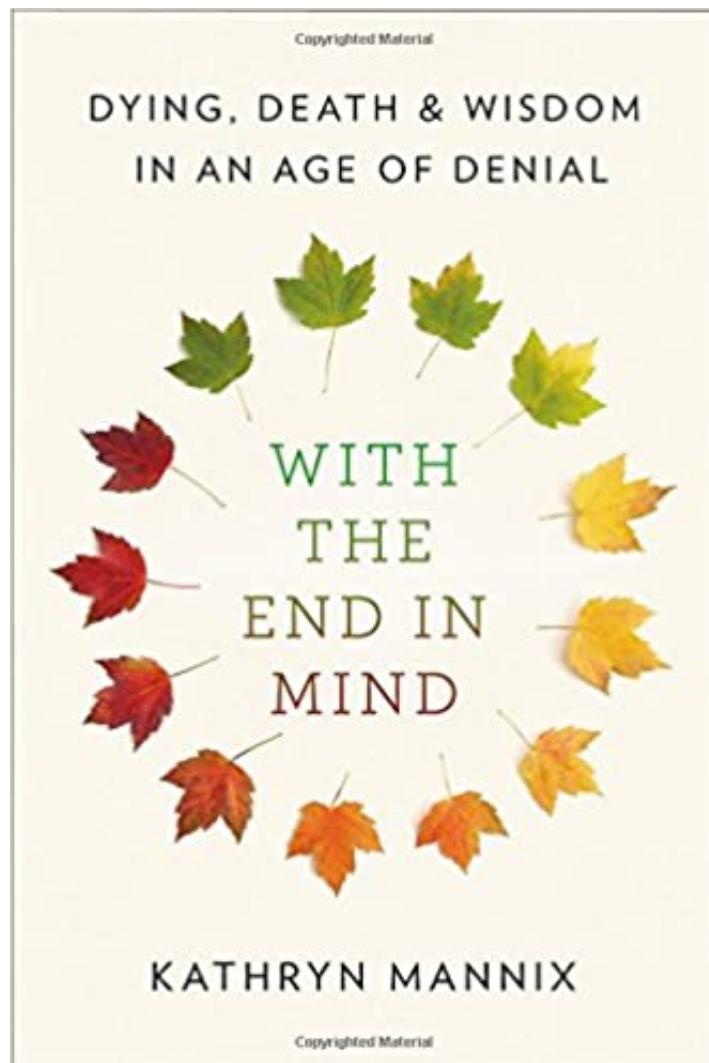
Far-away ingredients have been pushed off high-end menus in favour of produce grown with gray water and dishes composed from food scraps. Fine dining can be a drag on the climate. Think of all the air miles logged to fly in far-flung ingredients; the land and water devoted to raising agriculture and meat; the enormous amounts of kitchen waste. Yet some chefs and restaurant owners are going to extraordinary

lengths to make food that helps counteract the industry's huge carbon footprint. They're changing the way kitchens are run, turning to soil-enhancing grains like millet, making elegant sushi with local fish, and throwing out their garbage cans as they eliminate waste. From crafting hummus from beer keg runoff to sourcing rice from fields that double as home for migrating birds, these chefs are showcasing innovative ways to cook in a warming world. Here are the dishes that demonstrate how they're doing it.

[Read more at Bloomberg Green](#)

FYI #5: SPRING READING: NEW BOOK BY KATHRYN MANNIX

With The End In Mind: Dying, Death, And Wisdom In An Age Of Denial



Credit: Kathryn Mannix

Modern medical technology is allowing us to live longer and fuller lives than ever before. And for the most part, that is good news. But with changes in the way we understand medicine come changes in the way we understand death. Once a familiar, peaceful and gentle -- if sorrowful -- transition, death has come to be something from which we shield our eyes, as we prefer to fight desperately against it rather than accept its inevitability.

Dr. Kathryn Mannix has studied and practiced palliative care for thirty years. In *With the End in Mind* she shares beautifully crafted stories from a lifetime of caring for the dying, and makes a compelling case for the therapeutic power of approaching death not with trepidation, but with openness, clarity and understanding.

Weaving the details of her own experiences as a caregiver through stories of her patients, their families and their distinctive lives, Dr. Mannix reacquaints us with the universal, but deeply personal, process of dying. With insightful meditations on life, death and the space between them, *With the End in Mind* describes the possibility of meeting death gently, with forethought and preparation, and shows the unexpected

beauty, dignity and profound humanity of life coming to an end.

[Read more at Google Book](#)

FYI#6: SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

Wait, So I'm Actually Responsible For My Kids' Education Now?



Credit: iStock Photo

"What can I do?" my nine-year-old asked. It was 9 a.m. Monday morning, and Week Two of my family's self-imposed exile to our cottage two hours north of Toronto. When we heard school would be closed for two extra weeks following March Break (which has now been extended to the end of April)—a plan that now seems laughable, but at the time seemed perfectly reasonable—it made the most sense to escape to where we could easily maintain social distance, and keep our kids outside and entertained at the same time. At this point, I have no idea how their dad and I are supposed to keep up our full-time jobs, while simultaneously watching over and educating our kids at the same time. Currently, the strategy is to create a perfectly

planned out schedule the night before, that quickly gets hijacked by a surprise conference call, or a kid whose whole world has been turned upside down digging in their heels and refusing to cooperate. But of course, I know we're not alone. None of us have lived through a pandemic before and I can honestly say I have no idea what the next few months will look like. But we'll muddle through. What other choice do we have? If anything, my kids will have learned how to wash their hands.

[Read more at Tech Crunch](#)

END SHOTS

LOOKING FOR SIGNS OF SPRING SWANSEA NEIGHBOURHOOD, TORONTO APRIL 1, 2020



MANY CROCUSES



TO THE LAKESHORE



A CANADA GOOSE!







Credits: David Zakus



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