

One Year of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic one year ago this month. When the virus first started to spread rapidly across the U.S., a multitude of questions arose. How deadly is this pandemic? What personal protective equipment (PPE) should frontline caregivers be wearing? What type of mask should I be wearing, and do I really need to wear one? Now, a year later, incredible strides have been made in the fight against this virus.

As of March 10, 2021, there are currently more people in the U.S. vaccinated against COVID-19 – nearly 33 million people and counting – than the total number of cases in the U.S. since the start of the pandemic. Douglas Kasper, M.D. is the section head of infectious disease at the University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria and a leader in the OSF HealthCare response to COVID-19. He largely credits this milestone to the joint efforts of scientists and medical experts across the country and around the world.

Doug Kasper, M.D., Infectious Disease Specialist, OSF HealthCare

“Seeing the ability of the hospital community – and not just the inpatient workers, but everybody who functions in our hospital system – come together to solve problems rapidly shows the power of our medical community.” (:16)

Before COVID-19, the 1918 influenza pandemic was the most severe example of a public health crisis in recent history. The lessons learned from previous pandemics combined with the scientific advancements that have occurred since have allowed experts to combat this pandemic on an expedited timeline.

Doug Kasper, M.D., Infectious Disease Specialist, OSF HealthCare

“The strength in this response is that this does not only hold true for the response to COVID-19. It sets the stage for future pandemics if they were to occur. Our response has evolved in a way that is now much more advanced than we were initially prepared.” (:29)

Dr. Kasper adds that not only will scientists continue to learn from this pandemic, but it also will impact future generations for years to come.

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“This will drive a new generation of students to go into fields such as medicine, public health, education – to start to look at these things.” (:10)

We celebrate the breakthroughs that have given us hope that we are nearing the end of this pandemic, but this in no way detracts from the mourning the nearly 530,000 lives lost in the U.S. from COVID-19, nor does it detract from the impact it has had on businesses, families, and more.

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“While part of seeing this response shows the success of the system, that doesn’t make it any less traumatic what has happened to people who have been impacted directly by the virus or indirectly through business dealings or other.” (:13)

So what now? Dr. Kasper urges people to continue to wear their masks, wash their hands, watch their distance with others, and get the COVID-19 vaccine when it becomes available to them.

For more information on COVID-19, including frequently asked questions, visit the OSF HealthCare COVID-19 digital health hub: www.osfhealthcare.org/covid19/.

If you or a loved one is experiencing mental health struggles caused by the pandemic, OSF HealthCare offers free [behavioral health navigation services](#) to help understand all resources available in your area. [OSF Silver Cloud](#) is also available. The free mental health digital support tool is available in communities served by OSF.