

## **CORONAVIRUS: MY EXPERIENCE DURING THE PANDEMIC**

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At this point in time there shouldn't be a single person who doesn't know about the coronavirus, or as they call it, COVID-19. The coronavirus is a virus that originated in China, reached the U.S. and eventually spread all over the world by January of 2020. The common symptoms of the virus include shortness of breath, chills, sore throat, headache, loss of taste and smell, runny nose, vomiting and nausea. As it has been established, it might take up to 14 days for the symptoms to show. On top of that, the virus is also highly contagious putting all age groups at risk. The elderly and individuals with chronic diseases such as pneumonia or heart disease are in the top risk as the virus attacks the immune system.

The virus first appeared on the news and media platforms in the month of January of this year. The United States and many other countries all over the globe saw no reason to panic as it seemed that the virus presented no possible threat. Throughout the next upcoming months, the virus began to spread very quickly, alerting health officials not only in the U.S., but all over the world. As people started digging into the origin of the virus, it became clear that it originated in China. Based on everything scientists have looked at, the virus came from a bat that later infected other animals, making its way to humans. As it goes for the United States, the numbers started rising quickly, resulting in the cancellation of sports events, concerts, large gatherings and then later on schools.

As it goes personally for me, my school was shut down on March 13th. The original plan was to put us on a two-week leave, returning on March 30th but, as the virus spread rapidly and things began escalating out of control very quickly, President Trump announced a state of emergency and the whole country was put on quarantine until April 30th. At that point, schools were officially shut down for the rest of the school year. Distanced learning was introduced, online classes were established, a new norm was put in place. As for the School District of Philadelphia, distanced learning and online classes began on May 4th. From that point on, I would have classes four times a week, from 8AM till 3PM. Virtual learning was something that I never had to experience and encounter before. It was all new and different for me, just as it was for millions of students all over the United States. We were forced to transfer from physically attending school, interacting with our peers and teachers, participating in fun school events and just being in a classroom setting, to just looking at each other through a computer screen in a number of days. That is something that we all could have never seen coming, it was all so sudden and new.

My experience with distanced learning was not very great. I get distracted very easily and find it hard to concentrate, especially when it comes to school. In a classroom, I was able to give my full attention to what was being taught, I was all there. However, when we had the online classes, I could not focus and listen to what my teachers were trying to get across. I got distracted very easily, missing out on important information that was being presented. My entire family, which consists of five members, were all home during the quarantine. I have two little siblings who are very loud and demanding, so I'm sure it can be imagined how hard it was for me to concentrate on school and do what was asked of me when I had these two running around the house. On top of school, I also had to find a job and work 35 hours a week to support my family during the pandemic. My mother lost her job for the time being and my father was only able to work from home. As we have a big family, the income of my father was not enough. I made it my duty to help out and support our family as much as I could: I got a job at a local supermarket and worked there as a cashier for over two months.

While I worked at the supermarket, I was exposed to dozens of people every day and with all the protection that was implemented to protect the customers and the workers, I was lucky enough to not get the virus. As I say that, my grandparents who do not even live in the U.S. were not so lucky. They got the virus and spent over a month isolated, in a hospital bed, with no one by their side. Our only way of communicating was through the phone and if lucky, we got to talk once a week. Speaking for my family, that was the worst and scariest part of the whole situation. Luckily for us, they were both able to recover completely.

As the pandemic is somewhat under control, the spread of the virus has slowed down. We're now living in the new norm. We no longer view things the same, the way we did before. Large gatherings and activities that require large groups to come together are now unimaginable! Distanced learning is what we know, not to mention the importance of social distancing and having to wear masks anywhere and everywhere we go. This is the new norm now and who knows when and if ever we'll be able to go back to what we knew before. This whole experience has made me realize that we, as humans, tend to take things for granted and don't value what we have until it is taken away from us.

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