

# COVID-19, Only Humans or Not?

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COVID-19 has proved to be an unimaginable dire situation the world is currently facing. With increasing cases, the virulence factor and potency of the virus is also increasing with less or more efforts being put by different Organizations and Governments across the world to prevent the spread of the infection with development of vaccines for the same, while these developments have inflicted substantial economic and social shocks as global production, consumption and employment levels dropped precipitously, they have also been associated with significant reductions in air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

Air quality improved largely because of a reduction in factory and road traffic emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) and related ozone (O<sub>3</sub>) formation, and particulate matter. During the same period, global air traffic dropped by 60%. Not just that, many wildlife species thought to be extinct or endangered are re-emerging like rare butterflies found in Patna, India and whistling dogs in the US and so on...

But not all the environmental consequences of the crisis have been positive. Volumes of unrecyclable waste have risen; severe cuts in agricultural and fishery export levels have led to the generation of large quantities of organic waste; maintenance and monitoring of natural ecosystems have been temporarily halted. Natural ecosystems and protected species are also at risk during the Corona virus crisis. In many countries, environmental protection workers at national parks and land and marine conservation zones are required to stay at home during lockdown, leaving these areas unmonitored. Their absence has resulted in a rise of illegal deforestation, fishing and wildlife hunting

Apart from that, lack of knowledge or methods of proper disposal of the used protective gears especially face masks and gloves are leading to damages being done to environment and in turn the biodiversity. Not only that, local waste problems have emerged as many municipalities have suspended their recycling activities over

fears of virus propagation in recycling centers. The pollution itself is establishing in the form of marine pollution, soil pollution and excessive garbage production with less to no efforts to manage it.

Disposal of the PPE kits, face masks, gloves are contributed by the negligence and carelessness of the people in the society, also contributing to it can be accidental disposals due to them being flown away by the wind currents. These lead to accumulation of non-degradable plastic and similar slow degrading waste material in the environment. There have been many sightings and reporting of animals being endangered because of the new form of pollution arising in the nation and global scale. Birds, marine organisms are the primary targets of this pollution.

Face masks usually come with two strings that enable the user to wear them comfortably, but while disposing them, the strings end up becoming a greater threat to the birds as it gets entangled to their feet thus causing them pain or restrict them from flight, hence negatively impacting on their lifestyle and habitat.

Most of these waste such as single-use masks, gloves are also being disposed or carried away by wind into the water bodies such as rivers and seas causing harm to the marine life, especially turtles and fishes. Many sea divers have found turtles with plastic straws lodged into their nostrils, which may cause distress to the organism. With the non-methodical disposal of the masks, there seems to a possibility of the masks affecting the turtles more than the plastic wastes. Not just the turtle, but various thousands of marine organisms both free-living and attached to the substrates are harmed by this amount of wastes disposed.

Apart from living beings getting harmed owing to such a massive disposal of the wastes, it also affects humans too. Land fillings, dumpster





disposals, and other places like hospital biomedical wastes can lead to vector-borne diseases, secondary infection and affect daily life, and health of the people living in the neighbourhood.



The main question arises, what now? What strategies / solutions should be employed to manage this situation?! Attention must be given to threats on the environment and natural resource bases as a result of the Corona virus pandemic and consequential socioeconomic impacts.

1. Sustainable innovations to replace single use of PPE kits at personal and large industrial levels.
2. Economic stimuli to focus on green initiatives.
3. Educating masses about the proper disposal of single use PPE kits, which is manageable

with suitable machinery at municipality level.

4. Promote importance of greener world, not just with humans but co-existing with other animals in various biosystems.

Lack of environmental planning in expanding our economy, managing the current situation both at national and global scale is already killing millions, and it is going to come back in a much worse form (as humans are on top of the pyramid) unless its seriousness is accepted and communicated. Let this moment be a wake-up call for all of us. As countries emerge from the pandemic, we will all have to find ways to rebuild and to renew. All should think that this gives us a huge opportunity to choose a different paths - one that ensures environmental sustainability and resilience through which we can make decisions and map out our (and environment) sustainable recovery.

#### Source

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