

Care Package from Afar

Category: Contagion

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Within a week of the news about the coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China, many people panicked and bought all the facemasks off the shelf. Over one of our lunch breaks, my colleague in the immunology department told me she recently sent a box of masks to her mother in New York, because the stores there ran out of masks. My colleague and I agreed that the panicked reaction to the virus in America is laughable. Those affected here would be properly quarantined, and it would take several weeks at least for the virus to fully spread. The countries adjacent to China had many more worries than we did, we agreed.

In fact, I have relatives and friends in Vietnam who were worried about the outbreak. But judging by their Facebook posts, they know to wash their hands often, use hand sanitizer, and use facemasks to protect themselves and others. Yet no one seemed too worried about finding and buying the products.

My parents live in the U.S., too, and my mother and I were puzzled when my father hastily bought facemasks and hand sanitizer to send back to his siblings in Vietnam. My mother tried to reason with him that the cost of buying and sending the products from the U.S. would greatly outweigh the cost of buying them in Vietnam. Plus, by the time his package got there, more shipments of facemasks and handwipes would have arrived in the country. Vietnam has not had many cases, and there seemed to be little to worry about. She wanted him to be practical.

But practicality be damned was his attitude. There was a possible viral epidemic in Southeast Asia, and being in North America was not going to stop my father from worrying about his family. Luckily, Boston was not as panicked as New York then, and my father was able to buy a few boxes of facemasks, gloves, and hand sanitizer. He tried to ship them via UPS, but their fee was \$500, which my father found absurd. Unwilling to give up on his pursuit, my father sent the package via the USPS, since their shipping cost was comparatively more reasonable.

Masks and hand sanitizer: ~\$80

Shipping: ~\$200

Love and care from a brother to his siblings: Priceless.

Even from a safe distance, halfway around the globe, viruses can still induce ripple effects. When it comes to contagion, distance means nothing.

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