

# It Finally Happened

Category: COVID-19

written by Karen E. Lasser | July 26, 2023

It finally happened. Three years and four months after the pandemic began, I contracted COVID-19.

I wore a mask longer than most anyone I know. I dutifully received all the booster shots. I was headed to Brazil on a family vacation and decided it was time to relinquish the mask. My teenage daughters had been making fun of me for months. I was more worried about dengue, yellow fever, and zika as I slapped mosquitos buzzing around my ankles on my daily walk by the ocean at the idyllic beach resort of Buzios, a several-hour drive from Rio de Janeiro.

One evening, we noticed a man filming the environs in our hotel restaurant, coughing. We nicknamed him “the coughing guy,” and for the first time the specter of COVID-19 occurred to me. The thought dissipated as we proceeded through our itinerary from Buzios to Rio de Janeiro, Juiz de Fora, and finally, Sao Paulo.

As we were leaving Juiz de Fora, I noticed my nose was running, and I was feeling a bit run down. Later that night, I awoke to symptoms that recalled what I had always envisioned as “breakbone fever.” My body was shivering so much that I was unable to open a bottle of ibuprofen. We had traveled to a rural area in Minas Gerais to see some of the sculptures of Aleijadinho that decorated the baroque churches. Not anticipating a visit to rural area, we had not taken malaria prophylaxis! In a way, the positive COVID test came as a relief.

I am now on day 6 of isolation and feeling well enough to write this essay. Earlier in the pandemic, I had always consulted the New York Times’ world maps to get a sense of COVID risk around the globe. The Times no longer had access to COVID data in Brazil as of March 2023. If I had had a sense of the risk, I might have kept my mask on.

Tomorrow, I return to seeing my primary care patients in person, with a mask on. I will use my experience to remind my patients that COVID is still with us, in full force.

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