



100. Coronavirus Update

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Future Sense is a podcast edited from the radio show of the same name, broadcast on BayFM in Byron Bay, Australia, at www.bayfm.org. Hosted by Nyck Jeanes and well-known international futurist, Steve McDonald, Future Sense provides a fresh, deep analysis of global trends and emerging technologies. How can we identify the layers of growth personally, socially and globally? What are the signs missed; the truths being denied? Political science, history, politics, psychology, ancient civilisations, alien contact, the new psychedelic revolution, cryptocurrency and other disruptive and distributed technologies, and much more.

This is Future Sense.

Nyck: You're tuned to *Future Sense* here, with Steve McDonald, Nyck Jeanes and Mitch Schultz, on BayFM 99.9 coming out of Byron Bay, and all around the world via podcast. Thanks for joining us here and hello to all of you out there if you're listening, from wherever you are. We noticed that we have had quite a lot of listeners in the last week to our podcast, so thank you for doing that, and keep listening; keep passing it on.

Steve: We did indeed, over 1,200 listeners within a week, which is a lot. I think, just going back to late last year, we were getting around 300 and something a week, so that's wonderful. Thank you for your support.

I just want to give a quick coronavirus update now. We spoke last week in a special segment about the coronavirus and the uncertainty about its origin and some of the strange little pieces of the puzzle which no-one's really put together properly yet. This week, to give an update, they're reporting in mainstream media that the total death toll exceeds 800 now, and I think they're also reporting that that's more than died from the SARS epidemic back in 2003. I did note, though, that as far as I can see in the mainstream media, there's only been one death outside of China so far. I did a quick search on the Web and found an old article from the SARS outbreak in 2003 where they were reporting the 44th fourth person had died in Canada from SARS, so clearly the international death toll was higher than it is now, back in the SARS epidemic.

Nyck: Is it because they've closed it down better this time, do you think?

Steve: Well, it could well be because of that very, very rapid response. Maybe they learned from the SARS epidemic and that's why they acted so quickly to shut things down.

I did come across an interesting report which was from the *Centre for Disease Control* in the US, and they're just talking about general flu stats for this season—so this is not coronavirus related; this is just general flu information that they put out every flu season. Of course, flus and pandemics spread most during the cold weather; it's obviously winter in the northern hemisphere at the moment, so it's to be expected. As part of their routine reporting, they have issued figures for the period from October 1st, 2019 through February 1st, 2020, and this is what the CDC calls 'estimates'. The estimates, they say, don't capture all the flu cases simply because they're not capable of doing that, so they have to rely on reports from doctors, medical institutions and those sorts of things in order to put their stats together. So they say that they're as accurate as they can be, but they're just an estimate. For that period, from October 1st until February 1st, they're saying that in the US only, there have been somewhere between 22 million and 31 million people who came down with the flu.

Nyck: That's nearly 10% of the population. It IS 10% of the population.

Steve: Yes. There have been somewhere between 10 million and 15 million visits to medical professionals because of people having the flu; there have been between 210,000 and 370,000 hospitalisations due to the flu; and in the US alone, over that three month period, there have been between 12,000 and 30,000 deaths from the flu. Those figures eclipse anything the coronavirus has done so far, so, again, it just adds to the curious situation that we're seeing around this virus and the very, very sharp reaction that there has been to it.

Some of the consequences of that have included one of the worst routs in years on the Chinese stock exchange as Chinese stocks plummeted because of the travel restrictions and trade restrictions that are happening, particularly in the trade war between China and the US at the moment; and as an aside—again, I found another story reporting about the difficult state of the US healthcare system at the moment, which was a report put out by what I believe is a private company called *Awara Group* saying that the US healthcare system is in crisis and giving some quite detailed reporting about that (<https://www.awaragroup.com/blog/us-healthcare-system-in-crisis/>). They have a table here that compares the cost of healthcare in the US versus other countries, and it's quite considerably higher. There's also a table that says *Country Ranking on Life Expectancy with Health Expenditure*—so they're comparing life expectancy and health expenditure in terms of share of the gross domestic product. Top of the list for the best life expectancy and quite a low percentage—5.8%, I think it is, of GDP spent on healthcare—is Hong Kong, which is interesting, followed by Japan, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Singapore, South Korea, Israel, France, Norway, Australia (comes in at 11th), Sweden, Canada, Finland, United Kingdom, Germany, European Union, Cuba; and then the United States comes in at number 33, where life expectancy in years is currently sitting at 79 and the amount of GDP spent on healthcare is 17.9%, which is quite high.

Nyck: And I think we said the other day, too, that the life expectancy in the US is actually dropping at the moment for the first time of any developed country in the world. That's rather interesting.

Mitch: Particularly for men in my generation.

Nyck: Okay. So true, in their 40s or so. Yes.

Mitch: Yes, so there is that Gen X group, which is really the only one that has been declining over the last 10 to 15 years.

Nyck: What do they point to with that?

Mitch: Well, as Steve just pointed out, healthcare in general—people not being able to get the healthcare that they need. Then just imagine what that's doing to the rest of society and how that ripples out. It's going to affect production, and it's going to affect just wellbeing in general; it's going to affect what people are earning; it's going to affect all sorts of things when you have a sick population, and I'm just amazed that we still cannot connect the dots in the US, to a healthy population and what that does for the rest of society.

Nyck: It's also interesting, I'm thinking, your generation is very much caught between a rock and a hard place, between my generation and all that came with that—the baby boomers (and Steve's a little younger than me, but about there)—and those who are in their 20s now who are probably accommodating to the massive changes that are occurring. They grew up with the technology, etc, etc, and you, somehow, are sort of caught in the middle and I imagine there's probably even more mental health problems, arguably, in that age group.

Mitch: I think you're right, and I think that's also leading to suicide increase and a number of other things that are causing earlier deaths.

Steve: I'm sure a lot of that would be related to the values shift as well, and people being born into a world that's demanding a shift in values, but not supporting the new values because the old systems are still in play, which makes it very, very difficult and stressful for people to live in a society where the social systems don't fit with what their values are telling them they need.

Nyck: Back to the coronavirus, and I know you've got more there, too, but I'm interested that you pointed to a piece that was in the *ABC News* just a few days ago about a thing

called *Event 201* scenario. You talked a little bit about this because it's rather interesting that this occurred not long ago, before this outbreak of the coronavirus—not that there's a direct link or anything, but interesting.

Steve: No, look, it caught my attention when I read about it. So this was a tabletop exercise, and as I understand it, these kinds of exercises happen every year just prior to the flu season. In this case, this *Event 201* was organised by Johns Hopkins, which is a medical organisation in the US, together with the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation*, and there was a government body involved as well. They all came together just to look at what was needed in terms of response from the government and the private sector in case of a flu pandemic. They were looking at a coronavirus outbreak, but as I understand it, coronavirus is like a term that covers a whole range of different viruses, including SARS and the Middle Eastern MERS thing that happened years ago as well, so I don't see it as being specific in any way, and I doubt that there's any connection between this event and the outbreak of the coronavirus, but it is just, I guess, coincidental that they used that name on this tabletop exercise, which was held in October last year.

Nyck: And it threw all of us back a little bit to 9/11, to that day in 2001, where it is understood that there was, on the same day, I believe, a practice run, a rehearsal for such an event. Whether that's entirely true—and it is a bit mixed up in modern mythology, how much of this is true or not.

Steve: I think that is true in relation to 9/11 and that is the reason why this caught my eye when I read about this, but when I looked into it, from the small amount of research that I did, I don't see that there's any obvious link between that exercise and the coronavirus outbreak. I wouldn't say the same about the 9/11 thing.

Mitch: That seemed a little more suspicious.

Steve: It was very suspicious. Very suspicious indeed.

So, just a brief coronavirus update there. I think it's good—it's certainly limited the spread of this virus that there has been such a rapid and strict response to its outbreak. It still seems relatively harmless compared to other stuff that's going on—look at the general flu figures that we just quoted there in the US. I mean, there's a whole lot of people dying in the US from the flu at the moment, but no global alert around that, and yet we've got one here and I still can't help but feel that there's some relationship between the trade war with China and the international response that's gone on there.

Nyck: It's interesting for Australia that today, actually, our dollar has dropped to the lowest level for 10 years. That's rather good for Australian trade going out, so there's a positive result, one could say, partly as a result of the coronavirus and the response to that.

Steve: Yes, interesting. Anyway, that's all we have on a coronavirus this week.

Nyck: One other question, though, that someone has written in: "Hi, guys. Don't you think this corona thing is just another attempt at keeping people living in fear and looking to authorities for help?" That's kind of what we're saying, I guess. I mean, how would you figure that in?

Steve: It's easy to come up with these theories, but it's very difficult to prove them. We're trying to present a balanced opinion here on the show; we're trying to defer to, or default to, facts that we can confirm. In this case, as we said last week, there are a number of really unusual occurrences that have occurred around the coronavirus outbreak, including the link with scientists travelling back backwards and forwards from Canada prior to the outbreak, the fact that there's been a lot of international tension between China and other countries, the fact that this outbreak and China's forced response has really impacted their trade, seriously—it's caused their stock market to crash, the worst rout in years, they're saying—and so you could draw a lot of lines between dots there, but we don't have any proof.

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