In Bars, It's COVID Cocktail Hour

By Josh Bloom — June 30, 2020

It's summer and COVID-19 is not only not going away, but it's getting worse by the day, largely because of idiotic public health policies. One of the worst was letting people pack themselves into indoor bars. This has worked out exactly how you'd expect it to. Plus a special visit from The Real Morons of New Jersey.

For all you New Jersey folks who were looking forward to an indoor meal, I'm sorry to disappoint you. Indoor dining, which was supposed to begin in Jersey on July 2nd, ain't gonna happen. Governor Phil Murphy explained why. See if you can detect the subtle dissatisfaction in his words.

“So, unfortunately, the national situation, compounded by instances of knucklehead behavior here at home, are requiring us to hit pause on the restart of indoor dining for the foreseeable future.”

N.J. Governor Phil Murphy, June 29, 2020

Knucklehead is such a refreshing term. Although it isn't used much anymore this does not take away from its distinguished past.
Murphy was not talking about The Three Stooges, who are rumored to be dead. He was talking about other stooges, a different genus of knuckleheads.
It's not just Jersey. As of June 27th, 85 people (up from 34 on 6/24) who patronized Harper's Restaurant & Brew in Lansing, MI came down with COVID. Now, all the other drunks guests who visited the establishment between June 12-20 are being asked to self-quarantine. Ingham County Health Officer Linda S. Vail told CNN "Given the number of cases in this outbreak, we consider this a higher risk exposure than a typical visit to a restaurant or bar. There are likely more people infected with Covid-19 not yet identified."

These are hardly isolated instances:

- On June 28th, California Governor Gavin Newsome ordered bars in seven LA Counties to be closed because of rapidly spreading coronavirus.
- On June 26th, Texas Governor Greg Abbott did an abrupt about-face on his rapid opening policies after a surge in COVID cases was blamed on bars.

> At this time, it is clear that the rise in cases is largely driven by certain types of activities, including Texans congregating in bars. The actions in this executive order are essential to our mission to swiftly contain this virus and protect public health.

> Texas Governor Greg Abbott, June 26, 2020

- Florida is providing a more schizophrenic approach to public health. Governor Ron DeSantis wants to "figure out a way forward for bars, nightclubs and craft breweries that are essentially having to shut down again because of 'widespread non-compliance' with coronavirus guidelines." Not everyone agrees.

> Despite two consecutive record shattering days this weekend, DeSantis wants us to believe that nothing has changed and that we are on the path to reopening the economy safely.

> Florida Democratic Party Chairwoman Terrie Rizzo

The problem of bar-spread COVID is not unique to these states. A sobering article in Kaiser Health News entitled "Packed Bars Serve Up New Rounds Of COVID Contagion" takes a depressing look at what is going on in the bars that have opened. None of this should be the least bit surprising.

- Bars in Louisiana, Florida, Wyoming, and Idaho have been identified as outbreak loci.
- Partiers in Houston seemed to have a different interpretation of the behavior expected of them. A nursing student went into HandleBar Houston but left when she found the place packed and the clientele not exactly following the rules. The student, Adriana Megas said "Nobody was wearing any masks. You would never think COVID happened." (1) She fared no better in other bars: "The street was insanely busy. Every single bar was filled."
HandleBar in Houston goes viral

- In Ada County (population 450,000) 303 people became infected [?] during the third week of June; at least 152 of the infections were attributed to people who became infected in bars and those who subsequently caught it from them. Bars and nightclubs in Ada County are now closed.

I could go on but it's happy hour and I've got a fifth of Jack ready to down (2). There are three messages here, one of them obvious:

1. Unless your job is recycling used Kleenex from COVID patients there is probably no better way to spread/catch the virus than be in a bar. The Kaiser article mentions loud music forcing people to yell and be closer to each other, the impossibility of drinking and wearing a mask at the same time, and impaired judgment from alcohol consumption.
2. You can't have it both ways. If people want bars they can expect to see big spikes infection. Maybe the patrons don't care because, after all, young people don't really get that sick...
3. Except this is turning out to be false...

In Houston, 60% of hospitalized patients and 40% of ICU patients are under 50 [8]. And last week Dr. Anthony Fauci said “To think young people have no deleterious consequences is not true. We’re seeing more and more complications in young people.”

By any measure we are in the middle of a god-awful mess which shows no signs of letting up. Some of it was unavoidable and some was quite avoidable. Like letting people pack themselves into an alcohol-drenched Petri dish while they pretend that everything is OK falls into the latter category. Really, really stupid.

It's enough to drive you to drink.

NOTES:
(1) HandleBar was one of many bars to have their licenses suspended.

(2) That's a lie. I don't drink. Yet.

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