

Lockdown fuels alcohol sales

One area of the US economy seems to have thrived during the COVID-19 lockdown there - home delivery sales of alcohol. Many state governments opened the doorway for bars and 'liquor stores' to sell their wares via 'mail order' during the spring and summer. A 24 per cent surge in sales (and 27 per cent for spirits) showed the economic wisdom of this move. The health consequences have yet to come home to roost - but the signs are not good. 15 million Americans have alcohol abuse problems and there has been a 20 per cent rise in alcohol consumption since the '90s. *NPR* 11 September 2020 [n.pr/3mKsP3d](https://www.npr.org/2020/09/11/891111111)

Vaccine factories can be bad for your health

At least if you live in the vicinity of the Zhonghu Lanzhou biological pharmaceutical factory in Gansu province, China. In July and August 2019 an outbreak of brucellosis affecting thousands of people in the city of Lanzhou was traced back to the factory. While producing *Brucella* vaccines for animal use, the factory used expired disinfectants and sanitisers, meaning not all bacteria were eradicated from the waste gas. This contaminated waste gas formed aerosols that held the *Brucella* bacteria, leaking into the air and spread to the city by the wind. The irony is hard to miss. *CNN* 17 September 2020 [cnn.it/2RPhBfm](https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/17/health/brucellosis-lanzhou/index.html)

Hand sanitiser and child exploitation

While we're on the topic of sanitisers, the high demand for alcohol-based hand disinfecting gels has fuelled a massive increase in sugar cane production. Most of this industry is in countries where there is a high to very high risk of forced child labour, especially where lockdown has closed schools. And it's not just the hand sanitiser industry - the increased demand for PPE has increased the acute risk that the poorest could be pushed into forced labour in the manufacture of drugs and equipment to fight COVID-19, according to the UN. While no hard data has yet been forthcoming, there is growing concern that forms of modern slavery have thrived in the pandemic. There is a hidden cost to maintaining safety and fighting coronavirus to which we must be alert. *Thompson Reuters* 16 September 2020 [tmsnrt.rs/3ciDbCw](https://www.thomsonreuters.com/en/insights/articles/child-labour-ppe.html)

Wildfires posing growing health threat

Forest fires have raged from Australia to Brazil to the US West Coast and Siberia over the course of 2020, bringing with them gases, particulates and synthetic toxins as the fires burn through suburbs, towns, and cities. Previous wildfires have been associated with significant increases in brain, heart, and lung damage in local populations. But with the sheer number and scale of the fires this year, it is hard to know how widespread that damage will be. 3,000 miles from the West Coast states, Washington DC has already seen the particulates in the high atmosphere dim the sun and drop temperatures. We may be picking up the consequences for years to come across the globe. *National Geographic* 15 September 2020 [on.natgeo.com/3j5kNzm](https://www.natgeo.com/3j5kNzm)

Drink a little java for the sake of your stomach

Well, your bowel actually. More precisely, drinking one or more cups of your favourite coffee increases your chances of surviving colonic cancer, according to a recent study. And it is dose dependent - a cup of coffee a day increases survival by eleven percent - four cups increase that to 36 per cent. However, I suspect for those of us who imbibe the hot, black stimulant each morning as we stumble half-awake into the kitchen, warding off the worst of colonic cancer is probably not our primary motivator. *New York Times* 22 September 2020 [nyti.ms/2ZZJ6Y3](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/22/health/caffeine-cancer.html)

Plus ça change...

For over a century the use of bacteriophages to treat infections has roused the interest of clinicians and researchers alike. As antibiotic resistance becomes a major health hazard, the interest in the clinical application of these viruses that selectively attack bacteria has once again grown. It is also now being explored as a means to replacing antibiotics as growth promoters in cattle in developing countries. Indeed, if the WHO ever approves human phage therapy, it could have a significant impact on controlling bacterial infectious diseases in the developing world. God, in his infinite wisdom has placed the solutions to our self-made problems within our reach, if we have the wisdom and courage to use them aright. *The Guardian* 21 September 2020 [bit.ly/2EmuKtd](https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/09/21/bacteriophages-cancer)

From the ridiculous...

US pastor John MacArthur of Grace Church, LA, has stated that he is willing to go to gaol and start a prison ministry if authorities take him to task for repeatedly breaking COVID-19 restrictions on indoor gatherings. MacArthur has repeatedly argued that Jesus commanded the church to meet, and State authorities are subject to his authority, not over it. While this is undoubtedly true, other churches have found ways of meeting and ministering that do not put vulnerable members of the congregation at risk of coronavirus. One wonders where the greater faithfulness to Christ is to be found? *Premier Christian News* 18 September 2020 [bit.ly/300DigZ](https://www.premierchristiannews.com/2020/09/18/john-mac-arthur-willing-to-go-to-prison/)

To the sublime

In contrast, a recent UK study has found that 72 per cent of religious adults helped the vulnerable with shopping during lockdown, compared with 46 per cent of the general population. While that gap narrowed as lockdown went on, and while many argued that Christ's teaching led Christians to be more generous, it is also true that churches provided one of the few channels for coordinating effective local volunteering, whether in foodbanks, shopping services or other forms of support. Whatever the reasons, it reminds us that in responding to the strictures of lockdown in this manner, the Christian faith is always outworked in love for God and neighbour. *Premier Christian News* 22 September 2020 [bit.ly/3kF6wdf](https://www.premierchristiannews.com/2020/09/22/religious-adults-helped-vulnerable/)