

The COVID-19 pandemic: geography matters

Tony Gatrell, Autumn 2020

Possible impacts of COVID-19: suggested questions for discussion and project work

General

- Use some of the suggested resources to describe patterns of disease rates and mortality statistics within and between countries.
- To what extent are international comparisons the result of different ways of recording mortality?
- What will be the possible geopolitical consequences of the disease? Will there be new dynamics of international relations, particularly with regard to China?

Travel

- How will domestic trips change, if at all? Consumers have had to restrict their shopping behaviours and, where feasible, shop online for delivery. This delivery service preceded COVID-19, of course, but it has expanded; will this now be the norm?
- How will the journey to work evolve?
- Will we see reduced demand for overseas vacations if people choose to holiday at home ('staycation')? If so, what impacts might that have on over-used areas like the Lake District? Might it help 'resurrect' declining seaside resorts such as Morecambe, which was already seeing possible investment as the 'Eden Project of the North' (www.edenproject.com/eden-story/our-ethos/eden-project-north).
- What consequences will changing travel patterns have for the airline industry and airports if services are curtailed? Do the experiences of using technologies such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams mean that business can adapt to remote conferences and meetings?

The economy

- How will the world of work alter in the medium and long term? Will the journey to work be a thing of the past for some occupations, and if so which? Will we see much more home-based work and if so, what are the likely implications for work-life balance?
- What will be the medium and longer-term impacts on employment, and how will this vary by sector? How different will the high street look in the next few years? Even before the pandemic there were closures and threatened closures of well-known brands. Will we see a 'hollowing-out' of the high street as a result? Will people have become so used to online shopping that they forego the trip into town? Will jobs such as those in the emergency services and utilities remain protected, while others fall away?
- How will the educational experience change for students at school and in higher education? Will students question the value of physical presence at university and prefer to live and study at home?

Social life

- How have people in different countries coped with 'lockdown'? Has this varied between social groups?
- If social distancing has to be maintained for a lengthy period what will be the impact on different age groups?

- What will be the impact on social and health inequalities? Will these widen?
- We know that in the past 15 years social contacts have been transformed by innovative technologies (a range of social media). Will we see a decline in face-to-face meetings? What impact might restrictions on movement have for older people?

Environment

- Will we continue to see reductions in car usage and if so, will there be positive outcomes, such as reduced exhaust emissions and road traffic casualties?
- There is already evidence of reductions in air pollution (NOx): see some detailed European data at: www.eea.europa.eu/themes/air/air-quality-and-COVID19 , but will these reductions last? See also: www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-52485712.
- What will be the environmental impacts in resource-poor countries?
- Will the pandemic result in a stronger appetite for governments to address global environmental change, or will we return to 'business as usual'?