

COVID JOURNAL

DECEMBER 25, 2023-JANUARY 17, 2024

Introduction:

I managed to avoid catching COVID for three years and almost ten months since it was declared a pandemic on March 11, 2020. I avoided catching it in 2020, when it was so new that no one knew how it was transmitted and there were no protocols, let alone vaccines available. I avoided catching it the night I stayed in the hospital after having spinal fusion surgery on March 5, 2021. I avoided catching it when I went back to traveling on airplanes after getting the primary series of the vaccine in 2021. I avoided catching it while attending an artist residency and an artist retreat which both required travel by airplanes. I avoided catching it during several large indoor events and gatherings. I avoided catching it at the public outdoor swimming pool I patronize. I even avoided catching it when my mother caught it towards the end of the 2021/the beginning of 2022. I have continued to keep up to date with my vaccines and still mask in large, indoor settings, which helped me for a long time.

Monday, December 25, 2023:

A relative had invited us to stop by his home on Christmas day to see his family, some of whom had come in from out of town, even though we had previously let him know we couldn't attend their Christmas dinner. Note this was a very last-minute request, and I hate last minute anything, but I digress. After he kept pressuring us, and our visit was delayed by an hour because he had fallen asleep (the first red flag), we dropped by for an hour, mainly watching the Golden State Warriors basketball game in the den with him and a couple of other people who were not the family members with whom he had wanted us to visit. I sat right next to him. He didn't have a face mask on. I had a silk face mask on, but looking back on it I should have worn a surgical mask with the cloth mask over it like I usually do when I have "dressed-up" a bit and know I will be around a lot of people. He coughed a couple of times (another red flag) but I figured that since I was masked, I would be fine. When we left, he hugged us goodbye. The family's invitation had asked people not to attend Christmas dinner if they had any symptoms of COVID. However, they should have followed what the CDC advised, which was to ask everyone to test before the gathering, be up to date with their vaccines, mask, socially distance, and provide proper ventilation if they were to gather indoors.¹ One of his family members actually told me she didn't get the updated COVID vaccine because she "didn't want to get too many vaccines," which is one reason why one of my friends believes that we continue to be where we are with this virus. This attitude actually is pretty common as only fourteen percent of U.S. adults have gotten the updated vaccine.²

¹ <https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/COVID-19/Tips-for-Protecting-Yourself-and-Others-This-Holiday-Season.aspx#:~:text=Gather%20Outside%20or%20Increase%20Airflow,install%20high%2Dquality%20air%20filters.>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/respiratory-viruses/whats-new/vaccine-equity.html#:~:text=Based%20on%20National%20Immunization%20Survey,vaccine%20through%20November%204%2C%202023.>

Tuesday, December 26, 2023:

The following morning the relative called us up saying he hadn't been feeling well when we visited him and that he tested positive for COVID that morning. We tested ourselves immediately, but the tests came back negative. At that time we didn't have symptoms yet and it was probably too early to test, anyway. I am very glad that I had a stack of at-home antigen tests for later on in the week, though.

Wednesday, December 27-Friday, December 29, 2023:

On December 27, 2023, I started feeling symptoms, the first being severe fatigue and a very scratchy throat. I had a post nasal drip. I also felt very weak. My skin was very achy. We tested ourselves again the following morning, December 28, 2023. Again negative. That evening I began to feel worse with severe chills, really bad aches and a dry cough. I also felt very dizzy and woozy. My stomach was very tender. The aches were the worst in my low back, which is a weak spot for me. On December 29, 2023, came the runny nose and the sneezing. I started noticing sharp pains and loss of feeling in both my fingers and toes. My eyes felt like they had sand in them. I didn't lose my sense of taste or smell, which is something that is no longer an indicator of COVID like it was at the beginning of the pandemic.³ I never got a fever, either, though a lot of my friends said they had a high fever when they got it. FYI, these symptoms were just what I experienced with COVID. Everyone has different symptoms, different experiences and different levels of severity.

Saturday, December 30, 2023:

On December 30, 2023, I tested positive for COVID. I immediately informed my parents and my next-door neighbors, whose dog I walk a few times a week. My father tested positive for COVID as well, and his symptoms were similar to mine, but my mother tested negative, although she was feeling very fatigued and congested. I called the advice nurse at Kaiser because my father is diabetic and has high blood pressure. One of the questions she asked was whether we all had the updated vaccine. We answered affirmative. She informed our primary care physician, who was fortunately on call that day, especially since it was a Saturday and it was in between Christmas Day and New Year's Day. She prescribed Paxlovid for all of us, including my mother because of her symptoms, but my mother got a lower dose than my father and I did. I was surprised that she prescribed it to me seeing as I'm not over sixty and I don't have any medical conditions that would put me at high risk of severe COVID. Since my mother had not tested positive, she was designated to go to the pharmacy at Kaiser to pick up the prescriptions. My father had to stop taking his Atorvastatin medication for ten days because taking the two medications together might potentially damage his liver. I think the variant we had was the JN.1 variant. There has been a very high rate of COVID cases in California.⁴ Actually, California is one of the states that has reinstated mask mandates for health care workers at

³ <https://www.verywellhealth.com/loss-of-smell-and-taste-no-longer-covid-sign-7569170>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/27/well/live/jn1-covid-variant.html>

some of its hospitals, though I went to Kaiser a couple weeks later and a lot of the medical staff members and patients weren't masking.⁵

That day I informed our relative that we had tested positive for COVID. He said, "I'm sorry to hear that" and then told us that he didn't know where we could have caught it because no one else who had been around him on Christmas day had caught it. This statement was odd to me because he had told us he wasn't feeling well that day and he was symptomatic besides testing positive the following morning. Plus the only other people I was around during that time were my parents and my next-door neighbors, none of whom had COVID symptoms or diagnosis, so this relative was the likely source of my COVID infection. Also, I didn't really believe that no one else who was around him had caught COVID. I am guessing they just didn't test, might have tested once and didn't continue to do so, or they might have been asymptomatic.

The Paxlovid left a metallic taste in my mouth. It made me feel more tired. I was also constipated, bloated and gassy because I am lactose intolerant and the pills have a lot of lactose in them. I also got a yeast infection and acid reflux, but that's how my body reacts to any medication I take. I had to pee more frequently, but it seemed to be helping with the other symptoms and I also hoped that it would prevent me from developing long COVID. I continued to exercise throughout this time even though every muscle and bone in my body ached when I did so. For the long run, I felt it was better to exercise than to not.

Sunday, December 31, 2023-Monday, January 1, 2024:

On Sunday, December 31, 2023, we were already beginning to get past the worst of the symptoms, with the help of a lot of chicken soup, but we still felt pretty bad. My father spent the better part of the day sleeping. By New Year's Day 2024, we were already feeling a lot better so we had our classic black-eyed peas and rice with greens and yam pie. For me the chills, runny nose, cough and sneezing had calmed down a lot, though the fatigue and aches were still pretty bad. The relative called us again. I was so upset with him that I couldn't resist telling him that if he wanted to get together with us in the future, it would "behoove him" to let us know ahead of time and to be considerate of others by masking and socially distancing if he was feeling ill. He told me not to lecture him about this and that he didn't have any symptoms when we visited them, even though he was fatigued enough to be taking a nap and he was coughing. He checked in with us again on January 4th, but still denied the fact that we caught COVID from him.

Tuesday, January 2-Wednesday, January 3, 2024:

I continued to test positive the following day, January 2nd, though the purple stripe under the "T" on the test was much fainter than it was three days beforehand. Protocols directed that I did have to mask around others outside of my household though, for the next

⁵ <https://abcnews.go.com/US/hospitals-states-reinstating-mask-requirements/story?id=106029939>

five days. However, I was allowed to leave isolation as I continued to improve and I had no fever. The fatigue was still pretty bad, though, and so were the aches and pains. My skin was still achy, and I was getting those tiny, sharp pains in my body and aches where my surgeon had made an incision in my lower abdomen, which I had for a little while during my recovery from surgery until it calmed down, but any time I get a cold or another virus it flares up. I was still getting the shooting pains in my fingers and toes as well as a loss of feeling. I also noticed that my right ear was blocked, a problem I have had since I was a baby when I get colds, allergies and other respiratory viruses. I had chronic ear infections as a kid. If there was a lot of background noise and someone was talking to me, I really had a hard time hearing them. I also noticed how much trouble I had communicating with people and processing what people were saying to me. I do have a speech and language-based communication disorder, which has improved greatly thanks to compensating skills, but certain things still trigger it and COVID was one of them. I still wore out quite easily, even when talking to a friend on the phone for a few minutes or when I had to send out emails to people.

Thursday, January 4-Monday, January 8, 2024:

Great news! I finished my Paxlovid medication with the morning dose and I tested negative. I still had a bit of the cough and fatigue, and the aches particularly in my low back and a bit of the headache and dizziness but it was definitely good news, nonetheless. I decided to test myself one last time over the weekend. We still had to mask around people outside of my household through January 6th, though we will continue to do so, anyway for the foreseeable future. My father finally tested negative for COVID on January 8th but then his symptoms returned around January 13th and he tested positive on January 16th along with my mother. I also had symptoms, but tested negative on January 16th. I have decided to test myself on the 18th and 20th, so we'll see what happens. Evidently, this was a rebound infection that happens to one in five people after they take Paxlovid.⁶ We were advised not to take it again, however we have to reisolate for another five days and then mask in public starting at day six. The silver lining is that due to having both the vaccination and the infection, we will be immune to COVID for several months, however we will still be very careful.⁷

Concluding Paragraph:

The morning my father and I first tested positive for COVID my father said, "This is the last time I'm going to do something I don't want to do because doing so ends up being a disaster," which is a philosophy I have held since I was a little kid. I hope our relatives get the hint, and will stop inviting us to Christmas Dinner, seeing as we enjoy quiet holidays. I hope that sharing this experience was not TMI, but gives you some pause –to consider what you think is wise behavior for you and your family as we all learn to live with COVID from now on.

⁶ <https://hms.harvard.edu/news/one-five-experience-rebound-covid-after-antiviral-drug-new-study-shows>

⁷ <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/how-long-does-immunity-last-after-covid-19-what-we-know#How-hybrid-immunity-protects-the-most>

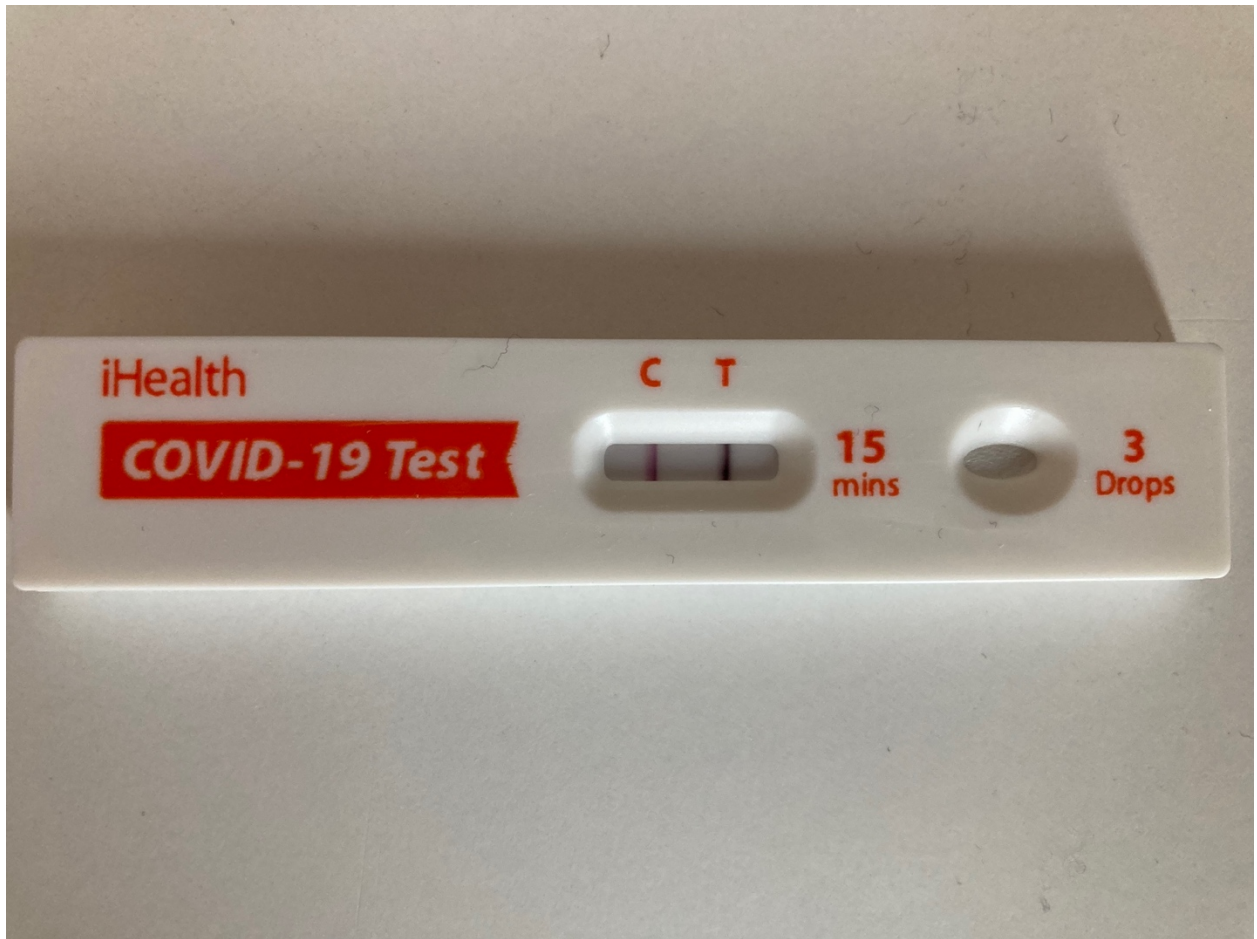


Figure 1: My positive at-home COVID antigen test on December 30, 2023.