

COVID-19 is a marathon, not a sprint

The COVID-19 pandemic rendered 2020 a year like no other in recent history. Although 2021 starts hopeful—with COVID-19 vaccines already being rolled out in more than 30 countries—the fight against the pandemic is far from over.

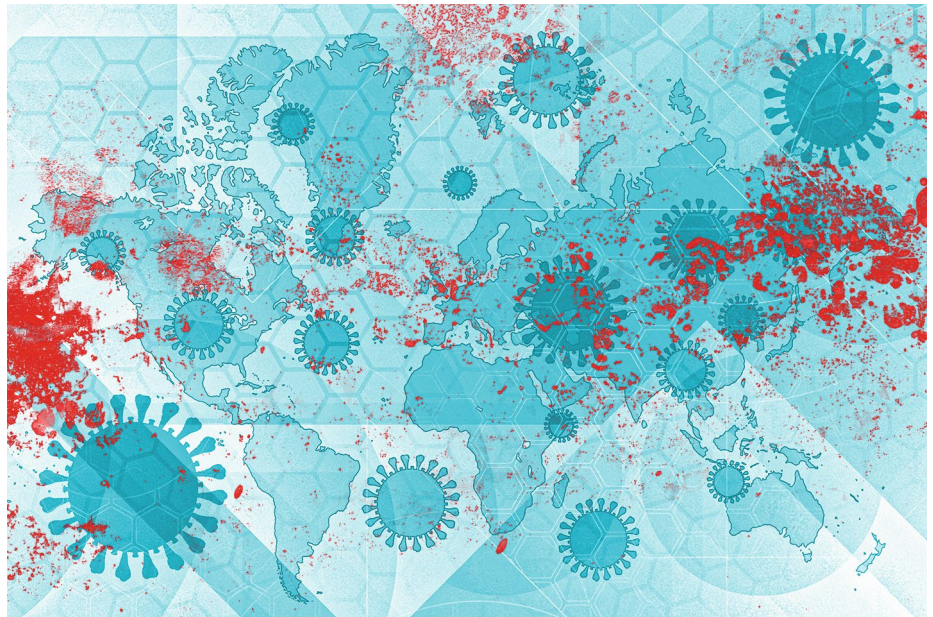
2020 was a year like no other, and the COVID-19 pandemic made a hostile takeover of our lives. Since the first reports of a cluster of cases of pneumonia on 31 December 2019, SARS-CoV-2 has infected nearly 90 million people and led to almost 2 million deaths. The pandemic has deeply affected the lives and livelihoods of people and nations worldwide.

The scientific community's mobilization and response to the pandemic has been nothing short of extraordinary and we have experienced it first-hand. In the early stages of the pandemic, we made a social media call for papers on COVID-19 with a behavioural angle and direct policy relevance. In an editorial in April 2020, we announced expedited processing of time-sensitive COVID-19 research, including joining an initiative led by Christopher Chambers, Registered Reports editor at *Royal Society Open Science*, to expedite the processing of COVID-19-related Registered Reports.

Since March, and through to the end of 2020, we received more than 600 COVID-19-related research submissions and in excess of 150 pandemic-relevant non-research (i.e., review and opinion) submissions. We expedited the processing of time-sensitive COVID-19 research, reaching initial decisions on these manuscripts on median within one working day and expediting the peer review process of submissions taken forward to review.

We are grateful to all scientists who give us the opportunity to consider their work and to the dozens of reviewers who have provided rapid and exceptionally high-quality feedback on time-critical submissions. We are thrilled to see the broad impact of our published COVID-19-related content, both on science and especially on policy. We are featuring all our COVID-19-related content on a dedicated collection (<https://www.nature.com/collections/human-behaviour-covid-19>) that is continuously updated with new content as it becomes available.

2021 starts with the hope of bringing the pandemic under control. Vaccine development has proceeded at an unprecedented pace and vaccine rollout is under way in more than 30 countries,



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with more countries added to the list almost by the day. However, the crisis is very far from over. Infections are soaring in several countries and population-wide vaccination faces numerous challenges unlikely to be substantively resolved before 2022. According to one estimate, in the most optimistic scenario where vaccine production fully meets stated targets, it would take 6 to 7 months to produce enough vaccines to achieve herd immunity by protecting at least 60–80% of the world population (<https://www.bmj.com/content/371/bmj.m4704>). Even then, vaccine hesitancy, distribution, healthcare capacity limitations, affordability, and a host of other challenges will need to be overcome.

While the fight against COVID-19 continues, we also continue to strongly encourage the submission of COVID-19 related research to our journal, addressing any aspect of the pandemic within the journal's scope of either immediate (and targeted towards assisting the policy response) or longer-term relevance. At the same time, we recognize the extraordinary burden of expedited peer review on our reviewers, who have gone above and beyond

in their service by dedicating time that is hard to spare to rapidly evaluate research. We will continue to support global efforts to fight the pandemic by expediting COVID-19 research, but going forward expedited processing will be reserved for highly time-sensitive COVID-19 research articles or registered reports of immediate policy relevance. This will allow us to make sure that peer-reviewed research of high immediate relevance reaches the public as soon as possible, while ensuring that we prevent reviewer burnout and treat non-urgent research submissions equitably, regardless of topic area.

If nothing else, this pandemic has shown that the scientific community—across disciplines and straddling scientific boundaries—can rise to meet an extreme global challenge with speed, determination, and a strong sense of its social responsibility. We are proud to be part of this effort and will continue supporting scientists and policy makers in making COVID-19 a challenge of the past. □

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