

At first, all it was only whispers: parents talking softly about a new disease in China on the news. Even when Covid-19 began to increase in cases, no one was taking it seriously. Everyone in my school joked about how someone should “take one for the team,” and purposely contract the disease so our school could shut down. Every other school in our neighborhood had closed except ours. All of our friends from those schools were relaxing at home, so why couldn’t we? We didn’t think this disease could seriously affect us.

When our school finally closed, we were all ecstatic. But as weeks in lockdown dragged on into months, we began to worry. Our jokes eventually slowed to nervous chuckles, then finally stopped, as we were exposed to the harsh truth behind Covid-19. The death toll was rising by the day, and the media was endlessly flooded with reports on the numbers. New, scary symptoms, such as losing taste and smell, or trouble breathing, began to be reported.

That was more than seven months ago, and while in a lot of ways I have become used to the new normal, in many ways I haven’t. I’m lucky that no one I love has gotten sick, but this disease is still killing people, and is probably only going to get worse in the coming months. Then, there has been the issue of school. When September rolled around, there were endless debates as to whether we should continue learning remotely or be allowed back in a physical classroom. After weeks of deliberation, the school board settled on giving the students a choice between a fully remote schedule, or a hybrid model of online and in-person classes. I discussed extensively with my parents about what I should choose, both fearing the risks of in-person classes and missing the familiar hallways of my school. Finally, we decided on doing a hybrid schedule, resolving that the risk would be minimal as long as I wore a mask and practiced social distancing.

Although I’m happy to be back at school for at least part of the week, I didn’t expect the sudden increase in homework. Our teachers seem to think that, with no sports and other after-school activities, we have hours of extra free time. Now, our teachers insist that we have extra hours of homework, while also cheerfully reminding us to get eight hours of sleep! While my classmates and I have tried to insist that we, in fact, don’t have as much free time as they think, they steadfastly refuse to change the new homework policy. It feels insensitive, almost: everyone is already dealing with increased stress and anxiety because of the pandemic, and now we have to deal with the added pressure of these extra assignments.

This new stress at school makes me long for life to return to how it was before the pandemic. How ironic, that while a few months ago we were all praying that school and work would shut down, welcoming the disruption as something fun, all we want now is for things to return to normal. But I worry that normalcy won’t happen for a long time. We still don’t know when a safe vaccine will be developed, and cases are starting to rise again in many parts of the country as winter sets in. If things get worse where I am, I might even need to give up my hybrid schedule, and fully return to online learning. I’m not sure what the next few months are going to bring, but I hope that, when this is finally over, we have learned to take these kinds of diseases seriously. Maybe if my friends and I, and the whole country, had not laughed when we heard of Covid-19, we would not be where we are today.