

Bill Gates and Rashida Jones Ask Big Questions

EPISODE 01: What will the world look like after COVID-19?

Date aired: November 16, 2020

RASHIDA JONES: Hi, I'm Rashida Jones, and I consider myself a pretty rational person most of the time. I really try not to be an alarmist, but I have to say that I've become increasingly worried about the state of the world and about the future. And every day, to me, it seems to be getting a little worse.

BILL GATES: Hi, I'm Bill Gates, and I actually think things will be all right.

RASHIDA JONES: You do?

BILL GATES: I do, but I'm an optimist.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah, I don't think I am. But let's talk.

[Singing]

RASHIDA JONES: Today we're going to talk about the big question around COVID.

In this country alone, we've seen a quarter of a million deaths and the infection rates are still spiking.

BILL GATES: These are big numbers. If we get a vaccine soon enough, then maybe we'll have less than a doubling in the total number of deaths.

I have to say the economic damage is worse than I expected. And even once we get done, we're going to have a lot of catch-up on schooling and mental health.

RASHIDA JONES: But there is some room for hope, right? I mean vaccines have gone to trial faster than ever before.

BILL GATES: That's the only very positive thing that we can look forward to is the likelihood of many of these vaccines working is actually pretty high.

RASHIDA JONES: So that leads me to the big question. I've heard you answer so many questions on COVID and you've helped me to sort of understand the science of it, and what it's going to take us to get out of this.

Recently we've been hearing a lot about this potentially effective vaccine that might be available soon. It feels like the right time to talk about what life might look like after COVID.

BILL GATES: Yeah.

RASHIDA JONES: For those of us who are lucky enough to survive through this, and if we haven't lost loved ones or the place we work, we can start to imagine and hope for a time when this horrible pandemic is over. Let me ask you, Bill, when we get the vaccine and everybody's taken it and things go back to normal, what is the first thing you're going to do?

BILL GATES: You know there's some people that it would be so nice to see. We do a lot of our foundation work with Bono and he's always very affectionate and energetic. There's some people who, on video, just aren't as... the emotional connection isn't as strong.

RASHIDA JONES: You're going to go hug Bono?

BILL GATES: Absolutely.

RASHIDA JONES: That's the first thing you're going to do.

BILL GATES: Absolutely.

RASHIDA JONES: Okay. You heard it here first.

BILL GATES: He's going to be surprised. [*Laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: What is life going to be like after COVID? Do you think that there's any possibility that we will be like East Asian countries and wear masks when we feel sick or when there's, you know, there's a particular threat? Is there any version of that?

BILL GATES: I don't know. In Japan, you know, when you ride the subway, people wear masks, but of course, they're crowded together in Japan, has a thing about cleanliness. I don't know if that will spread. It was certainly easier to tell Asians to wear masks than it was to tell Americans or Europeans.

RASHIDA JONES: We just have no precedent.

BILL GATES: Well, except when we're robbing a bank or something. [*laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*] What? Do you want to tell me about your past?

BILL GATES: No, no. Just in the movies it looks like.

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: And it's nice. People don't recognize me quite as much when I'm wearing a mask.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah. Well, that is one of the benefits.

BILL GATES: [*laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: What do you think in terms of, like meetings on Zoom and, you know, people are educating at home. I, for one, don't want to get in my car and go across town for a meaningless meeting, and I hope that I can continue to do that online, but, do you think any of these things will stick?

BILL GATES: I think just like World War II brought women into the workforce and a lot of that stayed, this idea of, "Do I need to go there physically?" we're now allowed to ask that.

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm [*affirmative*]

BILL GATES: If a salesperson is going to a customer, if they said, "Oh, I just want to stay at home today so I'll be on your screen," you would have thought, "Hey they don't really care about connecting with me."

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: And so, for the first time, the idea of learning or having a doctor's appointment or a sales call where it's just screen-based with something like Zoom, or...

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm [*affirmative*]

BILL GATES: ...Microsoft makes Teams, which competes with Zoom.

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*] Just, [*laughs*] just a quick plug. [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: But anyway... [*laughs*] I can't just...

RASHIDA JONES: Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. [*crosstalk*] I know. You've got to do it.

BILL GATES: ...there's, you know, great competition.

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: I think that will change dramatically. I think people will go to the office less. You could even share offices with a company that has its employees coming in on different days than your employees are coming in.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: Even the whole idea of the downtown, and traffic, and where you can live, or designing your house to make it great to be able to...

RASHIDA JONES: You think all of that will change...

BILL GATES: Yes.

RASHIDA JONES: ...because of what's happening? [*crosstalk*] Wow!

BILL GATES: Yes, and pretty dramatically. And of course, the software was kind of clunky when this all started, but now [*laughs*] people are using it so much people will be surprised by how quickly we'll innovate with the software.

RASHIDA JONES: I believe that human connection is important. I mean, obviously there's some things we can sacrifice, there's some things we don't. I don't feel comfortable going to restaurants and movies yet. When do you think we'll be normal again, where we don't feel scared to sit at a restaurant or it feels actually relaxing to go to a movie?

BILL GATES: There's a phase where we're going to have the numbers be super low in the United States, but it'll still be out in other parts of the world, so you could get a resurgence. I think a lot of people will remain quite conservative in their behavior, particularly if they associate with older people whose risk of being very sick is quite high. If we get it so it's

eliminated from the entire globe, then people are going to start to give you a hard time, "Hey, Rashida, we're here at the restaurant..."

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: ...you know...

RASHIDA JONES: Not yet, guys.

BILL GATES: ...get down here."

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*] I need more proof.

BILL GATES: But if it's still out in the world, you know, even the countries that have very little virus are mostly still being very careful about public events, because it could get into their country.

RASHIDA JONES: I think we can't continue to have this conversation without talking to an incredibly knowledgeable person. This is a person who, if you had to guess if he or I had been on the cover of *In Style* magazine, I would bet all of my Bitcoin that you would guess wrong. But they made the right choice, because Dr. Anthony Fauci is responsible for 2020's most important fashion trend, I think, which is masks. We have Dr. Fauci with us here today.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Hi, Rashida. Hi, Bill.

RASHIDA JONES: You know Bill.

BILL GATES: Hey, Tony. How are you?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): I'm very well. I know Bill well, yes. Good.

BILL GATES: [*laughs*] I can't believe how busy you are, Tony. You seem to be everywhere. How are you dealing with it?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): It's not easy, Bill, really. It's just so many things going on that you have to do, and it's just they overlap with each other. It's kind of stressful, but, you know, as you and I have discussed in the past, you kind of just dig deep, suck it up and do it.

RASHIDA JONES: Bill and I have been talking about life getting back to normal, and it feels hard to imagine right now, but can we expect any breakthroughs in testing or treatments?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): We have good therapies for people with advanced disease. You know, not spectacular, but good enough to prevent deaths and to diminish the time in the hospital. What we don't have a lot of, is something you can give to someone early in the course of infection to prevent them from getting to the hospital. This is important, not only, for example, in the United States and in the developed world, also in the developing world, where you don't have the hospital capabilities of taking care of somebody who gets seriously ill. If you could prevent them...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...from getting into the hospital by treating them early, I think they might be a game changer.

RASHIDA JONES: And is that something that is being developed?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Oh, yes. Very actively right now. There are multiple clinical trials in hospitalized patients, in patients as outpatients, in nursing homes, and even a very interesting study in families, in which one member of the family is infected and you give it to all the members, to see if you can prevent what we call household spread.

RASHIDA JONES: Is there a universe in which that is so readily available that until we get the vaccine, where everybody's kind of taking that, if they have exposure?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Well, that's not going to happen. *[laughs]* *[crosstalk]* That's not going to happen because, A, from a pure expense standpoint, that's going to be very difficult...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...but also, the quantity of it that would be available for the widespread use is also problematic.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. What about the people who don't get sick, who hopefully don't get sick? I mean, what is this winter going to look like, you know, once weather becomes an issue? What kind of precautions are we going to need to take?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): I think we're going to have to double down on the things that we've been talking about all along. The universal use of masks. Physical distancing. Avoiding

crowds. Doing things, if possible, I know it's tougher in the winter, but if possible, in an outdoor setting versus an indoor setting.

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): And washing your hands frequently. I'm actually concerned, as we enter the cooler months of the fall and the colder months of the winter, because our baseline of daily infections...

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...is indicative of a good degree of community spread that's already here existing. If you go into the winter, you would like to have as low a level of infection as possible, so that you're starting off in a problematic situation at least without having your hand tied behind your back.

RASHIDA JONES: There's got to be a magic number. I know that you were talking about Vermont has a very low infection transmission rate right now. That kind of thing, going into like a cold Vermont winter, is the goal to keep that rate or to have the growth slow?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): If you have a low test positivity is what they're referring to, namely the number of tests you do, what percent are positive, when you get an intermittent infection, which you inevitably will, no place is going to be zero infections during the winter.

RASHIDA JONES: Okay.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): There will be infections. If you have a low level of infection in the community and when you get these little blips, you can contain them much more easily by identification, isolation, and contact tracing. When you have such a high level of community spread, it becomes very difficult to do that.

RASHIDA JONES: Right, okay. You said identification, isolation, and contact tracing.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah.

RASHIDA JONES: Okay. This is just something I kind of want to know for myself, but do you think it's worth getting the flu shot? How does the flu play into this season?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): It's more than worth getting it, it's essential to get the flu shot. I mean, everyone six months of age or older should get the flu shot this year.

BILL GATES: Yeah, I totally agree with that. I just got mine. People will look back, and if this is a very low flu season, you know, give us a hard time, but the cost of the flu shot is so low that we've got to drive compliance as high as ever, even though it might be a very mild flu season.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Absolutely. Absolutely. Bill is totally correct. One of the things that I'm concerned of is our Australian colleagues in the southern hemisphere, they had their winter from April to the end of August. They did well by wearing masks and doing the things that we're speaking of. By doing that, not only did they bring the level of COVID down, but they had almost a nonexistent flu season...

RASHIDA JONES: Wow.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...because the things that prevent COVID-19 prevent flu.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): What you don't want is people to say, "Oh, therefore I don't need to get vaccinated." No. You want to do both.

RASHIDA JONES: What do you think is important about the public's trust in a vaccine once we have a vaccine in terms of distribution?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah. We're not in a good place there Rashida, because there is a baseline level of anti-vaccination in the country that goes back before COVID-19 and relates to the measles, mumps, rubella, and those types of attitudes about...

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...which are not based on science, that are just based on falsified data. We have a task on our hand. We have got to reach out in a very strong way to the community, to be transparent with them. When I say reach out, I mean engage the community with people that the community trusts.

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): This is particularly true of the minority populations, because of the historical understanding of the mistrust that African Americans, and to some extent Latinx have about the federal government.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): It dates back to historic shameful things that have happened. But they are very skeptical about getting vaccinated. You have a scientific task of developing a safe and effective vaccine, and you have a PR task of making sure people understand why it's important for them and their families to get vaccinated.

BILL GATES: I think the positive thing is, if you get 30 or 40% of the population that's willing, and then the rest of the population sees that those people didn't have side effects, that in fact they will come along and we'll get up to the high percentage, probably over 70%, that we'd eventually like to vaccinate to have transmission exponentially decline instead of go up.

Are you worried about the fact that the military's been pulled into this delivery process? People perceiving that in a strange way, Tony?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah Bill, I think you make a good point. I've heard that multiple times, that people don't fully appreciate what the military is doing in this. It's really simple. It's a logistic challenge to get supply chain, particularly when you need a cold chain. Some of the vaccines require very stringent requirements for temperature control, very, very low temperatures.

When this process called Operation Warp Speed came about, it had two elements to it, one scientific, which is led by a former head of a pharmaceutical company who makes vaccines, Moncef Slaoui, he used to be with GlaxoSmithKline. And then, because this is a collaborative effort with the Department of Defense, the Department of Defense came in and got us their chief logistic supply chain person, who has great experience and talent in moving things from place to place, tanks, and planes, and things like that.

He's gotten involved in helping out in the supply chain and the availability. The military's not going to be making the vaccine, they're not going to be administering the vaccine. Yet, when people hear military they immediately think it's another conspiracy...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...when in fact, it's not.

RASHIDA JONES: It's just about efficiency, and getting it to as many people as possible.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Absolutely. Exactly.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): That's exactly what it is.

RASHIDA JONES: Let's play this out. I get an alert on my phone. A vaccine has been approved. What happens? Talk us through the process.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): If a vaccine is approved to be safe and effective, then you have to have the availability of the doses. Because you're not going to, there are 330, approximately, million people in the country. Most of the vaccines are prime and boost. One of them is just a single dose. But most of them are prime boost.

RASHIDA JONES: Prime and boost. That's two doses?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): That's two doses.

RASHIDA JONES: Okay.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): You're going to need two doses. You need around 700 million doses, approximately.

RASHIDA JONES: Ok, that's a lot.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): We're not going to get 700 million doses the day that the...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): ...vaccine has been shown to be safe and effective.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): What happens is that there have been groups that have actually been tasked with making what's called prioritization of who should get it in the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth priority.

RASHIDA JONES: Right, who are they? Who gets it first?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah. It hasn't been officially determined yet. Usually health care providers, those who put themselves in harm's way of taking care of people. Then there are those who have underlying conditions, the elderly with underlying conditions particularly, that we know lead to an adverse outcome. Then, people who are essential workers in society, to make society work well. And then you have older people who may not have underlying conditions but just are risky because they're elderly. Then you get students. And then you get everybody else. There's five layers. That isn't the definitive one yet. They haven't fully decided. But if they do it the way they've done it in the past, that's the way it'll be.

BILL GATES: But the thing I'm not seeing yet. I can imagine having a website that you would go to and you would enter in the various data, and it would give you sort of a priority code. Tell you, "Okay, there's a drive-through site five miles away that you should go on a particular day." Until we get that website to kind of register the data and give people feedback about their priority, to me it's pretty vague how the recruitment's going to go on. I would think CDC would put up that website fairly soon.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah, I hope so Bill. I mean, you make a very good point. Theoretically it all sounds great until you say, "How are you going to make it happen?"

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: Yeah. Even with the diagnostic, we made a strong pitch to the CDC that they should have a website, and that therefore, only the, you know, inner city communities would get equal access. You wouldn't ever overload the test provider so that you were taking more than 24 hours to get the result back, because you were using prioritization. Anyway, I'm a little worried that that may never happen, or won't happen this year.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Right.

RASHIDA JONES: I'm also concerned that people would be, if they're fearful about a vaccine they'd be fearful to just give up their information to then be in line for a vaccine. Because I think there has to be some sort of like, proof positive, where somebody takes it, a group of people take it, and then in taking it they survive, and they're safer, and they're healthier, and that's going to encourage other people which might make the whole process longer, right?

BILL GATES: But I think there are 30% who get that it's not just beneficial to yourself, it's beneficial to everyone around you. We won't know how good of a transmission blocker the vaccine is for a while. But we'll have a sense. We're hopeful that along with protecting you from getting sick, that it reduces the number of super spreaders, and reduces the transmission quite a bit. There are some vaccines for other diseases that are fantastic at blocking transmission.

For this one, we're going to be learning even for a few months after we get the vaccine out exactly how strong that characteristic is. Some of the vaccines may be better at that than others, which, that'll be confusing.

RASHIDA JONES: I think...

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yep, yep.

RASHIDA JONES: So one is going to win? Like, one person's going to...

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): No.

RASHIDA JONES: No. Okay.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): No. No, no, no. In fact, that the plan is that we have more than one winners. The reason you want to get so many companies in is because you can't think provisionally only about us. This is a global pandemic. You know, and as Bill has been one of the great espousers of that, and I've followed him in that, and learned by his example about that, that we really have a responsibility to the global community. We, not only the United States, but all of the countries that are wealthy countries, to get as many players in as possible so that you can actually get enough vaccine for anyone and everyone who needs it. If you only have one winner, they're not going to make it. I want to see four winners, five winners. There are 11 vaccines in advanced trial now. Five of them are already in phase three trial in the United States. The other thing that I think we alluded to just a few moments ago is that there may be one vaccine that seems to work better in the elderly than in the young.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): And one may work better in children than it works in the elderly. So, when you learn that, and it'll take some time to learn that, then you might have, you know, more of a selective distribution, depending upon the demographic group.

BILL GATES: One thing I wanted to ask Dr. Fauci is, once we get the US... I mean, assume a vaccine gets approved, which you and I are quite hopeful for early next year. And assume we get pretty broad vaccination in the US, and the numbers go down a lot. If we have the disease elsewhere in the world, you know, it's not clear to me we can go back and do big sports events, or open up the bars, because you know, like Australia or South Korea, the risk of reinfection will be looming out there. And so, as long as it's in the world, I'm not sure we'll be completely back to normal.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): I totally agree. I mean, but it, I think it even gets more complicated than that. Because, if you have a vaccine, you know, that's 99% effective, and 99% of the people take it, then you're in a really good shape. But that is not going to happen Rashida.

RASHIDA JONES: *[laughs]*

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): I can assure you, that's not going to happen. If you get 75% effective and 69% of the people take the vaccine, you still have a lot of infection that has the capability of spreading. And as Bill said, that means that what we're going to likely be at... That's why people ask me the question all the time, "When are we going to actually get back to normal?" Well, I don't think it's going to be for a while, but I think we're going to get closer and closer to normal, namely a combination of the protective effect of the vaccine and a moderate degree of public health measures. I don't mean lockdown. I mean, you wear a mask when you're in a crowded situation. You maybe have theaters or sports events that you don't fill it to full capacity, but you at least have spectators. That's a big difference than, essentially, shutting everything down.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. Now, I know you guys agree on a lot of things about this, and you've talked about this a lot. Is there anything you disagree on when it comes to...

BILL GATES: I don't think so, no.

RASHIDA JONES: ...COVID-19. Philosophically, anything else?

BILL GATES: No.

RASHIDA JONES: No?

BILL GATES: We're both very enthused that the antibodies might reduce the death rate. You know, in the next few months, we'll learn a lot more about that. We're both enthused about how the vaccine companies have stepped up. You know, it's amazing. And the U.S., actually in that area, has been the leader in funding the research, which will be a benefit to the entire world. You know, so it seems weird in a very tough time, but I think we're both, along with the seriousness of the precautionary measures, we're both trying to deliver a bit of a hopeful message about the tools that are coming along.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Right.

RASHIDA JONES: Dr. Fauci, I know you're a very busy man. I'm so happy that you gave us some time today. What's the kind of final word? As we approach vaccine, as people try to live life, can you just give us the couple of things that the general public need to abide by to make for a safer...

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah.

RASHIDA JONES: ...quicker recovery?

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): You know, yeah, it gets back to what I said early on, and I repeated it so much, Rashida, that sometimes I think, people get bored...

RASHIDA JONES: You have to. No. It's not boring. You have to keep doing it.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): You've really got.

RASHIDA JONES: They have to hear you.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): No, you absolutely have to do things that sound so simple that people think they're maybe not relevant. But wearing a mask, keeping a distance, avoiding crowds, being outdoors as much as you possibly can, weather permitted, and washing your hands. We have seen what happens when you don't do that by the very unfortunate experiences that have become very public now in the United States. I mean, that's proof positive.

The other message that I like to give to people, because one of the things we're dealing with is a degree of essentially fatigue that people have about going through this. You know, it's amazing, it's almost like a distortion of time, Rashida. I mean, I want to tell people, don't give up. This is going to end. Science is going to help us with a vaccine and therapy, and if we pay attention to the public health measures, we can gain control of it. The thing you don't want to happen is that people said, "I've done this so long. I'm tired of it. The heck with it. I'm just going to go out there and do what I want to do."

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): That would only make this be more prolonged than it would end it.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. This is not going to end organically. It's up to us.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): No, it's not going to spontaneously go away. I think that's what we need to understand. It's not going to spontaneously go away.

RASHIDA JONES: So wash your hands, wear masks, stay away from crowds, believe in science and stay the course.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Right, exactly.

RASHIDA JONES: Thank you so much, Dr. Fauci. It's a pleasure to talk to you today.

BILL GATES: Great to talk to you, Tony.

DR. ANTHONY FAUCI (GUEST): Yeah. Thank you, Bill. It was great to be with you. Bill and I, we do this without the microphones every couple of weeks. We touch bases and compare notes and learn from each other, so it's great to see you, Bill. And thanks, Rashida. Appreciate it.

BILL GATES: You bet.

RASHIDA JONES: Thank you.

Wow. It really was nice to hear directly from Dr. Fauci. I always feel like he is so direct and he has all the information. He's so humble about pivoting when he needs to and he gets new information and he shares it with the American public.

Is it weird for you to see him kind of hit this international stage?

BILL GATES: Absolutely. You know, if somebody said, "Hey, there's a guy that you hang out with who is going to be a rock star," he might've been the last person I would name, but he stepped up.

RASHIDA JONES: How important is he in this process?

BILL GATES: Well, he's very important because people want sanity.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. I just wanted to ask personally, how has your life changed during this lockdown? And do you take precautions? Are you careful not to get it? Like, what are your parameters right now?

BILL GATES: Well, I haven't been to the foundation office or on a business trip since early March, and most of my time would've been going on business trips, doing a lot of conferences about the various diseases and raising money for helping the developing countries, and sitting in the office together with colleagues. And so my life has changed utterly. I'm kind of embarrassed to admit there's parts that I kind of like.

RASHIDA JONES: What do you like about it?

BILL GATES: Well, it's a simpler schedule. You know, if I do drive somewhere, there's no traffic. Business trips, even though I'm one of these macho people who says, "Okay, I'll get on a plane and go see those guys," that is disruptive to your being thoughtful, getting reading done, you know, your sleep gets disrupted.

RASHIDA JONES: Have you read more since lockdown?

BILL GATES: I've read more. Sadly, mostly what I've read [*laughs*] is about COVID. My general, goof-off reading hasn't gone up as much. You know, I've been lucky I've gotten more time with kids who...

RASHIDA JONES: Mm-hmm. [*affirmative*]

BILL GATES: ...are in college.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: Didn't expect to be at home.

RASHIDA JONES: They're home, right?

BILL GATES: Uh, now our one in medical school, one in college...

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

BILL GATES: ...are off away from home.

RASHIDA JONES: Does it feel normal or no? There's got to be...

BILL GATES: No. It's very abnormal.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: I hadn't realized the uncertainty weighs on young people who are trying to make their plans, trying to build up their friends. They want to have a sense, and the fact that they could be sent home at any minute is just...

RASHIDA JONES: It's weird.

BILL GATES: ...tricky.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah. I feel like there's a value system that has emerged that I didn't even know I had around COVID and how cautious I am, and I feel like I've heard this from a lot of friends and people being like, "Well, that person doesn't have the same standards as I do in terms of, you know, masks and washing hands and sitting outside." Have any of your friendships been thrown into doubt because of your relationship with how to protect yourself from COVID and their values around that?

BILL GATES: You're definitely right that given an excuse to really be isolated, some people, wow, they are hardcore.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

BILL GATES: And so I have to say to myself, "Well, should I be as hardcore as her?" I mean, I know people who won't even let the takeout person, you know, open the door. They have to put it on the porch and...

RASHIDA JONES: That's me.

BILL GATES: Uh, okay.

RASHIDA JONES: Wait. Does that mean we can't be friends?

BILL GATES: Well, no. It just means, you know, there's this...

RASHIDA JONES: We're not getting takeout together.

BILL GATES: ...spectrum.

BILL GATES: One thing that's tricky is when the kids have friends, how much do you interrogate...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...you know, the friends, about, "What have you been doing the last twelve days?" And, "Okay, you were with your parents. What have your parents been doing..."

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

BILL GATES: ...the last twelve days." It's almost like invading their privacy...

RASHIDA JONES: I know.

BILL GATES: ...to say, "Oh, well are you as virtuous as we are? If not, we're not going to let you come over."

RASHIDA JONES: It's a giant test of trust, really.

BILL GATES: That's right. Building, okay, what is that small group that you've chosen to be without wearing a mask and fairly close, which is mostly family.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. But you have science on your side. It's not like you're making kind of wild, illogical assumptions of how to keep this virus out of your life. You're following data-driven information that you've been given, right?

BILL GATES: Yeah, absolutely. I mean we didn't know how important masks were.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: Now, it's kind of mind-blowing. And the idea that somebody's resisting wearing a mask, that is such a weird thing to me.

RASHIDA JONES: Me, too.

BILL GATES: I mean what are these, like, nudists? I mean, you know, what, (*laughs*) we ask you to wear pants. And, you know, no American says, or very few Americans say that that's like some terrible thing.

RASHIDA JONES: Right. If you want to get back to normal life any time sooner, wear a mask, or don't wear a mask and stay at home. To ask for both things, feels like you just want things to be better, and they're not. You kind of have to just deal with what it is.

BILL GATES: Yeah. The mask helps you open up more things.

RASHIDA JONES: Why was there ever a time when we thought masks were not effective? That's what I don't understand. Masks just seem inherently effective to me.

BILL GATES: We think of respiratory diseases as coughing diseases.

RASHIDA JONES: Oh.

BILL GATES: The flu is spread by people who are coughing. Our model of respiratory diseases is heavily influenced by the common cold and the flu, and these unbelievable viral loads that you see with coronavirus don't occur with most of the other respiratory viruses.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: The idea, a super spreader is spreading at a level that's almost like measles, which is the most transmissible disease we've ever seen. A super spreader can go into a room, you know, spend an hour there, and infect a high percentage of people in the room. That's like measles. And yet, most people who get sick can go into that room and infect no one. Our model of flu with coughing turned out to be wrong. With flu, you have symptoms before you start infecting other people.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: And so it's a much easier disease to say, "Okay, that person goes and isolates themselves."

RASHIDA JONES: Oh, right.

BILL GATES: The mask, at first, we thought these simple masks didn't work. We were wrong about that. The complex masks we thought we had short supply, so we needed them for the medical workers. The N95 mask actually there was quite a bit of awareness but for the health care workers. The idea that a simple mask for the masses, including people who are spreading without knowing it, that that would make such a big difference, the evidence started to accumulate in April and May.

RASHIDA JONES: Right

BILL GATES: Now it's overwhelmingly clear that the upside is gigantic. The modeling group, one of the ones that the foundation funds, IHME, actually shows a projection that, if everybody wore masks, how many deaths we would avoid. You know, and it's over 100,000 deaths.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah. I wanted to ask you about school and what does it look like. What's the best-case scenario, because to me, that feels like the easiest place to get back to normal is to send kids to school, and it seems so essential. How do we get from, before vaccines are approved, is there a way that kids get to go back to school?

BILL GATES: Yeah. I certainly believe that, for younger kids, where online is just difficult, if you're young, paying attention just to that screen is very hard, so I hope in lots of cities in the U.S. in the first half of next year, we can have at least K-8 in session. The educational deficits we're building up, particularly of lower-income kids and lower-income families is just disastrous.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

BILL GATES: You know, yes, I think you should have less bars open and less restaurants open if that's what it takes to allocate your social mixing to education...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...as opposed to those other activities.

RASHIDA JONES: It feels like the right place to mitigate the risk, because the upside is so much higher than going to a bar, I think, at least.

BILL GATES: Right.

And, you know, if some teachers aren't comfortable because they're older, you know, you can move some of the high school teachers down to help out with K-8 and move some of the K-8 teachers up. Now, the public school systems didn't have much warning for the spring or even this fall, but, you know, I really hope that we set our priorities so that K-8 can resume...

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

BILL GATES:... in most of the country.

RASHIDA JONES: Yeah.

Now, do you think that the need for human connection ... Like what is it, where do you think that lies in the list of priorities? Obviously, we're talking about some baseline survival stuff, but I don't know about you, but I've been to a lot of Zoom cocktail hours. Sorry. Not Microsoft Teams cocktail hours. Have you had to do any online cocktail hours socializing?

BILL GATES: Not much. I've done visits with friends, where we drink wine.

RASHIDA JONES: On the internet?

BILL GATES: Yeah, absolutely. Now, my European friends, it's a little weird, because somebody has to drink wine in the morning.

RASHIDA JONES: They're probably fine with that, though.

BILL GATES: [*laughs*]

RASHIDA JONES: It's Europe. [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: I don't know. It might just be colored water that they are drinking.

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: I can't test it.

RASHIDA JONES: But it's no substitute, right? I mean, it's great that it's possible with technology, but it's no real substitute from getting a hug or making eye contact or picking up on kind of, you know, conversation and, and banter and rhythms with people. Being in the same room means something, doesn't it?

BILL GATES: Yeah, I think we may get the amount of kind of social contact you get from your work may go down, and so your desire to get more social contact in your community with your friends at night, you know, that might go up because, particularly, if we're doing a lot of remote work, then our desire to socialize, our energy to socialize after we stop working, will be quite a bit greater. You could shift the balance there somewhat.

RASHIDA JONES: Wow. That's the Bill Gates optimistic hot take on post-COVID, is that we will socialize more with people in our communities, and we will socialize less and make work sort of a lesser priority than our family and friends. I love that, if that actually happens.

BILL GATES: Yeah, so you could see that in your local community, your bedroom community, the restaurants and the entertainment could thrive, whereas, in the downtown, you know, maybe less so.

RASHIDA JONES: Well, how is that the fallout of this moment?

BILL GATES: Well, you have this problem.

RASHIDA JONES: We'd have to have learned something.

BILL GATES: In the cities that are very successful, just take Seattle and San Francisco. The cost of living in the downtown is such that teachers, policemen, they can't live there, even though that's where they come in and do their work, and even for the person who's well-paid, they're spending an insane amount of their money on their rent, and so it's a windfall to the urban real estate owners, you know, who are already quite rich, and you have these insane commute times...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...if you want to buy an affordable house. I do think that that holds back our country that some cities are too successful and some cities are not successful enough.

And so the idea that you can live further way, if you're only going in half the time, the number of cars on the freeway when you do go in is half as many, and you might be even willing to have a longer commute. And so the idea that you could get a cheaper house, a bigger house, and kind of feel a sense of community with a smaller set of people, you know, the 5,000 people or so in your nearby community, and that is more engaging than, you know, when you're in the downtown and it's just overwhelming how many people are all crowded in down there.

RASHIDA JONES: People like that, though, Bill. They like to be crowded in together. This is what I'm realizing. I don't feel that way, but other people do like to go to extremely crowded places that are loud.

BILL GATES: If you're raising a kid and you want them to be able to get out to a park and walk over to their friend's house, I don't know that the downtown...

RASHIDA JONES: Maybe not a park.

BILL GATES: ...is the best...

RASHIDA JONES: A bar.

BILL GATES: ...place for that. Okay.

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: I can have a bar out in my satellite community...

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: ...and you'll run into more people you know.

RASHIDA JONES: I love this vision of the future. Don't get me wrong. I'm just pointing out the fact that people do go out of their way to be in very crowded places. I'm not sure it's because it's crowded or it's new or whatever, but this being said, so if we talk about the next pandemic, okay, let's say, this wonderful kind of utopian version happens, where people kind of sober up and realize that their smaller communities are of the utmost importance and then they can go to work less, and they can work from home. Inevitably, we're going to have another pandemic, right?

BILL GATES: Yeah. Hopefully, with luck, it could be 20 years from now.

RASHIDA JONES: Right.

BILL GATES: But we have to assume that it could be three years from now.

RASHIDA JONES: If people are already set up in this way, do you think that the next one that comes will have less of a destructive impact?

BILL GATES: The main reason it'll have less destructive impact is we will have practiced. We would've done, you know, disease games like war games, and almost every country will respond like South Korea or Australia did where you're very quickly testing people and quarantine people, and our tools for testing will be way better. We won't be this stupid the second time around.

RASHIDA JONES: We hope.

BILL GATES: Yes, people like myself warned, you know, back in 2015, but when you see trillions of dollars and, you know, mental health and education, all these awful things happening, countries will get the experts, they'll get them the fairly modest resources, tens of billions, nothing like a military budget, that you need to have these tools invented and standing by, and so the next natural epidemic, even though it might have a higher fatality, I think we'll deal with it quite well, because this time it hit us over the head so hard, it's obvious that those prescriptions from 2015, they will happen.

RASHIDA JONES: I hope that you're right, I really do, but in my pessimistic mind, I still worry about this American identity and this need for autonomy and the autonomy is always at odds with the greater good [*laughs*] of this country. I hope I'm wrong, though. I hope you're right. I hope we are better prepared.

BILL GATES: No, no, no. We wear seatbelts. Now, they had to make the thing.

RASHIDA JONES: We didn't have the internet when people decided to wear seatbelts. [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: Well, no, I think death is a pretty clear thing to people. The next time around, people will respond more quickly. No, we do learn. Even though when you're right in the middle of the crisis, it seems insane.

RASHIDA JONES: I'm going to trust you on this one.

BILL GATES: Absolutely.

RASHIDA JONES: [*laughs*]

BILL GATES: Please, it's...

RASHIDA JONES: Okay.

BILL GATES: ...definitely lasted long enough to try our patience, and, you know, people have latched on to over-simplistic explanations or they've just gotten tired of distancing the way that they should, and so it's asking a lot of people. But it will make a big difference, and help is on the way in terms of the vaccine, getting that up, and particularly, if we explain what we know about the vaccine. I'm hopeful that next year, as the year goes on, we'll get closer to normal.

RASHIDA JONES: I can't wait to move to my satellite city with all my friends and family.

BILL GATES: It's going to be cool.

RASHIDA JONES: Bill Gates and Rashida Jones Ask Big Questions is a production of the Gates Notes. It is written and produced by me and Bill. Thank you to our guest, Dr. Anthony Fauci, for joining us today.

Our creative director is Ian Saunders. Our supervising producers are Jen Krajicek, Pia Dierking, and David Sanger. Our design director is Anu Horsman. Our technical director is Alicia Salmond. And our researcher is Brent Christofferson.

Thank you to executive producers Lauren Spohrer, Phoebe Judge, Bridgitt Arnold and Nick Mocerri, co-executive producers, Kara Brown and Meghan Groob, and producers Carl Malone and Nadia Wilson. Audio mix by Rob Byers, Michael Raphael and Johnny Vince Evans, and recording by Joel Barham. Galen Huckins is our composer. Our theme song is “Talk” by Khalid.

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