


Substantial Disruption



<https://www.substantialdisruption.com/>

Testing, Testing, Testing

By Mike Tully

The line at Tiki's Grill & Bar queued up eight feet from the hostess station. A young woman, with a marker in her hand, asked everybody in line to show her their COVID-19 vaccine information and identification. Once they did, she stamped their hand with a red mark and they were seated inside.

Tiki's is located on the third floor of the Aston Waikiki Beach Hotel, overlooking Kalakaua Avenue and Waikiki Beach. While the red stamp was unique to Tiki's, most businesses on the Hawaiian island of Oahu require proof of vaccination. I pulled out my driver's license, along with a digital vaccination card in my iPhone Wallet. The island of Maui has similar restrictions.

Kauai is not as strict as Oahu. Kauai is more bucolic; people are not crowded together as in Honolulu and Waikiki. The Oasis on the Beach restaurant took our temperature, but most businesses on the Garden Island were more casual. The prevalence of mask-wearing was much higher than on the mainland, however. Very few people on Kauai went around unmasked, at least while among others. Masking on the beaches was rare, which made sense. The brisk trade winds constantly cleanse the air and you're about as likely to catch COVID on the beach as to contract VD from a fantasy.

The "vaccine passport" debate is over in Hawaii. In order to avoid being quarantined, visitors must obtain an exemption from Safe Travels Hawaii. That involves registering on a state-owned website, answering a questionnaire, and uploading copies of your COVID-19 vaccination card. Once the State is satisfied you are fully vaccinated, you are issued a QR code that is downloadable to a smart phone. We had to show our QR codes when we checked our bags with Hawaiian Airlines at Phoenix Sky Harbor, as well as when we checked into the Hanalei Bay Resort in Princeville on the island of Kauai.

All of us except the one-year-old were fully vaccinated and boosted before we traveled to Hawaii. We all wore CDC and FDA approved N95 face masks. But Omicron is relentless. Notwithstanding our precautions and Hawaiian state requirements, three of our travel party contracted COVID-19. One person began to suffer symptoms the day after we arrived back in Tucson. They took a home test the next day, which showed the presence of an infection. Two others developed symptoms a day later.

Kris and I were asymptomatic, but needed to be tested, since we were obviously in close contact with infected persons. Home testing was not an option. I scoured the CVS and Walgreens websites and none of their stores had test kits in stock. Ordering test kits online required a three-to-five-day shipping delay, but that was irrelevant. They weren't available online anyway.

The next best option was to sign up for a test at one of the County's testing sites. I visited the Pima County Health Department website and registered Kris and I for testing appointments at a Paradigm Health testing center on East Grant Road. I naively believed we would walk into the facility, sign in for our scheduled testing, and be done within a matter of minutes. That is not how things work in COVID land.

The line was more than two blocks long. The temperature was in the low 40s. The line was not moving. Just getting inside the testing facility would take at least an hour, probably more. That raised the absurd prospect of getting sick to find out whether we were sick in the first place. We left. Dozens remained in line, many of them elderly. I wonder how many of them developed a serious illness from prolonged exposure to the cold air.

A member of our traveling party, who needed a test to authorize COVID-19 leave, stood in the same line later that day. The wait was an hour and a half. Why didn't the lab have employees reach out to the people in line and offer them test kits to take home and self-test? You had a line with dozens of people who were not socially distanced. Even though there were separate testing locations for asymptomatic and symptomatic people, there were no separate lines. That's right: symptomatic individuals were crowded into a packed line with the asymptomatic. The geniuses who ran the program turned a COVID-19 testing opportunity into a super-spreader event.

Kris and I were tested at our nearby Walgreens a few days later. We made appointments for drive-up testing. Mine took a total of four minutes. Kris, who had vehicles in front of her, took a few minutes longer. Both of us tested negative.

I don't know why we old farts escaped COVID-19 while our younger travel companions did not. We were obviously exposed. Perhaps we enjoyed a kind of super-immunity because we got our COVID-19 vaccine booster at the same time as our flu shots. Or maybe – more likely, actually – it was just dumb luck.

The person with the most severe symptoms had not yet gotten a flu shot. They may have been suffering from COVID-19 and the seasonal flu simultaneously. That would be the most lyrical malady in the history of disease: Flurona.

♪ *First there's a sneeze*
Then a cough, then a wheeze
Then you're down on your knees
'cause you've caught Flurona.

Just wear a mask
Quarantine is your task
It's the least we can ask
'cause you've got Flurona

M M M My Flurona
M M M My Flurona ♪

Nice beat. Easy to cough to.