

## *Introduction to the Special Issue*

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One of the great strengths of the College of Public Health at Temple University, and what makes it such a joy to lead, is the breadth and diversity of our disciplines. Highlighting this academic diversity is a chief goal of *CommonHealth*. In this issue, our students, faculty and researchers explore COVID-19 through a number of lenses in order to achieve a better understanding of the nature of the pandemic and the myriad ways it has impacted our lives:

- Researchers from Temple's Department of Health Services Administration and Policy, Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics, and the Center for Obesity Research and Education explore the relationship between COVID-19 infection and common comorbidities, such as heart and lung disease or obesity. Unlike many studies, this analysis looks at the rate of infection, as opposed to just the severity of outcomes. Both are key to our understanding of how COVID impacts those individuals who have common chronic conditions and diseases.
- From Temple's College of Engineering, Dr. David Brookstein traces the use of masks throughout the pandemic: from early doubts of their efficacy to the quick production of protective face masks for the general public as it became clear that mask wearing was a key strategy for preventing the spread of COVID-19.
- A narrative review from speech-language pathologists Molly Beiting (current Temple PhD student in Communication Science and Disorders) and Gabriele Nicolet shares early insights into the ways the pandemic has shaped their field, one of the many disciplines that has pivoted to videoconferencing and other remote technologies. Their work finds that, while telehealth has shown the potential for great benefit, there is still room for further innovation and research.
- With classrooms going virtual, indoor restaurants turning into sidewalk cafes, and the revival of drive-in movies, the pandemic has transformed the way we participate in seemingly every aspect of our daily lives. As a piece by our exercise and sport science students shows, gyms and fitness centers are no exception. These students spoke with fitness club owners, trainers and gym members to better understand the ways the pandemic has altered their routines.
- We think primarily about the physical effects of hospitalization on patients with COVID-19. Less discussed and documented is the mental health impact, such as feelings of anxiety, boredom and depression while isolated in hospital. Temple students and faculty in the occupational therapy and recreational therapy programs recount the work they spearheaded to deliver activities, resources and technology to help alleviate COVID-19 patients' isolation and the stressors that accompany that isolation. It is a powerful reminder of the impact we can make through our service to others.

- Even the simplest of preventive measures, like wearing a mask, are not always so simple for those without the resources to obtain them. Read about Fabric Masks for North Philly, an interdisciplinary group spearheaded by Temple students., Following Dr. Brookstein's design, these students created and delivered more than 13,000 masks for neighborhood residents, a testament to the power of grassroots efforts.
- There have been many complications as we try to understand the prevalence of COVID-19: availability and access to testing, the accuracy of certain types of tests, and the tendency for pre- or asymptomatic individuals to not seek testing. A team of researchers from our Water, Health and Applied Microbiology Lab, as well as graduate and undergraduate public health students, discuss a potential tool to track the spread of COVID: wastewater surveillance.
- Epidemiology and Biostatistics faculty member Dr. Krys Johnson writes about her experiences as a frequent media contributor in the wake of COVID-19, having appeared in more than 80 videos, articles and podcasts since March. It is an excellent look at what it is like to discuss public health in the public eye, and Dr. Johnson shares helpful lessons she has learned from her many media appearances.
- Associate Dean for Research Dr. David Sarwer takes a comprehensive look at mask wearing, examining its effect on interpersonal relationships, sharing findings from his own research on how mask wearing can affect how we perceive each other, and exploring implications for the future of healthcare delivery. While it is unfortunate that wearing a mask has become so contentious in our country, the effect on our relationships may be more complicated than it seems.
- Social and Behavioral Sciences researcher Dr. Sarah Bass explains the reasoning behind one of the biggest challenges across public health: How do we get people to behave in a way that is safer and healthier for themselves and their communities? In the time of COVID, this question has taken on newfound importance. Many in public health are frustrated with the resistance that seemingly commonsense public health measures have met with and are pondering what to do.

As the breadth of subject matter in this journal demonstrates, every discipline is crucial to a more complete understanding of COVID-19, and I urge you to consider how your area of research could further this knowledge. The pandemic illustrates what our college has always known: Public health is about so much more than the health of an individual or population. It is about where and how we live—and understanding the impact we make on one another.

In good health,

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