

The Next Big News Break Will Kill Coronavirus Fears

When The Next Pandemic Is Upon Us, We Will Ask What Was That Coronavirus

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A major news break on something that will have far-reaching consequences will trip up the virus coverage too. Soon we will be poring over the new news: breaking it down, analysing every aspect of it. We won't have time for the virus. Covid-19 will be history. Much like Sars, bird flu, swine flu and Mers.

Coronavirus. It's everywhere. Not the virus. The news.

Every website, every television channel and all the newspapers around the world are filled with the news about Covid-19.

News about its origins, its toll on humans and preventive measures have been discussed, dissected and disseminated.

Its DNA sequence too is out, and scientists have traced its cousins too. Only the horoscope is yet to be written.

True, the virus is nasty. It can be deadly too. But a healthy person can overcome the infection.

It is the speed and scale of the contagion that's worrying countries and governments, spooking global markets and disrupting trade around the world. There's even talk of a looming recession.

The wide coverage is the result of the pathogen's ability to spread fast, and that is sowing panic.

Yet, the world can't have enough of coronavirus. All other news have taken a back seat.

The plight of refugees from Syria and their travails as they cross from Turkey to the greener pastures of Europe do not move us anymore.

We don't even remember Aylan Kurdi. The image of the toddler's body washed ashore had seared the world conscience.

Many more Kurds are making the perilous crossing. We don't seem to care.

Even the Delhi riots that killed 53 people are forgotten. We are more worried about a virus from Wuhan province in China.

Obsession

Why are we obsessed with Covid-19? Fear. Yes, fear makes people irrational.

And the fear of the unknown terrifies us all the more. And not much is known of the coronavirus.

Forget the genome sequencing, the connection to bats (or is it pangolin?) and the blanket coverage. There are still lingering questions. Will it will survive the summer?

Even the modes of transmission are unclear; there are places where it has popped up without a



A Lebanese woman, wearing gloves and mask to protect against the coronavirus, flashes the victory sign during a march to mark International Women's Day in the capital Beirut, on March 8, 2020.

source.

A vaccine is several months away. We can't even predict the demise of the virus, that's continuing to haunt us every day.

But I have a hunch. I think the next big news break will do it. Over the last 30 years as a journalist, I have seen this happen several times. It's a pattern: one big news gobbling up another.

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virus coverage too. Soon we will be poring over the new news: breaking it down, analysing every aspect of it.

We won't have time for the virus. Covid-19 will be history. Much like Sars, bird flu, swine flu and Mers.

When the next pandemic is upon us, we will look back in wonder and ask what was that coronavirus? I couldn't wait to ask that question.

Gulf News

Parenting: The Rise Of Location Trackers For Kids As Young As 3

The devices are to calm parents' fears — but they hamper children's sense of freedom

JESSICA GROSE

One of my fondest memories from late elementary school is walking a mile home with a pack of friends. It's a composite of many days when we'd stop at a park next to the train station on our way home and play tag or swing, our legs pumping in the cool fall air. Our parents didn't know our exact coordinates, and they didn't seem to care that we didn't come home at the same time every day. I recall feeling high on that freedom — it's a feeling I want my kids to have, too.

This vision of childhood seems harder and harder to realise today.

Take the Gizmo, a smartwatch marketed to parents of children as young as 3 as a safety tool, which allows parents to track their children using GPS. There's also the Wizard Watch, the dokiPal and the Tick Talk, among others. The smartwatch market as a whole is nearly \$5 billion in the United States, and it's projected to grow 18 per cent in 2020, said Ben Arnold, a consumer technology industry analyst at NPD Group, a market research company.

Many of the products marketed to parents include some texting, phone call and pedometer features, but one of their major selling points is safety. For example: "The Wizard lets kids be kids and gives parents the confidence to allow their children to explore the world outside, without the stress and fear of wondering where they are or if they are safe." Parents in online reviews echo the latter sentiment, about assuaging parental anxiety — "Nowadays you just can't be too safe!" these parents are saying, and, "You want to know where they are and that they are safe at every moment."

How the gadgets work

But these products miss the point of what it means to be a kid, hampering children on the road to independence. And more heartbreakingly, trackers may prevent our kids from feeling truly free.

Still, the appeal of Gizmo is strong, even for parents who are ambivalent about overprotection. I didn't know what a Gizmo was until I had coffee with one of my saner friends. He was describing this smartwatch his then-10-year-old daughter had, which enables him to track her movements as she walks several blocks to school. The watch also has the functionality to alert him if she goes outside a predetermined geographic area, which he doesn't use. He said he checks her location about once a week, usually only when she doesn't text him after she's arrived at school.

"You're trusting a device instead of trusting your child."

- Sally Beville Hunter, assistant clinical professor in child and family studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

She's a rule-abiding, neurotypical kid; he's not concerned that she'll abuse her new freedom, and



he's not worried that she's not up to the responsibilities she has been granted. I expressed surprise that he felt the need to essentially LoJack such a child. But he told me the tracker is to assuage fears; he described it as "training wheels for me, for my anxiety." What's he afraid of? He's not really sure. He's not afraid she'll get kidnapped; they live in a very safe neighbourhood. He's not afraid she'll get lost — the city is a grid.

He described his fear as a "vague paranoia," something deep within his lizard brain that's calmed by knowing where she is. To him, the Gizmo provides a compromise for his family. Deep down he does want to give his daughter freedom like he had, because he started walking to school in second grade, but he still feels the need to find "a middle way" between giving her total independence and keeping her on the parental leash. "I think helicopter parenting has a real cost," for children he said.

GPS tracking of such young children is so new, there isn't reliable research on it — most of the research about children and smartwatches is about weight loss using the pedometer function. With that caveat in mind, the child development experts I spoke to were concerned that tracking young children may get in the way of their developing autonomy and responsibility, and it may also make them more anxious. After all, adults feel completely freaked out when they discover their location is being tracked without their active consent — why wouldn't kids?

Risks to social and emotional development

During the elementary school years, children should become more and more responsible and independent, and we need to give them appropriate boundaries. If you tell them that they're not allowed to leave the neighbourhood, and they need to be home at a certain time but you're still monitoring their

movements, that's a problem.

"You're trusting a device instead of trusting your child," said Sally Beville Hunter, assistant clinical professor in child and family studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

They might not be learning critical skills like knowing where they are and keeping track of time, if they know their parents will be yelling at them through a smartwatch to come home for dinner, Dr. Hunter said. Children's brains are still developing. If you don't let them develop these skills, she said, "The part of their brain that's supposed to be maturing in a more responsible way has shifted."

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- A child, on using location tracker

Dr. Joseph F. Hagan Jr., a clinical professor in paediatrics at the University of Vermont, was also concerned about the subliminal messages this kind of monitoring may be sending children. The risk to their social and emotional development isn't just about threats to their autonomy; it's also about the anxiety that can arise from "being exposed to a world being painted to them as dangerous, when it's not all that dangerous," Dr. Hagan said. There is some evidence that anxiety among children is on the rise — a study published in 2018 showed that diagnoses of anxiety for children 6-17 rose nearly 20 per cent between 2003 and 2012 — and we don't need to add to it, especially considering that children are far safer by many measures than they were 50 years ago.

Indeed, the risk of a child being kidnapped by someone they don't know — the most extreme parental fear meant to be soothed by a GPS tracker — is vanishingly small in the United States. The vast majority of missing children are runaways, and children running away are not going to take their

smartwatches with them. Furthermore, even in that rare case of kidnapping by a stranger, a GPS tracking watch cannot guarantee a child's safety. The kidnapper could turn off the watch or throw it out the window. Motivated kidnappers aren't even deterred by GPS tracking microchips implanted in a person's body; there was a case in Mexico in 2010 where kidnappers reportedly dug a microchip out of a man's arm with scissors.

I asked my friend's daughter, who is now 11, how she felt about the fact that her father checked in on her location from time to time. "Well, I am a little creeped out by it, because my dad can know where I am," she said. "But also, it makes me feel a bit safer. I doubt I'm going to get kidnapped, but if I do get kidnapped, he could find me and call the police." When I asked her if she thought about getting kidnapped before she got her Gizmo, she said, not really — perhaps illustrating Dr. Hagan's point about making the world seem more dangerous. Many of her friends have Gizmos and a few already have phones. "I don't think my dad would really let me walk to school if I didn't have one," she said, but overall, the tracking doesn't bother her — she has accepted the digital tether; it's her normal. "I don't really care because he's not looking at it that much."

It's invasion of privacy

This is not to say that smartwatches for kids don't have any benefits. As Heather Kirkorian, associate professor of human development and family studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, said that, for example, their texting and phone call functionality can be useful in a world where pay phones aren't available the way they used to be. My friend's daughter loved the fact that she could call her friends using the Gizmo and that it opened up a new mode of communication with her family. And certainly for children with special needs who may not be as independent as other children their age, the GPS tracking feature makes more sense. (Indeed, there is a tracker designed especially for children with autism: AngelSense.)

"Whenever I'm talking to parents about using technology, I'm always focused on what the goal is," Dr. Kirkorian said. The most important thing is the relationship between the parent and the child. If the monitoring is temporary and given along with new responsibilities, that's one thing. But if it's a permanent invasion of privacy — that's far from ideal. As kids get into their teen years, being tracked can undermine trust between parents and children, as Lisa Damour, a psychologist, pointed out in the Times in 2018.

There has always been tension, Dr. Kirkorian said, between the promise of safety for a parent and allowing independence for a child. My friend said he feels less stress since getting his daughter that Gizmo. But is it at the cost of breathless, joyful freedom?

New York Times