It Happened!

In a blog post titled "[Testing Positive Again](#)," POZ blogger Andrew Spieldenner, PhD, shares how testing positive for COVID-19 brought up similar feelings from his experience living with HIV. Here is an edited excerpt.

March 28, 2022 By **Andrew Spieldenner**

Yes, it happened. After a complete vaccination cycle and a third (booster) shot of the COVID-19 vaccine, I got it (a mild case thanks to the aforementioned vaccine shots).

Thanks to remote-work options, I have been splitting my time between Guadalajara and Montreal. In both places, mask mandates are mostly followed—at least where I live. In Canada, vaccine requirements are checked for indoor entertainment venues. In Mexico, a lot of recreation occurs outside or in open-window settings. I feel fairly safe in my bubble.

But then I came back to the United States to switch out my Canada winter clothes for the Mexico suitcase. I met up with some friends. On the Monday following that, one friend (who gets tested weekly at his university) told me he tested positive. I called my brother and asked him for a home COVID test. He grabbed one and rushed it to me. It was positive.

My brother is a health care professional. He indicated that I should isolate for 10 days from the first symptom. He had heard a cough, but I had fatigue and a cold for a few days longer. It looked like my COVID-19 was mitigated through my vaccine shots, and my experience would be mild.

I was supposed to leave for Mexico in a few days. Was it safe to travel? How many people would be exposed? Some of my friends in Mexico have not been vaccinated yet, and there was a birthday party that weekend.

These were the thoughts that raced through my head as I called the airline, found another ticket and booked a local hotel so that my family would not be further exposed. I packed up my luggage and went to the hotel for the rest of my isolation.

I voice-messaged a friend I'd had dinner with the night before. He asked me to stop apologizing, saying it wasn't my fault. I had not even realized I was apologizing so much. I felt like crap—"infectious" in a way that was familiar and unhealthy for my mind and spirit.

Getting COVID-19 showed me a few important points:

We do not live in a society that allows for time off for sickness.

We expect to go to work with a cold, a flu or any number of pains and aches. I am from a family of refugees who never believed in taking a day off, and this belief has carried into my life. Why do I have such a difficult time staying at home or working from home if I feel ill?

We need COVID-19 home tests.

With a trip ahead, I didn't want to spend time in a testing facility waiting for my results. So without the home test option, I would have gotten on a flight and seen my friends, exposing people. Home tests should be available for free to everyone who needs them.

Isolation has costs.

In my case, it was the hotel and food delivery, the change in travel plans and the shift in time spent with family and friends. Isolation brings on mental anguish too.

Stigma and blame are dangerous.

As we learned in HIV, stigma and blame are dangerous and become barriers to effectively battle a pandemic. In the case of COVID-19, I still hear people ask, "How did you get it?" and "Do you know who you got it from?" None of that matters. What matters is how we protect one another and ourselves.

People have tried to make me feel "dirty" for my HIV for decades. Screw them: I refuse to engage that logic.

Vaccines work.

Thanks to the vaccines, I had a mild experience. Now we just need to end the global vaccine disparities.