

Virus Diary: In Hawai‘i, pandemic, pregnancy, and plumerias

By **Jennifer Sinco Kelleher**
The Associated Press

HONOLULU — I remember setting out for a late afternoon run and the overpowering perfume of plumerias from the tree outside my house. That’s the moment I knew something was up.

Normally, for me, getting a whiff of the bright pink flowers requires plucking one and holding it close. That afternoon, I could smell them from afar.

I had temporarily developed a super-human sense of smell when I was pregnant with my daughters, now nine and seven. So as I breathed in the scent of plumerias, the thought crossed my mind: Could I be pregnant?

I brushed it off as part of the longing I’ve had for years after the birth of my (until now) youngest. Almost daily, I’d daydream about having a third child. I had a miscarriage before my daughters were born, and it felt like our family was incomplete. But I always tell myself it’s not practical: We live in one of the most expensive cities in the U.S.

Now is an especially bad time. The pandemic has decimated Hawai‘i’s economy. The state has been forced to pull the welcome mat from throngs of tourists who normally purchase the food my husband sells at farmer’s markets.

I’m not pregnant, I insisted as I set off on my usual three-mile route.



PANDEMIC & PREGNANCY. At five months pregnant, reporter Jennifer Kelleher is seen going on a morning run in Honolulu, in this August 28, 2020 file photo. (Photo courtesy of Jennifer Sinco Kelleher via AP, File)

Then I found myself jogging effortlessly into Waikiki, then back up to my home near Honolulu’s Punchbowl crater. My running app showed I ran 8.9 miles.

I’ve read somewhere that thanks to a surge in red blood cells, early pregnancy gives athletes a performance boost. It proved true during my two pregnancies.

The next weekend: 10.25 miles — my longest run in more than two years.

Somewhere in between struggling through remote schooling for my daughters, working from a very hot spare bedroom, and worrying about the future of my husband’s business, the symptoms became harder to ignore — including cravings for pineapple doused in vinegar

and for *limu*, or seaweed.

During low tide, I scrambled over craggy reef at a spot near Diamond Head where my mother took me as a child to gather a type of limu called *pokpoklo* in Ilocano, her Filipino language. I rinsed the sand off right there and ate it — as if my body desperately needed the chewy, dark green, nutrient-rich seaweed.

I knew I should take a test. But I really didn’t want to be inside a store, and it seemed awkward to use Target’s drive-up service for a home pregnancy test.

On Mother’s Day, my husband couldn’t take it anymore. He had to know. I wanted to wait. (Honestly, I just really wanted a mimosa that day.) He went to the store and

returned with a test. I had a feeling there would be no mimosas for many months.

I laughed when I saw “PREGNANT” in the plastic wand’s tiny window. Then I braced myself for a flood of panic because of the pandemic.

But it never arrived.

I do worry about not knowing what would happen to the baby if I catch the virus, and I fret about precautions to keep our family safe. But mostly, this pregnancy brings a calming hope.

I’ve accepted that this one will be different. I have a new obstetrician. I may never know what she looks like without a mask, but she has kind eyes. My husband may not be allowed to witness any ultrasounds, but if you’ve seen one amorphous fetus image you’ve seen them all. And if a spike in cases forces hospitals to revert to restrictions on visitors, he may not be at my side when it comes time to deliver.

Until then, I’ll keep running. On days when I’m not bowled over with nausea, I instantly feel better and stronger as soon as my feet hit the pavement under that plumeria tree.

Virus Diary, an occasional feature, showcases the coronavirus pandemic through the eyes of Associated Press journalists around the world.

Trump’s diagnosis shows U.S. vulnerability to the coronavirus

By **Carla K. Johnson and Jim Salter**
The Associated Press

ST. CHARLES, Mo. — President Donald Trump’s startling COVID-19 diagnosis serves as a cruel reminder of the pervasive spread of the coronavirus and shows how tenuous of a grip the nation has on the crisis, health experts said.

With U.S. infections rising for several weeks, Trump was one of about 40,000 Americans who learned they had tested positive when he broke the news early Friday. The president went through a “very concerning” period Friday, White House chief of staff Mark Meadows said.

It was dramatically different than the rosy assessment from Trump’s staff and doctors, who took pains not to reveal the president had received supplemental oxygen at the White House before he went to a military hospital. Some of Trump’s top advisers and allies also have tested positive recently.

“No one is entirely out of the virus’s reach, even those supposedly inside a protective bubble,” said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

Eight months after the virus first reached the United States, worrying signals mounted of what’s ahead this fall. The National Football League postponed games after players on several teams tested positive. Some hospitals in Wisconsin have run low on space, and experts warned of a likely surge in infections during the colder months ahead. Some economists say it could take as long as late 2023 for the job market to fully recover.

The U.S. leads the world in numbers of confirmed infections, with more than 7.4 million, and deaths, with nearly 210,000. Only a handful of countries rank higher in COVID-19 deaths per capita.

“The statistics are so mindboggling, they make us numb to the reality of just how painful, unacceptable, and absurd this is,” said Dr. Reed Tuckson, board chairman of the nonpartisan Health Policy Alliance in Washington. “Every single American must double down on their vigilance. If we don’t, then we are being foolhardy and

irresponsible.”

Wallace Clark, 50, of Springfield, Illinois, said he was flummoxed by the president’s diagnosis but hopes it makes other people realize that they need to take the pandemic seriously.

“Some people probably think they’re immune or can’t get it, but it is possible. It does send a message,” Clark said, as he put on a face covering before entering a health club.

The president’s infection occurred as the nation has reached a crossroads in its response to the virus.

The U.S. is averaging 40,000 cases per day. The situation is improving in Sun Belt states that were hot spots in the summer — months after states reopened in May and gatherings during the Memorial Day and July Fourth holidays fuelled a surge in infections, hospitalizations, and deaths.

Many of those states took action recently to loosen restrictions. Mississippi’s governor ended a mask requirement, South Carolina’s governor said he would ease capacity restrictions on restaurants, and New Orleans bars were given the greenlight to sell carry-out drinks. Florida has moved ahead with an aggressive reopening that gives bars and restaurants latitude to allow as many customers as they choose.

The outlook is gloomier in the Midwest.

Wisconsin reported a record daily death toll last Wednesday, and hospitals in multiple cities said they were running out of space. A 530-bed field hospital that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built on the state fairgrounds in the city of West Allis in April could be put to use if the situation worsens.

Iowa reported more than 1,000 new cases for the third consecutive day Friday as the virus continued to aggressively spread in many regions of the state. South Dakota health officials reported record highs in deaths and cases Thursday.

In Missouri, governor Mike Parson, a Republican who allowed the state to reopen in mid-June, was diagnosed with COVID-19 on September 23. Several people waving Trump signs and American flags at passing drivers in the St. Louis suburb of St. Charles on Saturday said Trump and Parson getting infected won’t

change their behavior. Most of the roughly two dozen Trump supporters who gathered didn’t wear masks.

Vince Kuhn, a 72-year-old retiree and Vietnam War veteran from Dardenne Prairie, Missouri, called Trump “a brave

man” who likely caught the illness because he was willing to be out with the people. Kuhn said he opposed restrictions like mask mandates before the president got sick, and he still does.

Continued on page 15



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