

## An Australian Covid Story

After being rescued from our ship in the Falkland Islands, I was able to fly back to Perth and “snuck in” on night of 27 March, just before government hotel isolation requirements for recently returned travellers came into effect here. Although I have not been tested, I’m certain I was COVID positive at that time based on test results from fellow expedition team shortly after we parted company (mandatory testing for residents flying back into South Africa and Seychelles), as well as my own minor symptoms: total and utter loss of sense of smell (aka “anosmia”) starting around 30 March, a few days into my isolation. Literally nothing in terms of symptoms at all apart from that – no congestion, no fatigue, full of energy bright eyed and bushy tailed

Easter Saturday marked two weeks since I returned to Perth. If I had been totally symptom free, I would have been allowed to go out (with care) after that as per general recommendations for those who had travelled overseas. However, I was clearly still COVID positive and therefore potentially contagious. More phone calls to the COVID hotline followed (I’d been giving them regular updates and also had a good phone chat with Dr Brewster at the Clifton Hill Clinic). My sense of smell slowly started to come back over Easter weekend, and was fully back on Easter Monday. Hooray! Some discussions I’d read suggested loss of smell could be long term or even permanent. At the same time, new Australian guidelines came out for those who had had minor COVID symptoms, and were wondering when it would be “safe” for them to venture out again (ie no longer in danger of infecting others!). The word was to wait 72 hours after those symptoms had all gone before going out (and when you do, to continue social distancing, hand wash hygiene etc). Based on that (plus cross check with physician friend in NZ as to what their guidelines were, answer 48 hours), I ventured out from the apartment for the first time last Thursday which was bliss.

There was also a lot of talk from the Patagonia trip about this key question – when would we be no longer infectious and “safe” to leave isolation. South Africa is requiring two negative tests after having tested positive before you’re considered safe. One person in South Africa was still continuing to test positive over Easter weekend, though she maintained that she’d had no symptoms since head cold in the Falklands. Another (in Austria – where like Australia, no tests are available unless really sick – had also developed cold-like symptoms once back home) said she would take her cues from the South African ie she wouldn’t go out until the South African was testing negative. As you can imagine, that made me feel slightly uncomfortable but then again I was and am following official Australian guidelines. Then, a few days ago, the South African suddenly posted that her sense of smell had come back! She hadn’t realised it was gone. No wonder she was still testing positive. She wasn’t symptom free after all.

Note that there are still no tests available in WA for those who are not showing respiratory distress, even if just returned from overseas and contact with COVID 19 positive people. I could still have tried to get one during my time of strict isolation, but I’d have had to go down to local clinic which would have defeated the purpose – ie my main question at that point was when am I safe to leave the apartment/am I still infectious? So no test for me, and now I’d be negative anyway. And of course, I am now immune to further infection. Hooray! At least for a while. Not sure how long but various news sites suggest at least several months, perhaps as long as a year based on other coronaviruses. I would like a serology/antibody test at some stage, but I don’t think reliable tests have been developed yet.

I also called the Red Cross to enquire about making a blood donation, having heard that plasma from those who have had COVID and survived may be useful in those who are struggling with the disease. Besides the fact that the Red Cross always need blood, probably now more than ever. I donate from time to time but often struggle to find time or an appropriate day (generally too many commitments requiring physical activity). A good discussion with the team there and ultimately the conclusion was that I should wait for 1 month after recovery from COVID before coming in to give blood. That would be on the week starting 12 May. I will definitely be going in to do that. I’m hoping also that by that time they have a good antibody test for COVID 19. As per some discussions, so called “immunity passports” may become quite useful in the near future.

In meantime, I am loving this period of quiet contemplation and downtime. Working on a variety of projects, work and play. I also have good regular schedule for home workouts including daily yoga which is wonderful. And lots of time for reading! And photobooks. I’m still back in 2018 for that. I’m probably a natural hermit in many ways!