Don’t Count on Warmer Weather to Stop the Pandemic

COVID-19 is not the flu. But amidst the ongoing pandemic, many people hold out hope that the two diseases have something crucial in common: a seasonality that will loosen the global grip of SARS-CoV-2 as the weather warms.

Many infectious diseases wax and wane with the changing months. Some, like flu, spike when the weather turns cold, while others, like cholera, thrive during warm, rainy summers. Whether such a pattern applies to SARS-CoV-2 is unclear. With spring just barely sprung, scientists haven’t had the time to suss out SARS-CoV-2’s annual schedule—if it sticks to one at all.

Besides, relying on seasonality to curb a pandemic can be a dangerous line of thought, says C. Brandon Ogbunu, a computational epidemiologist at Brown University.

“Seasonality has the potential to decrease the rate of infection,” he says. But this factor alone won’t get the world anywhere close to resolving the outbreak. “If I was a betting person ... all [my money] would be on the impact of human behavior and infrastructure” to slow transmission, he adds. “That’s where we need to put our emphasis.”