

The covid-19 pandemic will be over by the end of 2021, says Bill Gates

But millions of deaths are yet to come in poor countries

MILLIONS MORE are going to die before the covid-19 pandemic is over. That is the stark message of Bill Gates, a co-founder of Microsoft and one of the world's largest philanthropists via the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, in an interview with Zanny Minton Beddoes, *The Economist's* editor-in-chief, in early August. Most of these deaths, he said, would be caused not by the disease itself, but by the further strain on health-care systems and economies that were already struggling. He also lamented the politicisation of the response to the virus in America, and the spread of conspiracy theories—some implicating him—both of which have slowed efforts to contain the disease's spread. But he offered reasons for hope in the medium term, predicting that by the end of 2021 a reasonably effective vaccine would be in mass production, and a large enough share of the world's population would be immunised to halt the pandemic in its tracks.

It is not enough for there to be a vaccine: people have to be willing to take it. And on this, too, Americans are lagging behind. A recent poll by Gallup found that one in three would not agree to receive an FDA-approved vaccine, even if it were free. But here the news is more favourable. The latest research, Mr Gates explained, suggests that the other coronaviruses in circulation, and partial immunity afforded by vaccines already in use for other diseases, already grant a measure of protection against covid-19. It is also not as contagious as some other diseases. The current best estimate is that 30-60% of the world's population will need an effective vaccine in order to halt the pandemic. "Fortunately, this isn't measles. We don't need over 90% of people to take the vaccine."

