



Folkhälsomyndigheten

What is the post-COVID meaning of risk and the 'precautionary principle'?

Anders Tegnell



Risk of pandemics

- Spanish flu
 - Extensive and mainly on the young but also happened during times when society was vulnerable
- Asian and Hong Kong
 - Largely not well documented but limited
- Swine flu
 - Low but mainly young
- Covid-19
 - Unknown so far but effects of measures extensive



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Precautionary principle

- Wikipedia
 - The **precautionary principle** (or **precautionary approach**) is a broad [epistemological](#), philosophical and legal approach to innovations with potential for causing harm when extensive scientific knowledge on the matter is lacking. It emphasizes caution, pausing and review before leaping into new innovations that may prove disastrous.^[1] Critics argue that it is vague, self-cancelling, [unscientific](#) and an obstacle to progress.



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Precautionary principle

- In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.

— Rio Declaration, 1992

- When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not fully established scientifically. In this context the proponent of an activity, rather than the public, should bear the burden of proof.



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Proportionality

- The concept of proportionality is used as a criterion of fairness and justice in statutory interpretation processes, especially in constitutional law, as a logical method intended to assist in discerning the correct balance between the restriction imposed by a corrective measure and the severity of the nature of the prohibited act.
- Coercive measures on individuals can only be taken if no other less restrictive possibility is available.



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Public Health Agency Sweden – mission and tasks in brief

- National expert agency under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs
- Broad responsibility for surveillance, disease prevention and health promotion i.e.
 - Mental health
 - Non Communicable Diseases
 - ANDT¹
 - SRHR²



Good and equal health – Eight key areas of life

¹Alcohol, drugs, doping, tobacco, gambling

²Sexual and reproductive health and rights



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Communicable Disease Prevention and Control at the Agency

Photo: Daniel Olsén

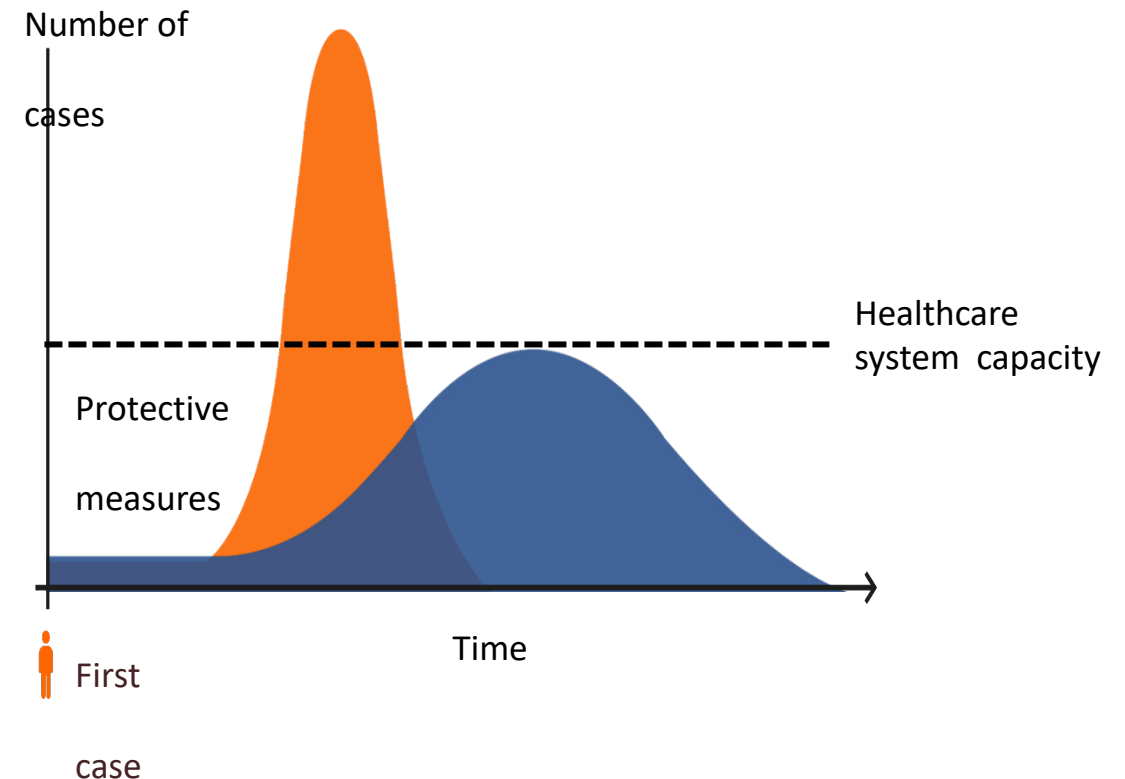


Only high-containment laboratory at biosafety level 4 (BSL-4) in the Nordic countries

- National coordination of infectious disease prevention and outbreak control
- National Database “SmiNet” with 60 notifiable diseases
- National Vaccination Register

Overall Swedish COVID-19 strategy

- Minimize mortality and morbidity in the entire population
- Minimize other negative consequences for individuals and society – difficult trade-offs
- Protection of risk groups
- Tailored measures and interventions
- Sustainable over time
- Virtual lock down – but with more voluntary elements



<https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/the-public-health-agency-of-sweden/communicable-disease-control/covid-19--the-swedish-strategy/>



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A combination of binding regulations and voluntary measures



Binding regulations have included:

- Ban on visiting nursing homes
- Distance education for secondary schools and universities
- Bans on gatherings of >500 (12 March), >50 people (29 March) and >8 (20 Nov)
- Physical distancing enforced in restaurants and cafés
- Travel restrictions and entry ban



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A combination of binding regulations and voluntary measures



Recommendations have included but not been limited to:

- Work from home if possible
- Meet few people
- Physical distancing
- Face masks in public transport during rush hours



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Public response to the strategy?

- 80% of people have adjusted their everyday lives in order to follow the social distancing and hygiene recommendations¹
- High, sustained levels of public trust in the Public Health Agency (69%) and in healthcare institutions (80%)²
- High level of compliance with recommendations
- Travelling decreased significantly with voluntary measures

¹Novus data (week 23 2021)

²Kantar Sifo data on public trust (12 August – 25 August 2021)

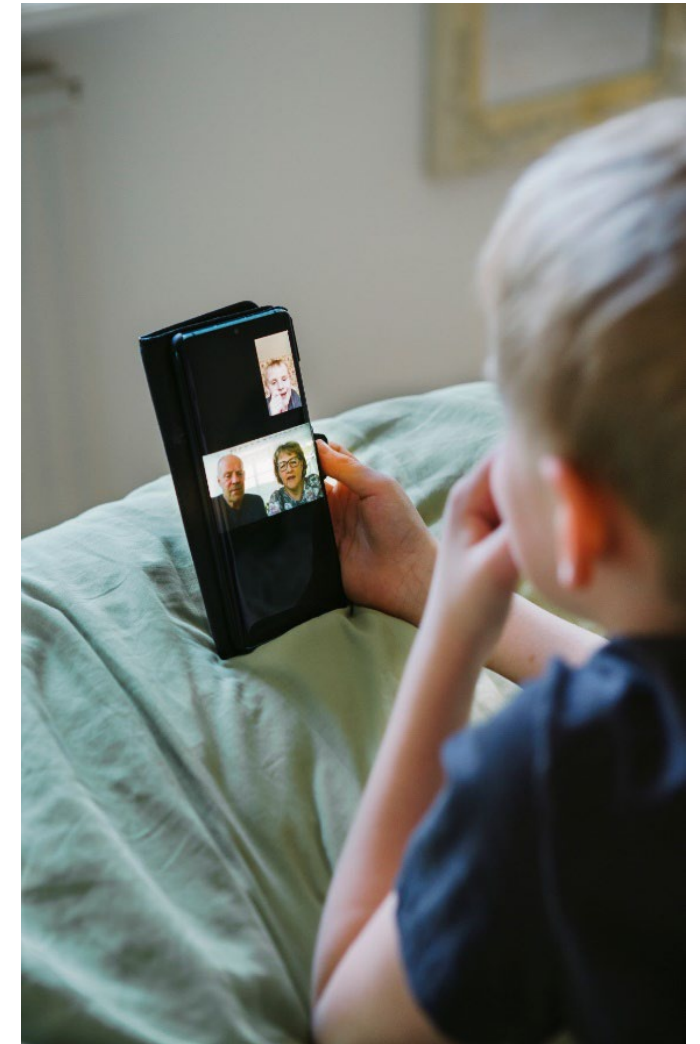


Photo: Madeleine Wejlerud/Scandinav Bildbyrå

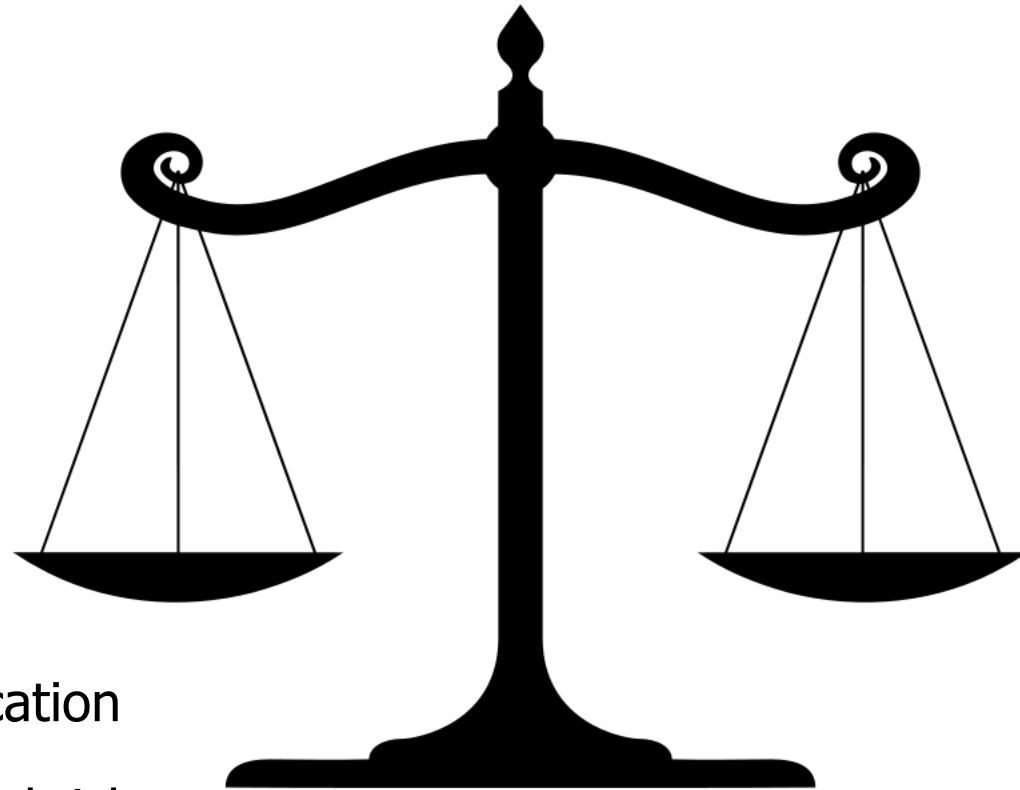


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Schools



- Loss of education
 - Increased risk in many areas
- Mental health etc

- Lower risk for individuals?
- Less transmission in society?



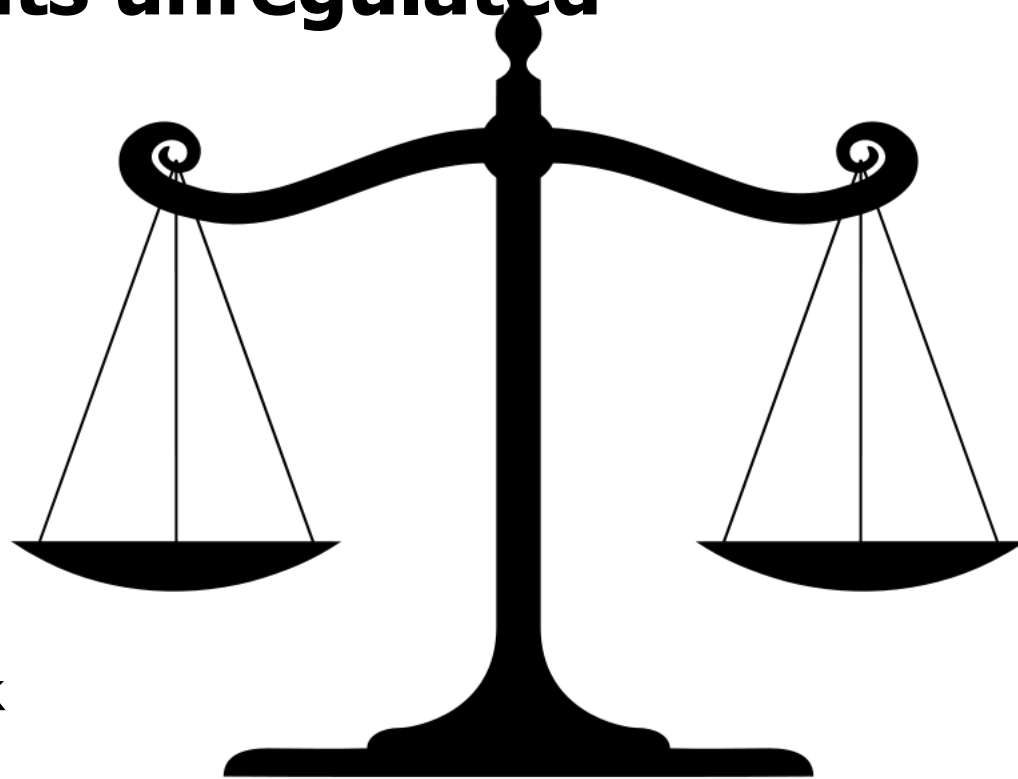
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Restaurants unregulated



- Loss of work
- Bad for economy

- Lower risk for individuals?
- Less transmission in society?



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Restaurants regulated



- Economy

- Lower risk for individuals?
- Less transmission in society?

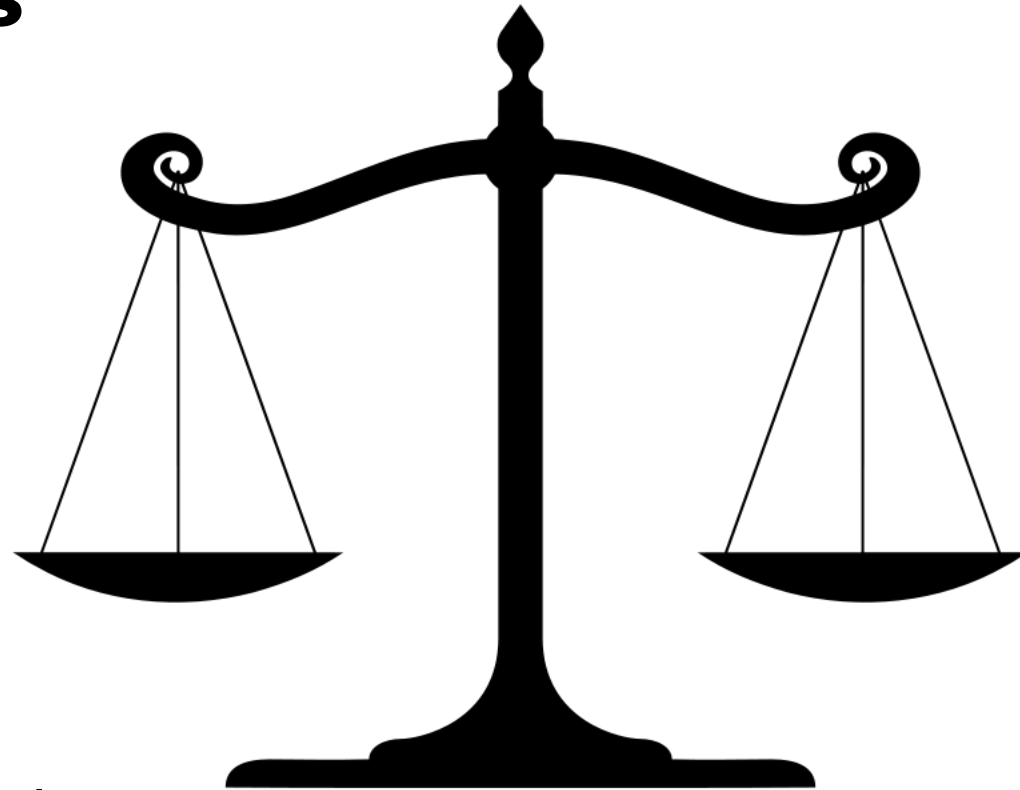


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Big events



- Economy
- Mental wellbeing

- Lower risk for individuals
- Less transmission in society

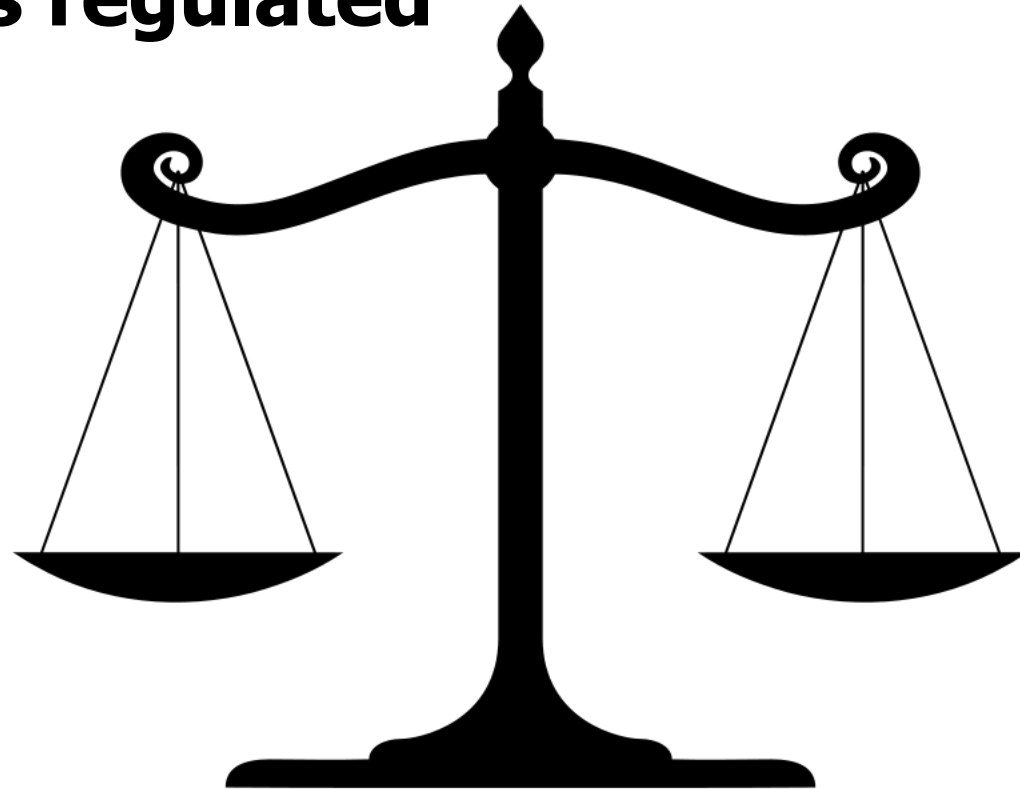


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Big events regulated



- Economy

- Lower risk for individuals ?
- Less transmission in society ?

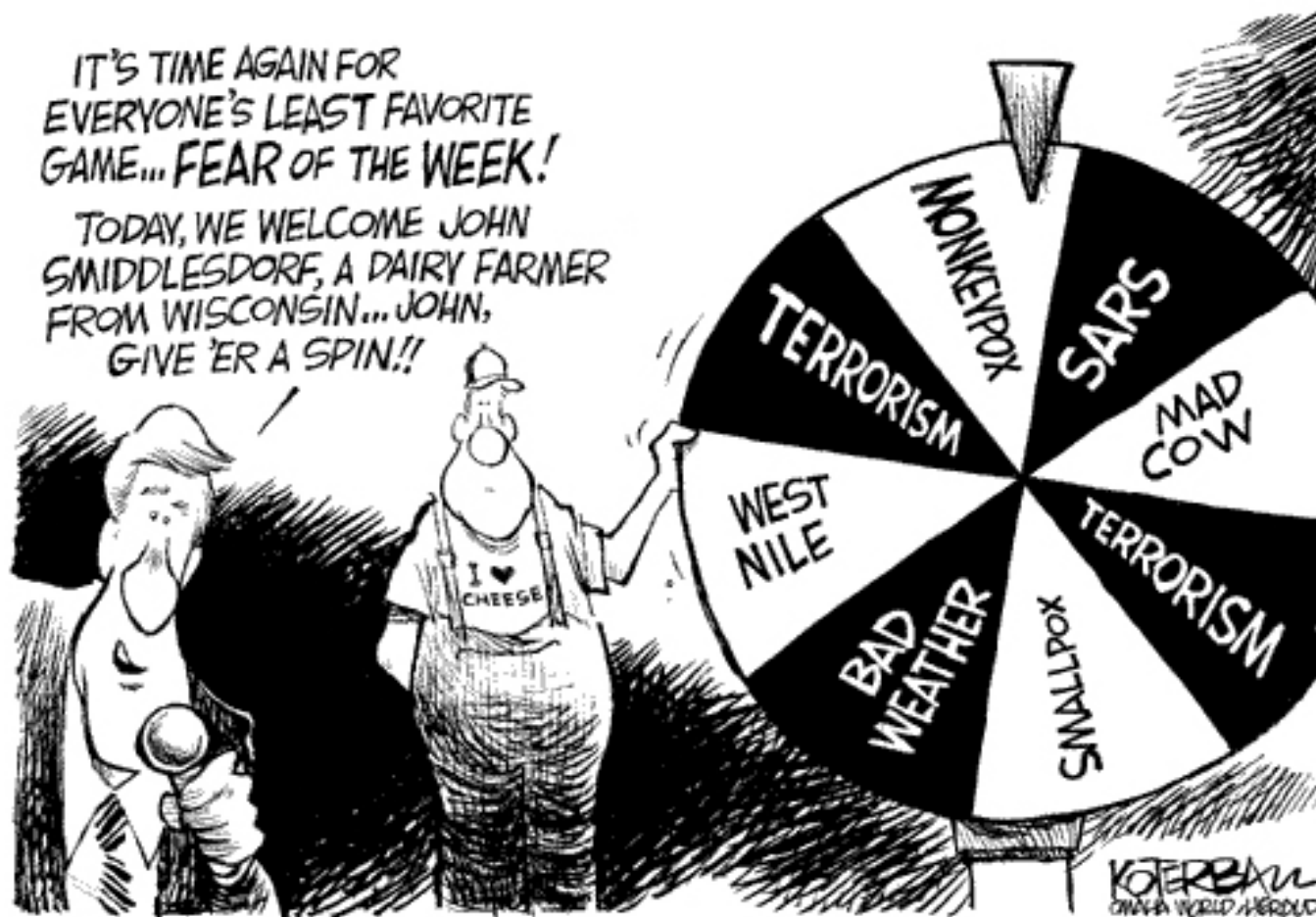


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What happens next time??



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