

CBS Mornings

04/06/22

8:00:46 a.m. [TEASE]

7 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Author Michael Lewis]

TONY DOKOUPIL: Author Michael Lewis is here. His latest book digs deep into the pandemic including big failures and some unsung heroes.

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8:02:53 a.m.

13 seconds

DOKOUPIL: Alright, but we've got to get serious. We're going to begin this hour with a growing concern about a new subvariant of omicron, now the dominant COVID strain in the U.S. It's called BA.2 and, according to the CDC, it makes up more than 72 percent of positive cases nationwide.

(...)

8:03:34 a.m.

1 minute and 47 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: New Dominant COVID Strain; Dr. Gounder Discusses Omicron BA.2 and State of Pandemic in U.S.]

DOKOUPIL: I wanted to begin with a general question which is the governments of our country seem to be putting responsibility back on individuals to decide how to handle the pandemic, so how should people be thinking through both their personal risk and how they expose others?

DR. CELINE GOUNDER: Well, that's precisely how you should break it down: What is my personal risk, so what is my personal health risk? What is my personal job risk? And, so, for example, you and I, if we have COVID we can't be on set. If I can COVID, I can't be at my job in the hospital. And then finally, what is the risk to the most vulnerable people in your life.? So maybe it's your grandmother. Maybe it's that six-month-old child. So, I think that's how I break down how do you — how do you think about the risk. The CDC does have a website that shows you community transmission and community risk. I would be careful in interpreting those numbers that green, yellow, red. It really tells you if you get sick, the hospitals will be able to take care of me with normal standards of care versus crisis standards of care.

GAYLE KING: I just don't trust the personal responsibility. I don't think people take the — tell the truth about it. Now you can go to restaurants, you can go anywhere. They're not asking to see your vaccines anymore. So, you're in a room with a bunch of people, you don't know if they're

vaccinated, not vaccinated. How are we supposed to move in the world these days? Who are we supposed to trust? What are we supposed to do?

NATE BURLESON: That's a good question.

GOUNDER: Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, the only people we can ultimately trust is ourselves —

KING: And so?

GOUNDER: — and knowing that we can do the right thing, we can get vaccinated. If we have symptoms, we can get tested. If we're infected, that we stay home from work or we don't go to school. I think things are about to get a lot harder for people, though. The government funding for testing and vaccination treatment for people who did not have insurance, that money has run out. And so, now you're going to start having to pay for things out of your own pocket.

BURLESON: Yeah.

(...)

8:05:45 a.m.
35 seconds

BURLESON: Cases are declining here, but they're rising in the U.K., and there's been a Shanghai lockdown. Is what is happening overseas a sign of things to come for us?

GOUNDER: It could be. It's a little early to say. I would look to the U.K. as the best predictor of what may be in store for us and there are some concerning signs. So, they are better vaccinated than we are, especially their elderly are better vaccinated and boosted. And, of course, they're the ones that are highest risk and we're seeing hospitalizations go up, nevertheless, in the U.K. So, we are sort of, you know, on watch and we'll see what happens.

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8:22:15 a.m. [TEASE]
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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Ahead; Author Michael Lewis]

DOKOUPIL: All right. Ahead, *New York Times* best-selling author Michael Lewis is known for the books like *Blind Side* and *The Big Short*. We're going to talk to him about his latest book just out in paperback on why the U.S. ditched its plan for the pandemic.

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8:45:10 a.m.

4 minutes and 42 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Michael Lewis Live; Bestselling Author on Latest Book and Podcast “Against the Rules”]

BURLESON: Michael Lewis is no stranger to tackling complicated issues in his books. His latest book, *The Premonition: A Pandemic Story*, is just out in paperback. Lewis investigates why the U.S. struggled with its coronavirus response despite being considered one of the best prepared countries in the world. He also just launched season three of his podcast, *Against the Rules*. Michael Lewis joins us first on *CBS Mornings*. Welcome back, how are you doing?

MICHAEL LEWIS: I'm doing well. Thanks for having me.

BURLESON: Good to see you. You say that we are worse prepared now for another pandemic than we were in March of 2020? How is that so, and how can we change that?

LEWIS: I think — just as a culture, we have not wrestled with what just happened.

BURLESON: Mmm.

KING: Yeah.

LEWIS: I mean, that's the thing that amazes me. That I think there's like — you got to first accept that you failed. That -- when you have four percent of the world's population and 20 percent of the deaths and you have more resources going in and more knowledge on how to deal with it, something was wrong and we haven't actually — there's been no postmortem, explaining, like — there are weird things that happen out there. Why is the death rate in Miami triple the death rate in San Francisco? Like what was the — what worked, what didn't work? And on top of that, people have dug in their heels. Like — like, I think in the beginning of the pandemic, the country could have been led, could have been led to a different place. Instead, it's — it's divided. And if you come in now and you try to, I don't know, close schools —

KING: Yeah.

LEWIS: — in response to something more dangerous —

KING: Wearing a mask.

LEWIS: — wearing a mask, getting a vaccine, you've got people — their heels are dug in.

BURLESON: There's a stubbornness.

LEWIS: There's a stubbornness. So, there's like a — a public education thing that didn't happen in the beginning that would be harder to do now because people think they know.

BURLESON: Yeah.

DOKOUPIL: But isn't it that people do know something, and there are two political strains here and some people are valuing freedom over a pure public health approach.

LEWIS: There's some truth to that, but what — freedom — freedom to do what?

DOKOUPIL: Do whatever they want.

LEWIS: Freedom to infect other people and kill them?

DOKOUPIL: Yes.

KING: Right.

LEWIS: I mean, that's not really — this a perverted idea of freedom, right? I mean, I think that it's — it's — there was this false dichotomy that was introduced very early on that we were choosing between, like, the economy and health and the truth is it was never a choice. If you'd let this thing run in the beginning the way it ran in New York, you would have had neither. I mean, the — the constraints on the freedom actually enabled the economy to motor along a bit, so I think — like, that wasn't explained.

KING: Mmmhmm.

LEWIS: Anyway, all this is very grim. What was so interesting to me about this story — it's — which all takes place kind of before the pandemic was it's amazing the talent we had that we didn't use.

KING: And —

LEWIS: People we had —

KING: — yeah.

LEWIS: — who were sitting in places waiting to be accessed —

KING: Who knew stuff.

LEWIS: — who knew stuff —

KING: No — no — you call them the experts. You said experts — your words — suck at telling their own stories. And sometimes they even have trouble making the information that they know interesting, that, quite often, can be very boring. So whenever there's a crisis, you say go to the L-6 person. The person who's at level six. Don't go to the top person. Go to the L-6 person who actually knows what they're doing.

LEWIS: This is — the podcast just came out —

KING: Yes.

LEWIS: — the Against the Rules podcast and it's — it's about experts. It's sort of like exploring our prob — you know, we're really great at creating knowledge and, as a society, we're, like, fantastic, we're the best in the world.

KING: Mmhmm.

LEWIS: We're not so good at figuring how to use it or even know who has it. And one of the — one of our stories in the podcast is just about this, it's about — when you're in complicated systems, government agencies, big corporations, and some crisis happens, some problem happens. It's not the people on the top who have the answer. It's usually some very specialized expertise that's buried six levels down in the organization and it tells you — you know, what's interesting is: So, why does that person down here have so much trouble getting what they know up here?

KING: Right.

LEWIS: So you can — and this is partly in the pandemic story. We have people down here in public health who knew what to do and couldn't get it into the heads of the people up here. And I think it's related to inequality in that if you — when you have big gaps between one and two and two and three —

BURLESON: Yeah.

LEWIS: — and, all of a sudden, level six doesn't feel like they can talk to level one.

KING: Yes. Yes.

LEWIS: And, so, part of our problem with expertise, I think, is a problem with inequality is that the more inequality in the society there is, the harder it is for the person who actually knows something who might not have a lot of status —

BURLESON: Yeah.

LEWIS: — who might be someone — a supposed nobody —

KING: But they're the superstars.

LEWIS: — but they're the superstars.

BURLESON: Right.

LEWIS: And the trick is, like, finding those people.

KING: At level six.

BURLESON: And we're glad that we found you. We appreciate you.

KING: Yes.

LEWIS: You're one of the best at taking something complicated and making it so exciting. Michael Lewis, the paperback edition of *The Premonition* and season three of the podcast *Against the Rules* is available right now.