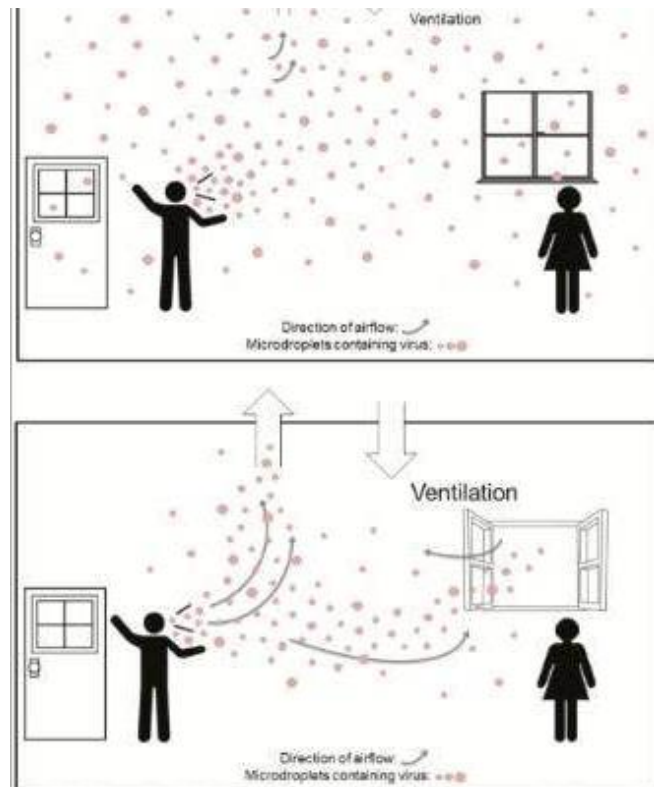


Ventilation - the secret weapon in the Covid battle

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How ventilation protects us from tiny aerosols of Covid-19

Dr Siouxsie Wiles MNZM is an award-winning microbiologist and science communicator based in Auckland.

OPINION: Earlier this month, several thousand people from around the world – business and political leaders, heads of state, investors, economists, journalists, and celebrities – gathered in the Swiss resort town of Davos for the 53rd annual meeting of the World Economic Forum.

Founded in 1971 by German engineer and economist Klaus Schwab, the forum is an international non-governmental and lobbying organisation based in Switzerland. As it says on its website, the reason for organising its yearly meeting in Davos is to “convene leaders from government, business, and civil society to address the state of the world and... provide a platform to engage in constructive, forward-looking dialogues and help find solutions through public-private cooperation”.

It’s invite-only to attend ‘Davos’, as the forum’s annual meeting is more commonly known. But the likes of you and me you can watch at least some of the talks and panels online. And those videos are pretty revealing.

There’s barely a mask to be seen, so at first glance it looks like those at Davos are just living with the risk of catching Covid, like we’re all expected to as we move into year four of the pandemic. In other words, Davos would just be like every other Covid super-spreader conference.

But if you know what you’re looking for, in the background you’ll spot the forum’s secret weapon. Air purifiers. Unobtrusively cleaning the air of any viruses and bacteria floating around. It even looks like they were using ultraviolet disinfection. Because it turns out that the World Economic Forum takes Covid-19 very seriously. In fact, they had a whole protocol “to create a safe environment” for their meeting in Davos.

So, what was that protocol? For starters, all attendees had to have a Covid PCR test on arrival. The turnaround time was 24 hours and people's test result linked to their electronic pass. If the test came back positive, the person's pass was automatically, electronically, revoked. Rapid tests were also available at any time, and the Forum had a dedicated Covid hotline attendees could call.

While attendees didn't have to wear masks, the forum-provided drivers who chauffeured them around did. And just like the rapid tests, the forum had both surgical and high-quality respirator masks (the equivalent of N95s) available for anyone who wanted one.

But what the protocol also reveals is that the World Economic Forum was quietly using one of the most effective protections we have against Covid – properly ventilating the air. In fact, they'd even installed “additional state-of-the-art ventilation systems... in areas with restricted air circulation”.



The World Economic Forum meeting in Switzerland used of the most effective protections we have against Covid, proper air ventilation, Siouxsie Wiles writes. RICKY WILSON/STUFF

What depresses me is that most of the Davos attendees will have left the forum, having gathered in their thousands, believing their single PCR test and use of hand sanitiser was what stopped them all getting Covid.

Instead, it was the ventilation and air purifiers. And because those attendees are the world's business and political leaders, they'll continue insisting we need to live like we did before the pandemic.

The air purifiers at Davos sparked a hashtag on Twitter: #DavosSafe. Because we all deserve the same invisible protections those attending the World Economic Forum had.