



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on July 11, 2020

NBC Virologist Who Claimed to Have COVID-19 Never Had It

A virologist whose supposed battle with COVID-19 made for ratings-grabbing television now appears never to have contracted the virus in the first place.

Dr. Joseph Fair, 42, joined NBC News as a science contributor in March, just as the coronavirus was becoming big news. On May 14, he told viewers that he had [contracted the disease on a flight](#) despite having taken all the government-recommended precautions. In nearly a dozen subsequent appearances on NBC and MSNBC over the next month, Fair recounted his symptoms, treatment, and eventual recovery. The networks presented it as a cautionary tale of someone with no risk factors who still had come down with COVID-19. As Fair put it in his May 14 appearance, “If it can take me down, it can take down anybody.”



All along, however, Fair repeatedly tested negative for COVID-19, and on Tuesday, he announced on Twitter that he had also [failed an antibody test](#). Thus, it is virtually certain that whatever he had, it was not COVID-19.

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NBC, which was so thrilled to have such a story that it downplayed the negative tests when it deigned to mention them at all, should have been more cautious about accepting Fair’s account at face value, wrote journalist [Steve Krakauer](#).

To begin with, when he announced that he had COVID-19 on the *Today* show, Fair said he believed he had contracted it through his eyes on a packed flight to New Orleans. A medical expert [told Krakauer](#) that while that’s not impossible, it’s highly unlikely. “Unless he was sitting next to someone coughing or sneezing on him, the likelihood is extremely low,” said the expert.

Krakauer continues:

Fair says he began showing symptoms approximately three days after his flight, and then, toward the end of the “7 to 9 days” of feeling sick, he couldn’t breathe so he called an ambulance and admitted himself to the hospital. During his NBC News appearances, his symptoms during those pre-hospital days appeared to evolve. In the early reports, he described loss of appetite, nausea and muscle aches, and a “moderately severe flu for the first week.” On May 18 in an MSNBC interview, it included “complete lack of taste and smell” and “fever, sweats.” In that same interview, he described a “panic attack” he had, just as he was about to go to the hospital. On Meet The Press



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last weekend [June 14], Fair described his self-treatment pre-hospital symptoms as “the worst I’d ever felt,” describing the early days as spending “23 out of 24 hours in bed.”

In Fair’s earliest appearances, NBC mentioned that he had tested negative for COVID-19 several times under four different types of tests. Fair tried to argue that the tests were all incorrect, and while that’s certainly plausible for some of them given what we’ve learned about their accuracy, it’s stretching credulity to believe that the same person with all these alleged symptoms would repeatedly come up negative.

Nevertheless, NBC pressed forward with the story and even aided Fair in his efforts to dismiss the test results. *Today* co-host Craig Melvin referred to them as “false negative tests,” and his colleague Hoda Kotb said, “Every time it came back negative, but clearly you have it.” This from the same people who keep admonishing us all to “believe science.”

In later appearances, the negative tests were simply ignored. On *Meet the Press*, Fair’s experience was once again treated as a warning to coronavirus “deniers.”

“Those people that are young and think they’re invincible or people that just don’t think it’s going to affect them that greatly even if they do get it, I can say that my own experience was the complete opposite,” declared Fair.

Now, post-recovery, Fair has admitted that his illness “remains an undiagnosed mystery as a recent antibody test was negative.”

“In the end,” observed Krakauer, “NBC’s viewers were left with two very alarming — and false — impressions. First, that an expert virologist can take every precaution but can still catch COVID-19 through his eyes.... Second, that tests can be so untrustworthy that you can have multiple negative tests and still have coronavirus.”

One might add a third: that NBC is a purveyor of serious journalism rather than baseless panic.

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Michael Tennant is a freelance writer and regular contributor to The New American.



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