



## Calls for Shutdowns to Stop COVID-19 Are Unwarranted and Foolish

by Richard W. Rahn

Some of presumptive President-elect Joe Biden's advisers have advocated a new and even more extreme shutdown of the country to allegedly stop the COVID-19 virus. Much of what is advertised as public health wisdom from the political class is nothing more than nonsense spouted by people who wish to control others.

Examples are mask mandates and limits on social gathering that apply to others, but not to those who mandate them like California Gov. Gavin Newsom or House Speaker Nancy Pelosi or New York's notorious Cuomo brothers.

COVID-19 is unlikely to go away until herd immunity develops from a combination of those who had the virus and those who have been vaccinated. Efforts to keep the very young from getting COVID-19, given most will not even realize they have it or will suffer only mild symptoms, may be counter-productive in that it delays the point where a country has herd immunity.

Fortunately, not all political leaders are irrational and lacking in an understanding of cost-benefit analysis. The leaders of Sweden decided not to shut down their country and not to engage in universal mask mandates, but to let life go on as normal but with some low-cost precautions.

The result was that Sweden had a big spike in cases and deaths in the early spring but it quickly leveled off, so its death rate is now lower than in the U.S. and many other European countries like the U.K., France, Spain and Italy who engaged in much more totalitarian behavior. Gov. Kristi Noem of South Dakota also took a no-lockdown stance in her state. The result is the South Dakota death rate is lower than the average state death rate, but not the lowest.

The data both worldwide and within the U.S. states indicate that lockdowns have had at best only limited success while the costs have been enormous — not only to those who have lost their jobs and businesses, but to many who have other medical conditions that are being ignored or inadequately treated. Masks can have serious side effects for those with breathing, lung or heart conditions, as they cause people to recycle their own CO2.

Public policy is being made on very bad data. The number of reported COVID-19 cases is largely a function of the number of tests — and there are massive inaccuracies in the tests. Elon Musk, who understands science better than most everyone, had four tests for COVID-19 on the same day last week. Two were positive and two negative. Deaths from COVID-19 are greatly overstated in many jurisdictions — with suicides and automobile deaths being listed as COVID-19 because the deceased had tested positive.

Only a tiny number of people under age 25 (and only a few under 65) die of COVID-19, yet tens of millions of schoolchildren have been denied in-class instruction. Requiring 5-year-olds to wear masks when playing with friends is cruel nonsense. Distance learning can serve as a partial substitute for a limited period of time, provided the child has parents who take an active interest and make sure their children are actually doing the lessons each day.

The real-world result is middle-class parents who understand the importance of education find ways to make sure their children are at least getting some minimum amount of real schooling each week (by the parent serving as substitute teacher, private tutors or private schools). While, at the same time, many children who are often most in need of intense hands-on educational help do not have parents who are capable or sufficiently motivated to do what is necessary.

It is easy to predict that in a couple of years studies will show an increased educational gap between children in middle-class and lower-income families in the states with the most restrictive lockdown measures.

When political commentator Tucker Carlson asked Gov. Phil Murphy of New Jersey (who managed the trick of having both the highest COVID-19 death rate and some of the most restrictive policies among states) how he could justify ignoring the Bill of Rights, Mr. Murphy's response was "that is above my pay grade." New York's Gov. Andrew Cuomo and New York Mayor Bill de Blasio spout edicts that are often arbitrary and unenforceable and clearly violate civil liberties — as if the U.S. Constitution is merely a historical relic.

Given the data showing that young people have little to fear from COVID-19, they should be free to pursue their lives as normally as possible, including only wearing masks when in the presence of older folks.

Those older than 85 with pre-existing conditions need to be very careful and protected as much as possible. Those older than 60 or so should be free to take as much or as little risk as they wish, knowing the facts about their own health. Businesses and places of public accommodation who cater to all age groups should, as a matter of good business practice, require reasonable social distancing and wearing of masks by employees.

Businesses that cater to only those under 50 with employees all under 50 should practice good sanitation but not require masks and extraordinary precautions — provided they clearly make it known that those over 50 are unwelcome.

It makes sense to discriminate on the basis of risk (age and health condition) while preserving everyone else's God-given liberties.

*Richard W. Rahn is chairman of the Institute for Global Economic Growth and Improbable Success Productions*

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2020/nov/16/calls-for-shutdowns-to-stop-covid-19-are-unwarrant/>