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The Economic Shutdown Was Not Necessary

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Approximately 80% of the U.S. COVID-19 fatalities occur in the 65 and older group. Federal health officials must have figured that Americans 65 and over and others with underlying health conditions did not know enough to take care of themselves and many would wind up being admitted to hospitals. Further, health officials must have decided that people under 65 could not be responsible either. Result: recommend that most of the economy be shut down to avoid overcrowding hospitals.

The hospital over-capacity concern never materialized, but threats and scare tactics continue from some federal health officials and governors. One study showed that as of early May two-thirds of counties in the U.S. had one or no fatalities.

Over 20 million jobs have already been lost and many are not coming back, with thousands of businesses bankrupt due to the mandated economic shutdowns. For perspective, the job loss in April was more than double the cumulative job loss during the Great Recession.

National unemployment was 3.5% in February of this year; in April it was 14.7%. High school graduates' (no college) unemployment rate was 3.6%, now it is 17.3%. The unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's degree or higher was 1.9%, now that is 8.4%. The across-the-board shutdown has been an economic disaster for workers and businesses.

Pandemics have occurred before and the Wuhan virus is just the latest. Had the Chinese Communist Party been transparent and forthcoming about their virus, the rest-of-the world may have been able to avoid many of the deaths.

The 1957-58 flu pandemic cost the lives of up to 116,000 Americans, according to the [CDC](#). The total U.S. population then was 175 million, for an approximate 0.07% death rate. The U.S. economy was not shut down. Health officials at that time must have known that people needed to work and were responsible enough to take precautions.

The 1968 flu pandemic, according to the [CDC](#), claimed 100,000 lives for an approximate 0.05% death rate. Most of those fatalities were in the 65 and older group in the U.S. according to the [CDC](#). The economy was not shut down.

There were approximately 87,000 U.S. deaths from COVID-19 as of May 14. Let's say by year-end COVID-19 deaths double to 174,000. The U.S. total population was 328 million in 2019, which would place the death rate, as a percentage of the total population, at 0.05%. This is a similar death rate as occurred in the 1968 flu pandemic and slightly below the 1957-58 pandemic death rate.

One characteristic of the Wuhan virus that is similar to the 1968 flu pandemic is that most fatalities are in the 65 and older group, approximately 80%.

Health officials know these numbers. Why didn't they initially suggest a shelter-in-place proposal for those 65 and over and those under 65 with an underlying condition?

Over 90% of the 164 million U.S. labor force in February was under the age of 65. That means over 90% of the labor force could have likely continued to work by taking precautions such as wearing masks and/or by working at home and thus this economic devastation could have been avoided.

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