

# Lifting lockdown? Against coronavirus, no one size fits all

April 24 2020, by John Leicester and Aritz Parra

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A man wears a mask to protect against the spread of the coronavirus as he walks along the Trocadero square close to the Eiffel Tower in Paris, Friday, April 24, 2020. France continues to be under an extended stay-at-home order until May 11 in an attempt to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)

Without a tried-and-tested action plan for how to pull countries out of coronavirus lockdown, the world is seeing a patchwork of approaches. Schools reopen in one country, stay closed in others; face masks are an obligation here, a simple recommendation there.

Kids still attend soccer practice in Sweden while they are not even allowed outside in Spain. In the U.S. state of Georgia, gyms, hair salons and bowling alleys were being allowed to reopen Friday even as American hospitals still heave with virus emergencies. In other parts of the globe, the prospect of a haircut is still weeks away.

There is no simple, one-size-fits-all answer. As governments and scientists fumble around, still struggling with so many unknowns, individuals are being left to take potentially life-affecting decisions.

In France, for instance, the government is leaving families to decide whether to keep children at home or send them back to class when the nationwide lockdown, in place since March 17, starts to be eased May 11.

"It is hard to decide," said Helene Alston, a French tax lawyer with a daughter and a son in middle school. "I think I will send them back to school because it allows us to restore a bit of normality in our lives."

But "we don't want to deliberately put them in a dangerous situation," she said Friday. "I might change my mind."



Staff of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government urge people to go home from the Kabukicho entertainment district in the Shinjuku Ward in Tokyo, Friday evening, April 24, 2020. Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expanded a state of emergency to all of Japan from just Tokyo and other urban areas as the virus continues to spread. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

In Spain, parents face a similarly knotty decision: whether to let kids get their first fresh air in weeks when the country starts Sunday to ease the total ban on letting them outside. Even then, they will still have to abide by a "1-1-1" rule: no more than one hour per day, within a 1-kilometer (1,000-yard) radius of their house and with no more than one supervising adult.

"The first day is going to be stressful," said Eva Novillo, who has been

confined with her wife and 7-year-old Ema in Madrid for more than five weeks. "We are going to be hysterical for the kids not to touch anything or not to touch their faces."

The slowing of Spain's horrific outbreak, which has killed more than 22,500 people, made the prospect of letting kids out feasible. For the first time Friday, Spanish health authorities counted more people recovering from the disease in a 24-hour span than new infections.



In this Monday, March 9, 2020, photo, students wearing masks to help stop the spread of the new coronavirus, participate in the visual arts mock exam for Diploma of Secondary Education (DSE) at the CCC Ming Kei College in Hong Kong. Hong Kong's university entrance examinations have started with social-distancing measures. More than 52,000 students are expected to sit for the city's Diploma of Secondary Education exams over the next month. (AP Photo/Kin

Cheung)

"With all of the effort that we have done," said Health Ministry official Fernando Simón, "the evolution of the epidemic is obviously beginning to be where it should be."

The imperative to reopen is largely driven by economics, with lockdowns bleeding companies and government coffers of cash. In a trend seen around the globe, roughly 26 million Americans have filed for jobless aid in five weeks, pushing unemployment to levels last seen during the Great Depression of the 1930s and raising the stakes over how and when to ease shutdowns of factories and other businesses.

Shutdown hotels, restaurants, bars and cafes in Germany placed empty chairs in streets and squares Friday to highlight their economic suffering. The prospect of sipping wine on a Paris sidewalk also is still far off: French authorities announced that restaurants, bars and cafes won't reopen before June.



People wear face masks to protect against the spread of the new coronavirus as they walk through an outdoor shopping area in Beijing, Friday, April 24, 2020. China reported no new virus deaths for the ninth straight day, and just six new cases on Friday. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

For many of the world's poor, without social safety nets, idling at home or home-schooling kids with online classes are luxuries beyond reach.

In Africa, 10 nations have none of the ventilators that are keeping coronavirus patients alive in richer countries. The continent of 1.3 billion people, with more than 25,000 virus cases, is being outbid in the global race for scarce medical equipment.

"Ventilators are like trying to spot a dodo bird at the moment, literally,"

said Stavros Nicolaou of Business for South Africa, which is working to source supplies.

Even in the world's wealthiest countries, reopening too much, too fast raises the possibility of new infection spikes that again overwhelm hospital ICUs.

Japan initially seemed to have controlled its outbreak by going after clusters of infections. But on Friday, Japanese medical experts issued a stark warning that the country's emergency medicine resources are reaching breaking point amid dire equipment shortages.



Pitrik van der Lubbe waves from a crane to his 88-year-old father Henk, right, whom he has not seen in over 4 weeks at nursing home Hanepraij in Gouda, Netherlands, Friday, April 24, 2020. The crane was made available for free by a

company to allow family members to see their loved ones in isolation because of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

"We can no longer operate normally, and in that sense I say the collapse of emergency medicine has already started," said Takeshi Shimazu, head of the Japanese Association for Acute Medicine.

The coronavirus has killed more than 190,000 people worldwide, including more than 100,000 in Europe and nearly 50,000 in the United States, according to a tally compiled by John Hopkins University from government figures. The true numbers are undoubtedly far higher, and new cases are surging in Africa and Latin America as outbreaks subside in some places that were hit earlier.

In Muslim communities, the pandemic is casting a shadow over the holy month of Ramadan—marked by daytime fasting, overnight festivities and communal prayer. Ramadan begins for the world's 1.8 billion Muslims with this week's new moon. Many Muslim leaders have closed mosques or banned collective evening prayer to ward off infections.





Muslim men attend a Friday prayer despite concerns of the new coronavirus outbreak, at a mosque during the first day of the holy fasting month of Ramadan in Lhokseumawe, in the religiously conservative province of Aceh, Indonesia, Friday, April 24, 2020. During Ramadan, which begins Friday, faithful Muslims normally fast during the day and then congregate for night prayers and share communal meals. (AP Photo/Zik Maulana)

"It's heartbreaking," said Mohand Idi Mechnane, head of an Algerian government commission in charge of Islamic issues. "But health comes above religious obligation."

Some U.S. governors have begun loosening up despite warnings from health authorities that it may be too soon to do so without sparking a second wave of infections.

A major meatpacking plant in northern Colorado that closed because of an outbreak that killed four workers was set to reopen Friday after a two-week disinfection, even as some questioned how employees can maintain social distancing inside the facility.

On the economic front, few experts foresee a downturn as severe as the Great Depression, when unemployment remained above 14% from 1931 to 1940, peaking at 25%. But unemployment is considered likely to remain elevated well into next year and probably beyond, and will surely top the 10% peak of the 2008-09 recession.



A staff member of the local health authority supports a woman using a new coronavirus test kit at a new drive-in testing center in Berlin, Germany, Friday, April 24, 2020. (AP Photo/Michael Sohn)



In this photo taken on Thursday April 23, 2020, two women in traditional dress dance by the entrance of their decorated house in the village of Mairena del Alcor, some 21 kilometres (13 miles) from Seville, Spain, during the annual traditional April Fair celebrated across the southern Andulacia Provence. Without breaking the confinement rules and maintaining their distance from each other, the residents of the village have found a novel way of continuing the tradition of the fair which has been cancelled due to the coronavirus outbreak and normally includes flamenco dancing, bullfighting, eating and drinking. (AP Photo/Miguel Morenatti)



Ultra-Orthodox Jews keep social distancing during a morning prayer next to their houses as synagogues are closed following the government's measures to help stop the spread of the coronavirus, in Bnei Brak, Israel, Friday, April 24, 2020. (AP Photo/Oded Balilty)



A client leaves a bookstore after collecting her order in Lille, northern France, Friday April 24, 2020. French bookstores, which saw sales plunge in the first month of confinement due to the coronavirus outbreak, have won permission to open pick-up windows for customers to fetch books they've ordered online or by phone. The culture minister said book customers can check the box for "purchases of primary necessity" when they fill out the form that all French residents must carry whenever they leave the house explaining why they're not in confinement. (AP Photo/Michel Spingler)



People going to work some wear masks to protect against the spread of the coronavirus ride a subway early morning in Paris, Friday, April 24, 2020. France continues to be under an extended stay-at-home order until May 11 in an attempt to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. (AP Photo/Michel Euler)



A man walks down the stairs in a quiet 61st Street–Woodside subway station in the Queens borough of New York, Thursday night, April 23, 2020, during the coronavirus pandemic. More evidence is emerging that far more New Yorkers have had the coronavirus than the number confirmed by lab tests, officials said Thursday, offering insight that could help authorities decide how and how quickly to let people stop isolating from friends and return to work. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



Neighbors receive a free lunch in a soup kitchen organized by neighbors and financed by the local government, on the outskirts of Lima, Peru, Thursday, April 23, 2020. (AP Photo/Rodrigo Abd)





The initiative 'Empty Chairs' have set up almost 800 chairs in front of the Brandenburg Gate to point out the difficult situation of their industry in Berlin, Germany, Friday, April 24, 2020. The federal and state governments have decided to relax a number of coronavirus related restrictions in Germany but restaurants and pubs must remain closed. (Bernd von Jutrczenka/dpa via AP)

U.S. President Donald Trump will be holding a signing ceremony Friday for a bill providing a nearly \$500 billion infusion of coronavirus spending, rushing new relief to employers and hospitals.

Huge lines have formed at food banks from El Paso, Texas, to the Paris suburbs, and food shortages are hitting Africa especially hard.

Janet Simon, laid off as a waitress at a Miami IHOP restaurant, said she

has just \$200 and is panicking over how she will care for her three children. Simon, 33, filed for unemployment a month ago, and her application is still listed as "pending."

"I'm doing everything to keep my family safe, my children safe, but everything else around me is falling apart," Simon said. "But they see it, no matter how much I try to hide my despair."

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