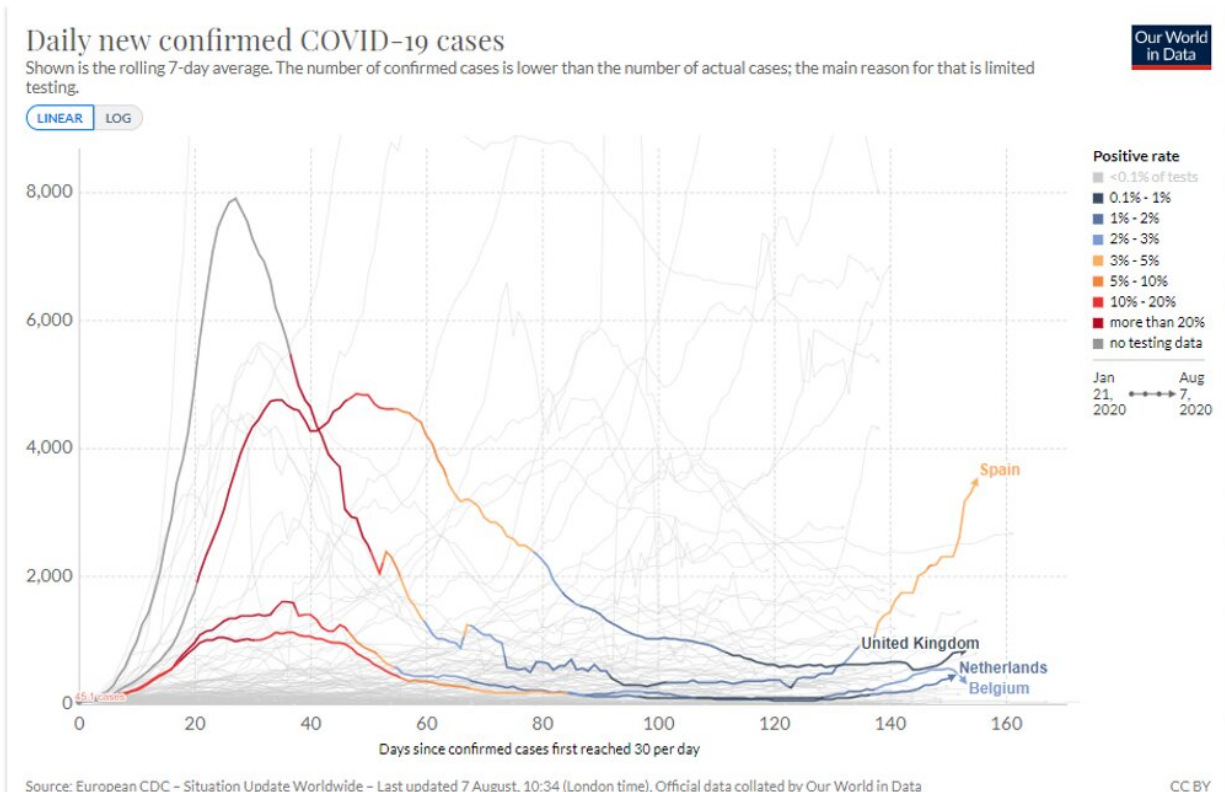


A scientist's plea on coronavirus: Now is not the time to relax

August 10 2020, by Lena Ciric



Credit: Our World in Data, CC BY

Living under lockdown and the uncertainty that COVID-19 has brought to our lives has been difficult for everyone. We have all welcomed the opportunity to return to a more normal way of life. But a [resurgence in cases](#) after the easing of lockdown in many countries shows us that this

pandemic is by no means over. We need to remember that now is not the time to relax and take risks.

Governments around the world have taken different approaches to responding to the pandemic, but social distancing measures have been a common factor for all. That's because it's one of the [most powerful tools we have](#) in preventing the transmission of this disease. The fewer people we interact with, the lower the chances that the [virus](#) will spread. This has been a successful strategy to lower numbers of [cases](#).

In June and July it was evident that the numbers of new cases were down significantly in Europe, so governments started to relax some of the lockdown measures that had been put in place.

However it is worth keeping in mind that on July 4, when most shops, pubs and restaurants reopened in the UK, the daily number of reported new cases globally was still [205,610](#) and this number continues to rise—it is 266,864 on the day of publication, more than three times what it was in April when the UK new daily cases were [at their peak](#).

While there are new cases emerging, there is still a risk of transmission. People taking more risks in August and September will mean that case numbers will be higher than if we had maintained stricter measures.

Preparing for a second wave

There is now broad agreement in the scientific community that [a second wave will come](#). This will coincide with colder weather and the seasonal onslaught of respiratory infections such as colds and flu.

But the severity with which a second wave will hit is not beyond our control. If we are all more careful about our actions now, we will reduce the numbers of cases and deaths that will occur in the coming months

and ease the burden on the health services.

I am a microbiologist—my [expertise](#) is in how dangerous microbes including viruses live in indoor spaces. I have been working on COVID-19 since March and I understand the risks.

I am also a human being. I miss seeing my friends and family. I worry that my son's development will suffer because he is not interacting with his friends and has missed a lot of school. I miss traveling and eating out. But I know that if I relax, I may expose myself and others to the virus. I am not willing to take my chances with COVID-19.

Yes, for most people the illness is mild, but it can be severe, and it is impossible to know which route it will take until it is too late. It might be that I am fine, but that my husband is not. Or that I give it to our neighbor who is at high risk of severe COVID-19.

Our knowledge about how this virus behaves and spreads is growing each day and, as a result, the government advice has evolved over the past few months. We know that [infected people](#) can spread the virus before showing symptoms and that many people who carry the virus but do not show any symptoms at all but [can give it to others](#). This increases the chances of the virus spreading among the population.

We also know that the majority of transmission events [take place indoors](#), so it is best to meet outdoors. At the start of the pandemic there was little evidence that the virus could be transmitted by tiny airborne droplets, but this now a [distinct possibility](#) which means that wearing a face covering will protect you and others. There is also now evidence that the cells in your nasal passages are the ones most prone to infection by the virus, so make sure you [cover your nose](#).

It is quite clear that COVID-19 is not going away, however much we

might want it to. The more care and restraint we show now, the lower the likelihood of another devastating wave of cases that will cripple [health services](#) and result in yet more thousands of lives lost.

Before you head to the office, the shops or the pub, think whether you need to take the risk. Is it really worth it?

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