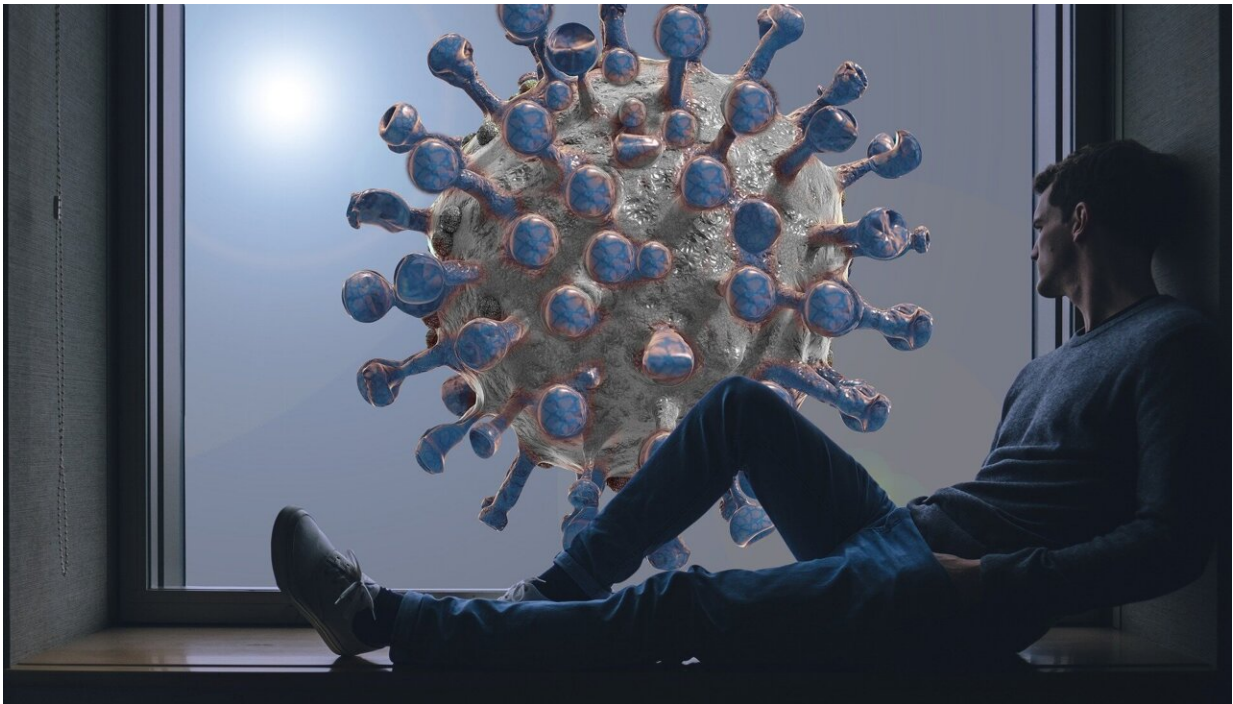


Study: Ending an eviction moratorium increases COVID-19 hazard

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Ending an eviction moratorium for renters makes people in a community significantly more likely to contract COVID-19, according to a new study co-authored by MIT researchers.

The study uses the variable timing of state-level moratoriums, issued and

terminated at different points during the COVID-19 pandemic, to quantify their effect. It is the first study to identify the individual-level risk for people in different social circumstances, due to eviction moratoriums ending. The increased risk runs throughout communities, the research shows, meaning that ending eviction moratoriums does not just affect those who lose their housing.

Eviction moratoriums have been used to protect renters in danger of losing their housing at a time of economic strain caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The study shows that, on average, when a state lifted its [moratorium](#) and let evictions resume, the hazard of contracting COVID-19 was 1.39 times greater after five weeks and 1.83 times greater after 12 weeks, rather than if the moratorium had continued.

When people had three or more co-morbidities, that likelihood increased by 2.37 times within 12 weeks. The hazard of contracting COVID-19 in nonaffluent areas, and in areas of high rent burden, were 2.14 times and 2.31 times higher, respectively, within 12 weeks in states that lifted eviction moratoriums, as opposed to maintaining them.

"Not having access to a stable way of sheltering yourself from the pandemic can be very impactful for how the pandemic spreads, not just for you but for your community," says Sebastian Sandoval-Olascoaga, a doctoral student at MIT and co-author of the new paper. "There are spillover effects, and there is a transmission process created by evictions within a community."

For that reason, Sandoval-Olascoaga adds, "As new variants spread, our study suggests that this policy, which protects low-income communities and people with co-morbidities, can also create [health equity](#) and provide protection for groups with more advantages."

The paper, "Eviction Moratoria Expiration and COVID-19 Infection

Risk Across Strata of Health and Socioeconomic Status in the United States," was published today by the journal *JAMA Network Open*.

The co-authors are Sandoval-Olascoaga, a doctoral student in MIT's Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP); Atheendar S. Venkataramani, an assistant professor of medical ethics and [health policy](#) at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine; and Mariana Arcaya, an MIT associate professor of urban planning and public health, and associate head of DUSP.

"The public health rationale for eviction moratoria appears strong," says Arcaya.

Different states, different COVID-19 rates

Eviction moratoriums have been the subject of ongoing political debate during the COVID-19 pandemic, and last week the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Biden administration's federal eviction moratorium, which had been issued by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The CDC issued an initial ban of its own in the fall of 2020, which had been extended multiple times until the Supreme Court ruling. By September 2020, an estimated 47 percent of renters behind in their payments were in danger of eviction, according to U.S. Census Bureau surveys. Amid this policy uncertainty, 43 U.S. states plus the District of Columbia issued eviction moratoriums during the pandemic; seven never have.

Of those 44 state-level governments, 26 wound up lifting their eviction bans, while 18 did not, in effect forming "treatment" and "control" groups for the study. The researchers used variations in the timing of eviction bans in 2020, while controlling for complicating factors, to

identify what difference the resumption of evictions made to state-level trajectories of COVID-19 spread.

"We have a natural experiment where some states could help us as a control group, and some could help us as a treatment group," Sandoval-Olascoaga says.

To conduct the study, the scholars also examined anonymized commercial insurance and Medicare Advantage records from a large national database with health information on nearly 200 million people; ultimately they analyzed a random sample of 500,000 U.S. residents, to evaluate how the moratoriums affected health. Because many things affect the spread of COVID-19, the study controlled for a wide range of complicating factors, including state policies such as mask mandates, stay-at-home or shelter-in-place orders, school closures, business restrictions, and existing COVID-19 levels at the county and state levels.

Multiple potential mechanisms

The researchers suggest there are multiple potential mechanisms through which lifting an eviction ban increases the spread of COVID-19. More people, once evicted from their housing, may start living with relatives or friends in more crowded settings, in which COVID-19 is more likely to spread. Ending eviction bans also increases homelessness, which likely sends more people into crowded shelters or other situations where they have increased proximity to others.

Additionally, because people in poor health are more likely to be affected by the end of an eviction ban, it means that individuals with greater-than-average vulnerability to getting COVID-19 are put into situations where there is increased likelihood of transmission. As Sandoval-Olascoaga observes, "an [eviction](#) creates a cascade of events" in which COVID-19 can spread more easily.

Moreover, Sandoval-Olascoaga notes, because the study uses data from 2020, the findings show what happens when evictions resume in the context of a less transmissible version of COVID-19 than the currently prevalent Delta variant.

"These results occurred when the Delta variant was not a thing," Sandoval-Olascoaga says. "We were able to find an impact with a COVID strain that was not as transmissible as this one."

For her part, Arcaya says that "the pandemic is not over, and while we hear a lot about what individuals can do to protect themselves—with masking and vaccination being critical—stopping evictions and otherwise helping people stay in stable housing are part of how cities, states, and the federal government can protect all of us."

More information: Sebastian Sandoval-Olascoaga et al, Eviction Moratoria Expiration and COVID-19 Infection Risk Across Strata of Health and Socioeconomic Status in the United States, *JAMA Network Open* (2021). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.29041](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.29041)

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