

Hebrew University Researchers: Israeli Quarantines Were Unnecessary

Contrary to government policy and public opinion, a team of Israel researchers has recommended ending all restrictions implemented during the coronavirus outbreak and reopening the country to international travel immediately.

In fact, the Hebrew University research team—comprised of an epidemiologist and two finance professors—contends that Israel overreacted to the situation and should have been more like Sweden, which did not implement lockdowns, enforce social distancing or impose fines for violators.

“We conclude that only a limited-time quarantine of the high-risk group might be necessary, while the rest of the economy can remain operational,” the researchers wrote.

They called the quarantining of an entire population a “medieval” approach that has produced catastrophic economic and social consequences leading to high unemployment, isolation, limited access to health care, drug abuse, domestic violence, hunger and social unrest.

“There is no doubt that the number of deaths that will be caused by the lockdown will be massive,” Gershon told the *Calcalist*.

The researchers admit that without these strict measures, the death toll in Israel would have been higher than the 212 mortalities tallied up from the coronavirus until this point. But they claim the situation would have been manageable and the economy would not have sustained irreparable damage.

The 24-page report, “How to Manage the COVID-19 Pandemic

without Destroying the Economy,” studied data on COVID-19 deaths in various countries including the density of the population, use of public transportation, accessibility to intensive care at hospitals and whether people are prepared to change their behavior during a pandemic.

They warned that if lockdowns are in place until a vaccine or treatment is found, then “such an approach will lead to economic mayhem, with many people dying from the consequences of economic and financial destruction.”

While restrictions are now being slowly rolled back in Israel, health officials still maintain that returning to normal too fast could cause a spike in infections or a second wave—and a return to another lockdown. However, the researchers contend that in case of another wave, Israelis should feel reassured to keep the economy open.

“In the second wave we mustn’t close the economy,” Gershon said. “We should ask for responsible behavior, but there will be no need to panic.”

The study urges Israel to roll back all restrictions including reopening the tourism sector right away.

“We shouldn’t think of tourism being about just having fun. It’s about the survival of the people who provide the services like in [the Red Sea resort town of] Eilat. If you want Eilat to rebound, you need to return it to life,” he said.

The researchers believe their model can also help health officials around the world predict how their country will fare in case of future epidemics. {eoa}

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