



CA Study Says COVID Lockdowns Were Ineffective: Readers Weigh In

A controversial study written by economists, said that COVID lockdowns do little to save lives. We asked readers to share their thoughts.

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CALIFORNIA — A new working paper argued last month that stay-home orders or "lockdowns" during the COVID-19 pandemic did little to save lives.

The analysis, written by economists, argued that such orders imposed "enormous economic and social costs." The paper reawakened a long running lockdown debate after it was shared by Johns Hopkins University last month.

The study is not yet peer reviewed has drawn backlash from the medical community. A handful of conservative-leaning media outlets reported on the study, while most mainstream media did not.

Patch asked readers to share their opinions about the study in a recent non-scientific survey and respondents were pretty evenly split on whether stay-home orders helped save lives.

We asked readers: Do you think "lockdown" or California's stay-at-home orders, mask rules and business closures helped save lives during the height of the pandemic?

- 45.9 percent said "no"
- 47.8 percent said "yes"
- 6.3 percent said "not sure"

The survey — which drew more than 1,600 voters and appeared in [questionnaire form this week on Patch](#) — is meant not to be a scientific poll but only to give a broad idea of public sentiment. In the early days of the pandemic and before COVID-19 vaccines were available, businesses across the Golden State were forced to close their doors to stop the spread.

We asked readers: Do you think the state should have allowed businesses to stay open before there were vaccines available?

- 28.7 percent said "no"
- 58.5 percent said "yes"
- 12.9 percent said "not sure"

The study, titled "A Literature Review and Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Lockdowns on COVID-19 Mortality," was authored by Steve Hanke, a professor at Johns Hopkins and director of the Troubled Currencies Project at the Cato Institute; Jonas Herby, a special adviser at the Center for Political Studies in Copenhagen; and Lars Jonung, a Lund University economist.

The three economists aimed to determine whether lockdowns reduced deaths caused by COVID-19. Lockdowns in the study were defined as a combination of stay-at-home orders, social distancing and mask-wearing.

But experts have criticized the authors for the methods they used to weigh in on a public health issue.

"Shame on these authors to try and pass something on as scientific research when it is a polemic about their personal political views," Dr. John Swartzberg, a professor of vaccinology and infectious disease at the University of California, Berkeley told Patch. "It's hard enough to advance our knowledge about this pandemic and how to manage it. Screed like this serves only to confuse our understanding and stall progress."

Alternatively, Dr. Timothy Brewer, a professor of infectious disease at the University of California, Los Angeles told Patch: "There is no reason to discount it because it was done by economists, just as there is no reason to rank studies — as the authors do — based on whether they were done by social scientists (mainly economists) or not."

We asked readers: Would you question the validity of their research?

- 50.2 percent said "yes"
- 34.9 percent said "no"
- 14.9 percent said "not sure"

Both Brewer and Swartzberg pointed out that the researchers excluded other studies and data that showed lockdowns did slow the rapid spread of COVID-19 and prevent deaths.

"Overall it is not a bad study, but much data gets excluded by their inclusion criteria," Brewer said.

The authors used a systematic search and screening procedure to identify 18,590 studies, but only 24 studies were eligible for inclusion in the meta-analysis, the researchers said.

"That is not so unusual, but does raise the question of what the non-included information" said, Brewer said. "The study only looks at effects on COVID-19 deaths, not COVID-19 case numbers, hospitalizations or other potentially important outcomes."

We asked readers to share additional thoughts on the study:

This is both a medical and economic issue. Not to include data from medical research creates doubt in my mind about the validity of this information and the agenda of the authors.

Mandates are not ethical. Imposing executive orders without legislative approval for long durations is authoritarian and no place in a true democracy.

I think the Omicron wave is a good indicator of the potential damage the earlier waves would have caused had societal disruptions not been placed.

Economists cannot have a valued opinion on a public health issue.

The lockdowns caused more chaos and havoc to our economy which created higher suicide rates. Also hundreds if not thousands of families went hungry.

May have helped, however at the same time, destroyed businesses and the economy at the same time. And now this vaccine which isn't a vaccine it is a shot being forced. It should be a choice. This is different than other. It hasn't had enough research done yet.

Masking and personal distancing could have been implemented to prevent business from closing. I don't give a lot of weight to this "working paper" from a medical perspective, but agree full closure for months hurt businesses. Even now, many still wear masks when going out to prevent illness, so we probably could've done this all along. Hindsight doesn't help the past, but we can use this knowledge going forward.

Now that we have vaccines, I feel it should be more open. Give people options.

The lockdowns were destructive to people's lives, finances, and well-being. Thousands of businesses have closed forever due to them. And the people who still swear by the lockdowns are in complete denial.

The authors are economists not medical experts.

Disgusting attempt to pass off [expletive] as science.

I do not believe we can make this determination. COVID is still new. Maybe not shutter for so long - protocols were needed until we knew more. In-Person learning should have returned quicker. However we did the right thing for our Seniors and those more at risk.

[Lockdowns were] necessary. Nobody knew what to do at that time.