



Scathing new study on lockdowns boosts critics of pandemic restrictions

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Republicans touted the results of a prominent new study that found early pandemic lockdowns meant to stem the spread of COVID-19 were not effective.

The meta-analysis was led by Steve Hanke, an applied economics professor at Johns Hopkins University and director of the Troubled Currencies Project at the libertarian Cato Institute. The team of economists reported that worldwide pandemic lockdowns only prevented 0.2% of COVID-19 deaths.

Critics of pandemic restrictions boosted the study.

"The one thing we do know that did work is vaccines and natural immunity ... So, we should emphasize what works," Kentucky Republican Rand Paul told *Fox News*. "The study is an extensive analysis looking at dozens and dozens of studies, bringing them together, and said lockdowns did not reduce mortality but were devastating to the economy."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki was pressed on the study Friday and responded by distancing the administration from lockdowns. She argued President Joe Biden has not favored lockdowns and that they are a relic of the Trump era that will not return.

"Most of the lockdowns actually happened under the previous president ... What our objective has been is conveying that we have the tools we need to keep our country open," Psaki said.

Before the White House could respond, Republican lawmakers promoted the report's findings on TV and social media. The report buttressed their argument that societywide lockdowns did more harm than good.

"Did it stop COVID? Doesn't look to me like it did," said John Kennedy, a Republican senator from Louisiana. "Did it gut the American economy like a fish? Yes. Did it set our kids back years in terms of learning and socialization? Yes ... Did it impact the whole world? Yes. When America sneezes, the rest of the world gets a cold."

Meanwhile, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, said the findings were not surprising.

"This is what so many people had been talking about for so long. That it does not really have an effect on how well we were able to go through it," he told Fox News. "But what does it have an effect on, all these shutdowns? How many people missed a cancer screening? The mental health, the suicides for young children."

The study, which has not been peer-reviewed, is a meta-analysis based on 34 reports winnowed down from more than 18,500 studies "that could potentially address the belief posed."

Republicans are ramping up calls on the Biden administration to shift its focus from treating COVID-19 like an emergency to dealing with it as a normal part of life. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, for instance, urged Democrats to "accept that COVID is here to stay and we just need to get on with our lives."

Lockdowns were common in the United States during the first year of the pandemic but have since gone out of fashion, especially after the vaccination campaign. Still, other restrictions remain in place, such as mask mandates for some settings such as public transportation.

China, on the other hand, has adopted a zero-tolerance policy, which includes imposing draconian lockdowns and travel restrictions. New Zealand, which had pursued a similar approach, pivoted at the tail end of the delta wave to adopt a new strategy of treating COVID-19 as an endemic problem.