

## Corona Virus Containment Response: A Massive Public Health Ethics Failure

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The four commonly accepted principles of health care ethics, per Beauchamp and Childress (2008), include the (a) principle of respect for autonomy; the (b) principle of non-maleficence; the (c) principle of beneficence, and the (d) principle of justice. These are also the basis for public health ethics, though public health ethics deals with the population at large, rather than individual, clinical cases. The public health interventions during the response to the SARS/Corona Virus-19 pandemic have been a major discussion point in the medical community, and, in the main, my colleagues have agreed with the measures taken by governors across the U.S.

This included shutting businesses deemed “non-essential” and issuing “stay at home orders” and closing schools. In this analysis, I will argue that public health authorities have overstepped, ethically, if not legally, in their actions. They have repeatedly violated the four commonly accepted principles of health care ethics, trampling on the autonomy of individuals; violating the principle of non-maleficence by throwing individuals out of their jobs; viewing their actions as beneficent, despite reams of data to the contrary; and in general acting only as they deemed just, not consulting with key stakeholders, like regular citizens and small business leaders and non-profit directors. As a result, today, there are 20 million who have become unemployed in America, and the total is expected to grow to 20 percent of the entire U.S. workforce early this summer (CBS News, May 10, 2020, More than 20 Million Americans lost their jobs in April)

This may be the single, biggest instance of iatrogenic illness in the history of medicine -- harming 20 million Americans, ruining their economic lives, by forcing them to stay at home, when simpler, mask precautions and social distancing would have sufficed as an intervention.

Here are some other relevant headlines about the damage done by the rush to enact policies to ‘contain’ corona virus from just the other day: • Nearly one-third of Kentucky workers seek jobless aid, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/nearly-a-third-of-kentucky-workers-seek-jobless-aid-11589103001?mod=lead\\_feature\\_below\\_a\\_pos1](https://www.wsj.com/articles/nearly-a-third-of-kentucky-workers-seek-jobless-aid-11589103001?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1)

Tesla files lawsuit to reopen California factory which officials want closed due to Corona-virus concerns, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/elon-musk-threatens-authorities-over-mandated-tesla-factor-y-shutdown-11589046681?mod=hp\\_listb\\_pos4](https://www.wsj.com/articles/elon-musk-threatens-authorities-over-mandated-tesla-factor-y-shutdown-11589046681?mod=hp_listb_pos4)

• International air travel will take 18 months to recover due to corona virus restrictions, [https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-hits-emirates-earnings-as-airline-warns-of-depressed-travel-for-at-least-18-months-11589110258?mod=hp\\_listb\\_pos5](https://www.wsj.com/articles/coronavirus-hits-emirates-earnings-as-airline-warns-of-depressed-travel-for-at-least-18-months-11589110258?mod=hp_listb_pos5)

The media has largely cheer-led the restrictions imposed by state and local government -- even as news media have laid off around 30,000 additional reporters and producers, according to published reports. What we are seeing is public health malpractice and ethical violations which have caused huge harms to our lives which will take a long time to recover from, and possibly which some may never recover from, e.g. shuttered small businesses, people made homeless due to job loss, etc. When the virus first gained international headlines, President Trump and other policymakers in Washington D.C., according to published reports, called for travel restrictions on individuals from China. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the U.S. media assailed this proposal -- and then when the outbreak started here of the virus complained that the White House did not contain it. This is unjust. Simple precautions could have been implemented, like the Swedish government enacted, which would have prevented this mass unemployment, panic and emotional strain in the U.S. in my view and in the view of many critics.

• Sweden resisted a lockdown, and its capital Stockholm is expected to reach ‘herd immunity’ in weeks, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/22/no-lockdown-in-sweden-but-stockholm-could-seeherd-immunity-in-weeks.html> 3 Quoting from the article here: “Its neighbors closed borders, schools, bars and businesses as the coronavirus pandemic swept through Europe, but Sweden went against the grain by keeping public life as unrestricted as possible. The strategy — aimed at allowing some exposure to the virus in order to build immunity among the general population while protecting high-risk groups like the elderly — has been controversial. Some health experts liken it to playing Russian roulette with public health. But now, the country’s chief epidemiologist said the strategy appears to be working and that ‘herd immunity’ could be reached in the capital Stockholm in a matter of weeks.” The sources who are critical of the Swedish response are the same sorts of sources who advocated for lockdowns here in the U.S. and in the U.K. and Continental Europe - all to maleficent effect. There was no evidence-based criteria to lock-down businesses and force people to stay home.

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The public health officials -- who are supposed to be reasonable, rational scientists -- stampeded governors into panicked responses under color of law. They violated the autonomy of millions, and thought they were beneficent, but were bureaucratic bullies. I've read of police roughing up people at the mall whose masks slid off momentarily. This is not justice, this is a form of madness. A massive reform of public health ethics is called for in the aftermath of the Corona-virus pandemic, and a return to realistic

implementation of health ethics principles is required. Weighing the costs of bankrupting the country (and the globe) versus the price of medical treatment for middle aged people (not the elderly) not being infected needs to be part of the equation. Public health may take decades to recover from this ethical disaster; who knows what impact it will have on mandatory vaccinations and other seemingly beneficent projects in the future. Reasonable people may no longer cooperate.