

TRANSCRIPT

Corona vs. Corona measures: alternatives to a second lockdown

From the Corona Crisis to the Economy for the Common Good (Episode #3)

Thoughts and lessons from the crisis

A vlog by Common Good economist Christian Felber

For sources please see the German version of the transcript.

Dear affected by Corona and Corona measures,
this is the third part of my personal video blog "From Corona to the Common Good - Lessons from the Crisis".

In the past few days, I have become more and more pondering whether the current measures against the corona pandemic are the right ones for the future: Lockdown, shutdown and social distancing represent serious interventions in personal freedom, social life and the economy, and have such a dramatic impact on people's health and lives - that now

a differentiated public discussion of possible alternative strategies and the exact evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of each individual measure must take place.

The scientific data base of the threat potential of Covid-19 is also in motion or is just being formed, so that more and more experts are questioning current government measures or bringing new approaches into play.

This video is primarily dedicated to such voices. Let us first look at the most important figures of the current analysis.

First: In the peak flu winters of the past few years, up to 25,000 flu deaths were counted in Italy and Germany - Italy currently has around 20,000 corona deaths, Germany less than 3,000. There are now over 100,000 worldwide. The flu claims up to 650,000 deaths annually, according to the World Health Organization. That means if the current number of corona increased fivefold, the value would still be below the values of the worst flu years. By no means do I want to say that Corona is less dangerous or as dangerous as the flu, but simply that there are currently no reliable figures available.

The information on the number of intensive care beds in German, Italian, French and Spanish hospitals is reliable: the number of beds in Italy, France and Spain is two and a half to three times lower than in Germany. Due to savings measures in the health sector, the hygiene standards are also very different. The virologist and epidemiologist Martin Haditsch points this out, which can lead to a higher number of infections in the hospitals themselves and thus to a fatal positive feedback on the number of deaths in the affected countries.

Second, most death counts make no distinction between "death with corona" and "death by corona". It is about the decisive cause of death. For example, a patient may die of cardiac arrest or cerebral hemorrhage that was infected with corona the day before and is included in the statistics as a corona death. According to the former President of the Italian Health Service, an accurate attribution of the causes of death could reduce the number of Corona deaths in Italy to 1/8. That would be about 2,500, one tenth of the peak values of the strong flu years. Hamburg now counts differently - the Institute of Forensic Medicine examines every single corona case differentially. As of April 8, there were 29 deaths from Corona in Hamburg.

Thirdly, a study by the University of Florence on 3,000 Corona infected people showed that half to 3/4 of all infected people show no symptoms. According to the chief epidemiologist, a study in Iceland and another from the University of Padua came to similar results. The

chief infectious disease specialist at the St. Gallen Clinic even speaks of 85% of those with a corona infection who are free from symptoms. What does that mean?

This is good news at first because the level of immunization among the population appears to be significantly higher than originally assumed. The first empirical study by Bonn's virologist Hendrik Streeck in the German hotspot community of Gangelt comes to the conclusion that 15 percent of the population is already corona-immune - and that is still cautiously estimated. Transferred to the Austrian hotspot region of Tyrol, this would result in 113,000 people being corona-immune, as of today. The first sample for the whole of Austria calculates a number of 28,500 or 0.33 percent of the population infected with Corona. However, these were virus tests and not antibody tests as in Germany. A surprisingly optimistic and criticized study by Oxford University believes that half of the population is already corona-immune. The aim of this study is that representative antibody tests determine the level of immunity of the general population.

One thing is certain: the greater the number of infected, the lower the death rate. Initially, these referred to those who tested positive. But people without symptoms were not tested at all. The virologist Streeck in Gangelt came to 0.37% mortality empirically - calculated carefully, the number could also be lower. In a recent study on Wuhan, the mortality rate was 0.04 to 0.1%. And Professor Ioannidis of Stanford University came up with 0.125% - flu-like values and light years below the 3.4% mortality rate that was initially announced by the WHO and was loud and threatening in the media worldwide.

There is a precedent in recent history for misjudgments: swine flu. When the WHO raised it to the highest danger level 6 in mid-2009, mortality rates were up to 5.1 percent. The WHO later corrected to 0.02. Today hardly anyone is afraid of swine flu.

I got to know many new terms in the crisis, such as lockdown, shutdown, social distancing, herd immunity or cross immunity. And thanks to Peter Weibel, there is another new word: Phobocracy: rule through fear. At present, many people - justified - are afraid of the corona virus. I am afraid of long-term curfews and such drastic measures that there is hardly any topic left other than that of the crisis.

Above all, I am afraid that governments will implement measures after measures with a firm hand and remain idle in a radically disproportionate manner in the face of much greater dangers such as climate change or the loss of biodiversity. Eating a little less meat, not flying on vacation or cycling instead of driving fat cars would be neither dangerous to health nor life-threatening.

In contrast to the Corona measures: The former Minister of Health of Israel said that the curfews would kill more people through anxiety, depression or heart attacks than the virus. You don't have to agree to that. But more and more public health experts, such as David Katz from Yale University, are asking whether the measures are as bad as the disease.

Constitutional lawyers therefore question the proportionality of the restrictions on fundamental rights. Christoph Möllers from the Humboldt University in Berlin believes that the Infection Act does not cover the broad range of the measures, literally: "On this basis, you cannot close an entire country for weeks." And for months?

The current key question is twofold:

First, are the encroachments on fundamental rights proportionate and second, are general exit restrictions and undifferentiated social distancing still the most effective measures to deal with the Covid19 pandemic?

The big dilemma of the current crisis strategy is: A steep curve demands many corona victims in a short time, so it is flattened. But the flatter and longer the curve, the more victims the measures demand. The German Ethics Council is already warning of "dramatic side effects":

- less nature, fresh air and exercise weaken the immune system;
- the loss of caregivers and restrictions on health care can cost lives;
- Social isolation leads to loneliness, anxiety and depression;
- Stress leads to an increase in domestic violence, especially against women and children;
- Unemployment and bankruptcies usually lead to higher suicide rates.

"If the health, economic and psychosocial damage outweighs", writes the German Ethics Council, "the legitimacy of the strategy ends".

That is why it is now necessary to compare the dangers of corona and corona measures. Not appeasing, but evaluating. A complete basis for decision-making would have to cast both dangers in facts and figures and put them up for public discussion.

In addition, more experts on alternative strategies should have their say.

The epidemiologist Knut Wittkowski from Rockefeller University, for example, advocates more proximity instead of distance and rapid immunization of the non-risk groups - while protecting the risk groups for 4 weeks, for example.

The risk groups are now well identified and could be protected more specifically. For example, through special rules for old people's homes, free supply services or reserved shopping slots for the older population.

I also find the suggestion of immunity certificates after a positive antibody test worthy of discussion - this group of people could move freely again - and maybe help at a crucial point.

Restricting the freedom of non-infectious corona-immune people permanently is hardly in accordance with fundamental rights!

In addition to Wittkowski, the Hamburg infectiologist Ansgar Lohse and six German experts, including two former members of the Health Advisory Council, believe that schools and playgrounds should reopen. This would also enable rapid immunization of the non-risk groups. Those who are immune can visit their grandparents again after just a few weeks.

With general containment as the main strategy, on the other hand, it is completely unpredictable when grandchildren can see their grandparents again.

The paradox of the current strategy is that the fewer people are infected and immunized in the first wave, the more waves it takes to reach the famous herd immunity.

But the longer the shutdown lasts, the more damage it does!

I was most afraid of the subsequent waves right from the start. Because they turn the state of emergency into a normal state, and that changes everything: from living together, through the economy, fundamental rights, democracy.

Perhaps the measures taken for the first wave were the right ones. But given the overall picture, we have to ask whether the same measures are the best for the subsequent waves.

New insights and findings must lead to new considerations. For example, that it is perhaps most effective that humanity does more to prevent viruses from jumping from wild animals to humans.

That's what the next video is about. Because, alongside Ebola, HIV, and Sars1, Corona may have been just a warning example of what will come if we continue to stick to the dogma of permanent economic growth instead of striving for an ecological balance.