

Opening Statement: The Life-Threatening Unintended Consequences of Pandemic Lockdowns

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It's not often that I break down in tears while reporting on a story. But that's exactly what happened on Monday when I [covered](#) a series of interviews with doctors across the globe warning that COVID-19 lockdown orders are leading to an "international epidemic" of child suicide.

"We are very surprised by the intensity of the desire to die among children who may be 12 or 13 years old," a French doctor [said](#). "We sometimes have children of 9 who already want to die. And it's not simply a provocation or a blackmail via suicide. It is a genuine wish to end their lives."

The number of youth suicide attempts his hospital sees in a month has more than doubled amid pandemic restrictions.

Here in the US, the Centers for Disease Control reported that [25 percent](#) of young adults considered suicide during the lockdowns, while overall mental health issues appear to have spiked as well. CDC [data](#) show a 24 percent increase in emergency room mental health visits for children ages 5 to 11, compared to 2019. Among adolescents aged 12 to 17, that increase is 31 percent.

The spike in depression and suicidality triggered by the social isolation of pandemic lockdowns is certainly not what proponents of the restrictions intended. They simply want, as we all do, to stop the spread of COVID-19 and bring the pandemic to an end. But as Henry Hazlitt explained in his book *Economics in One Lesson*, responsible policymaking means looking beyond intentions and immediate effects. It means taking into account a policy's indirect consequences and its collateral damage. And sweeping government interventions tend to be plagued by unintended consequences: sometimes lethal ones.

There has been perhaps no more dramatic example of this lethality than the unintended consequences of pandemic lockdowns. Government officials took drastic, unprecedented steps of closing businesses en masse, criminalizing citizens' livelihoods, and essentially placing healthy Americans under a form of house arrest. The lockdowns and restrictions have been normalized, but they are not normal. My colleagues and I at the Foundation for Economic Education have chronicled over the last year how these attempts to address a public health crisis have generated their own crises and have likely done more harm than good.

The aforementioned mental health crisis is only one of many that have emerged as a result of these unprecedented government restrictions. We have also seen an enormous uptick in addiction and drug overdoses. According to the [CDC](#), "Over 81,000 drug overdose deaths occurred in the United States in the 12 months ending in May 2020, the highest number of overdose deaths ever recorded in a 12-month period."

Full data will take years to analyze, but state-and-local level examples of this tragic trend are too numerous to list.

For instance, the *Boston Globe* [reported](#) that Maine overdose deaths "climbed nearly one-third in 2020 to set a record." In the summer of 2020, a coroner in Ohio told the *Washington Post* their office ran out of wheeled carts to put the bodies of overdose victims in.

Meanwhile, an analysis from the National Commission on COVID-19 and Criminal Justice found that domestic violence [spiked 8.1% after lockdowns were imposed](#). The study's author said that this figure is, if anything, an underestimate—"a floor, not a ceiling."

None of this even touches on the economic devastation pandemic lockdowns have wrought. According to the business website Yelp, [60% of the 163,735 businesses](#) that closed between March 1st and August 31 of 2020 will never reopen.

Small businesses, in particular, have suffered. More than [100,000 small businesses](#) permanently shuttered last year amid pandemic lockdowns and riots, while [polling](#) shows that 60 percent of small business owners worry they won't make it through June 2021.

From mental health to drug overdoses to domestic violence, the immeasurable economic and social damage lockdowns have wrought cannot be made whole by any amount of welfare, stimulus payments, or business grants. Lockdowns and continued pandemic restrictions are what's crushing the American economy and the American spirit.

Neither the Paycheck Protection Program nor other fraud-rife and inefficient federal band-aids can heal the gaping wound lockdowns have carved in our economy.

Policymakers who continue to perpetuate lockdown policies and heavy pandemic restrictions must discover the humility necessary to see that their sweeping actions have consequences beyond their control, understanding, and intentions. Until they do, millions of Americans will continue to suffer silently as they bear the unintended consequences.