

‘We must have a plan’: Why we need an exit strategy for the coronavirus shutdown

How long is this going to last? As terrible as a pandemic would be, is averting it really worth a new Great Depression? What is the endgame?

As a pandemic loomed, the country moved in remarkably short order from shrug to shutdown. Understandably, some are already questioning the wisdom of this move, noting [how little information we’re acting on](#) and [the devastation the shutdown is already wreaking on the economy](#). The *New York Times* grants shutdown skepticism the frisson of “[taboo](#).”

Much of this skepticism still misunderstands just how devastating the pandemic would be — not only in lives lost but in damage to the economy. The skeptics are wrong in the near term. For now, we have no other choice. But they are right that this cure cannot be tolerated for long. And they are right too that there is no consensus on when the shutdown will have achieved its aim, or on when the benefits will no longer outweigh the costs.

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We urgently need a better understanding of why the shutdown is necessary, under what conditions it will be relaxed, and what we all must do to achieve that transition. The present uncertainty imperils not only the economy but the effort against the pandemic. We must have a plan now.

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