

Viewpoint: We can't simply test our way out of the coronavirus pandemic

In response to [calls for Covid-19 testing](#) of the entire U.S. population, several large [universities](#), and even [some employers](#), have announced plans for extensive [Covid-19 testing of their employees \(and students\)](#) to support a safe return to work and school. These efforts are based on expert recommendations, some of which call for [repeated testing of the entire population \(using the PCR test\) every 14 days](#), or even more often. Such initiatives could [require millions of tests](#) in the U.S. each and every day.

With each announcement, pressure grows on other organizations — and public health departments — to follow suit, potentially triggering a testing arms race. While mass Covid-19 testing might seem intuitive, its benefits are unlikely to meet the high expectations for it.

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According to [a model](#) developed by Imperial College London and the World Health Organization, based on these optimistic assumptions the impact of universal Covid-19 testing would reduce the number of Covid-19 cases by less than 10%.

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Other [important harms](#) of widespread testing include the real possibility that testing locations might serve as sites for congregation and thus promote the spread of SARS-CoV-2; the need for testers to don scarce personal protective equipment; and the fact that testing is resource intensive, time-consuming, and uncomfortable.

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