

COVID-19: science must not be the boy who cried wolf

Dear Editor,

COVID-19 mitigation and suppression strategies like physical distancing severely affect livelihoods. Jobs, education, healthcare and more continue to be disrupted or lost. 'Is all this necessary?' numerous people ask as some countries are already loosening isolation measures while others proceeded with less strict measures in the first instance. Moreover, researchers identify a lack of reliable data.¹ If observable effects of SARS-CoV-2 are not as severe as many fear (at least in some places), may trust and compliance with strategies in future crises be eroded?

Importantly, Rose's 'prevention paradox' comes into play. Benefits of measures which may not be readily noticeable by individuals may make huge differences when combatting COVID-19 in populations.² Thus, science must bring home to the public that it is not crying wolf here: continuing uncertainty in forecasts mean that, for now at least, extensive mitigation and suppression strategies and potentially repeated cycles of these measures are/will be necessary.

Conceivably, only today's drastic measures disallow the sizeable rest of the iceberg to be observed. The COVID-19 situations in Lombardy and New York convey that this crisis is unique.

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