

# Yale Study: German COVID Death Risk Equivalent to Driving Nine Miles Per Day

More than 120,000 people have died worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic as of April 14, [according to official statistics](#), and nearly two million have been infected worldwide.

Yet [a new white paper](#) published by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, Yale University, and BMJ suggests the fatality risk of COVID-19 may not be as high as previously believed.

Analyzing data from Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, as well as New York City, Louisiana, Michigan, and Washington State, researchers concluded that COVID-19 deaths “are remarkably uncommon” for individuals under the age of 65 who do not have preexisting health conditions.

In pandemic hotbeds such as the Netherlands, Italy, and New York City, people in this category accounted for just 0.3 percent, 0.7 percent, and 1.8 percent of all COVID-19 deaths, researchers found.

“The COVID-19 death risk in people [under] 65 years old during the period of fatalities from the epidemic was equivalent to the death risk from driving between 9 miles per day (Germany) and 415 miles per day (New York City),” wrote scholars John P. A. Ioannidis, Cathrine Axfors, and Despina G. Contopoulos-Ioannidis.

[In a previous article](#) written for *Stat*, John Ioannidis, a professor of epidemiology at Stanford University, raised the possibility that the novel coronavirus disease could prove to be “a once-in-a-century evidence fiasco” and expressed

skepticism of efforts to “flatten the curve” by mandating school and business closures.

“One of the bottom lines is that we don’t know how long social distancing measures and lockdowns can be maintained without major consequences to the economy, society, and mental health,” Ioannidis wrote.

The authors of the white paper, which was published on April 8, conclude that data suggest policymakers should explore a pandemic strategy “focusing specifically on protecting high-risk elderly individuals.”

The findings would seem to run counter to widely-cited estimates from the Imperial College in London and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

On March 29, [Anthony Fauci](#), an epidemiologist and the leader of the Trump administration’s coronavirus task force, [estimated](#) the U.S. death toll from the novel coronavirus would be 100,000 to 200,000.

Those estimates, while daunting, were far below the estimates of Neil Ferguson a British epidemiologist and professor of mathematical biology at the Imperial College in London, who [published a paper](#) saying 2.2 million Americans and more than 500,000 in the United Kingdom would likely die.

According to a March 20 *New York Times* [report](#), Ferguson said the “best case” scenario for the U.S. was “about 1.1 million deaths.” Ferguson later clarified that his estimates were predicated on the absence of social distancing measures.

In the U.S., [95 percent of Americans](#) have been ordered to stay at home because of the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 42 states have issued orders that require them to shelter in homes and leave only for essential activities, such as getting food or medical supplies or services.

As a result of stay-at-home orders and business closures, a record [17 million Americans](#) have filed for unemployment the last three weeks.

There's currently a great [debate raging](#) as to whether the federal government will change its social distancing guidelines to prod the U.S. economy back to work on May 1.

"At some point, the president is going to have to look at Drs. Fauci and Birx and say, we're opening on May 1," the popular Fox News host Laura Ingraham [recently tweeted](#). "Give me your best guidance on protocols, but we cannot deny our people their basic freedoms any longer."

Kickstarting the economy would come with risks, of course, but all things in life do. Even driving nine miles.

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