How to ease a covid-19 lockdown

# Fumbling for the exit strategy

Overwhelmed by the crisis, most governments are ill-prepared for what comes next

SUDDENLY EVERYONE has a plan. Ideas for exiting the covid-19 lockdown are spreading faster than the virus ever did. Spain(西班牙) has let builders return to work, Italy has opened stationers （文具商店）and bookshops, Denmark（丹麦） is allowing children back into nurseries（托儿所） and primary schools（中小学）. South Africa（南非）’s opposition is calling for a relaxed “smart lockdown”. In America President Donald Trump has been sparring（争论） with state governors over who should decide what reopens when.

Every country is different, but already two things are clear. First, governments need to explain to （向..解释）their people that the world is not about to return to normal. Without a vaccine（疫苗） or a therapy（疗法）, life will be constrained（限制） and economies will remain depressed. Second, testing and contact-tracing（检测和接触者追踪） are vital to keeping the virus at bay（防止...侵袭）. Countries that failed to invest（投资） enough in them （when the disease first emerged in China） risk repeating（重复） the mistake.

The need to devise（设计） exit plans（退出） is urgent（紧急的）. The alarming cost of hard lockdowns is becoming clearer. This week the IMF forecast that extending full lockdowns well into the third quarter of 2020 would turn a 3% contraction（收缩） of the world economy this year into a 6% one. An analysis（分析） by Norway（挪威）’s covid-19 task-force（工作小组）, published on April 7th, compared an 18-month hard lockdown with a “slowdown” and concluded（得出结论） that the statistical value of the extra lives it saved would be dwarfed（相形见绌） by its long-term cost.

And yet（可以，然而）, however much exits are needed, they are also hard, because most of the world remains susceptible（易受...影响的） to a second wave（浪潮） of covid-19. Spain（西班牙） is the country with the highest number of recorded cases per head（每人）. Yet only a tiny share（小份额） of the population has been infected. Even if （即使）the actual（真实的） number of cases were 100 times higher than official numbers suggest, two-thirds（三分之二） of its population would still be vulnerable（脆弱的）—more if immunity（免疫力） is short-lived（短暂的）. Lockdowns have been sold as a way to “beat（战胜，打）” covid-19. In fact, they reset the clock. Having failed to stop the disease taking hold（蔓延）, countries have bought themselves a chance to try again. But unless they act differently the virus will surge （激增）once more.

What should they do? Governments need to choose from the menu of options by comparing the costs of each measure with the benefits it brings—and the calculus（计算方法） will differ in different countries. Should masks（口罩） be mandatory? (Yes, if supplies are adequate（足够的）.) Should schools take pupils back? (More research is needed.) Which industries can safely reopen? (Factories can; hospitality is harder.) Do you shut borders （关闭边境）or quarantine（隔离） travellers? (Quarantine is better.) Policies will evolve（演变，进化） as the science improves or the disease flares up（突然燃烧起来，爆发）. Sometimes, that will mean tightening（对..加强控制） the rules again.

China offers a snapshot of what this means. Since restrictions were relaxed there the streets have filled up, many people have gone to back to work and life has become more liveable（舒适的）. However, consumers remain anxious（焦虑的） so some of them stay at home. The talk is of a 90% economy (see article)—better than a 50% economy, certainly（当然）, but nonetheless（尽管如此） the greatest global economic catastrophe（灾难） since the 1930s.

Managing this part-locked-in, part-let-out world（部分锁定、部分释放的世界） depends on testing. Testing can tell governments about the running rate of infections and which measures work （有效）and which do not. It isolates（隔离） new cases, allowing the tracing of their contacts, helping arrest（抑制）the spread of the disease. The better the testing, the less all-embracing（包括一切的） the social distancing needs to be, because infected people are routinely（常规地） removed from the population—in theory（理论上） it could replace（替代） distancing altogether（完全的）.

Governments talk about testing a lot. It will not be available on a truly mass scale（大规模） for many months. One cheap substitute（替代品） is taking temperatures（测体温）, but people free of fever（没有发烧的人） can still be infectious（易传染的）. Another idea, boosted（改进） by recent news of a collaboration（合作） between Apple and Google, is to use mobile-phone apps to log contacts（记录联系人） automatically so that testing can be targeted （针对性）on those people most likely to be infected. But the apps need to be widely downloaded to work and they still require vast（大量的） numbers of testers and tracers（追踪者） to identify（验明，鉴别） new infections and check that people are isolating（使隔离） themselves (see article). One proposal（提议，提案） says that America will need 260,000 recruits（新兵）, up from just 2,200 today (see article). Until governments begin to grapple（努力） with such numbers, exits will be underwhelming（平庸的，平凡的）, dangerous even.

No wonder（难怪） the world is racing for a vaccine（疫苗） (see Briefing). This is a global effort as it should be—no country has a monopoly（垄断） on science. Again, though, to produce and distribute（分配） a vaccine fast and efficiently calls for hard work today. Without investment（投资） now, even before a vaccine has been proven（证明）, there will be a shortage of manufacturing capacity（生产力）, disrupting routine（中断常规的） vaccinations for diseases like measles and polio（麻疹和小儿麻痹症）. For as long as there is a shortage some countries may try to corner（垄断） the market, leaving（留下） health workers and the most vulnerable （易感染的）at risk elsewhere.（别处）

Talk of exiting lockdowns（解除封锁） raises the spirits and justly so. Yet the frustrations（挫折） and the hard choices are just beginning.

有关解除封锁的谈论令人振奋，这是理所当然的。然而，挫折和艰难的选择才刚刚开始。