



Written by [John Stossel](#) on January 11, 2023

## COVID: Who Was Right?

It's now been three years since COVID hit.

At the start of the pandemic, "experts" shouted: "Stay home!" "Close schools!" "Wash your hands!" "Disinfect countertops!"

Clearly, disinfecting countertops and washing hands made no difference. What about closing schools and lockdowns?

The media trashed Gov. Ron DeSantis when he lifted Florida's lockdown. "Acting irresponsibly!" roared MSNBC's Dr. Vin Gupta.

Reporters praised New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's lockdowns.

On CNN, Andrew's brother Chris gushed, "I am wowed by what you did!" By contrast, he said, Florida was "in such dire straits."

But actually, adjusted for population, Florida and New York had about the same number of deaths. Given that Florida has more old people, Florida did *better* than New York. Much of the media just reports what it wants to believe.

My new video this week covers which states and countries handled COVID well and which didn't.

For the most part, there are few dramatic differences between states that opened up and those that didn't. The two states in the continental U.S. with the fewest deaths: Vermont and Utah — a red state and a blue state.

The leftist media also got a lot wrong covering the rest of the world.

When Swedish health officials let the virus spread to try to reach herd immunity (and allow younger people to live normal lives), the media's "experts" were horrified.

Time: "A Disaster!" NBC: "Sweden's failed experiment."

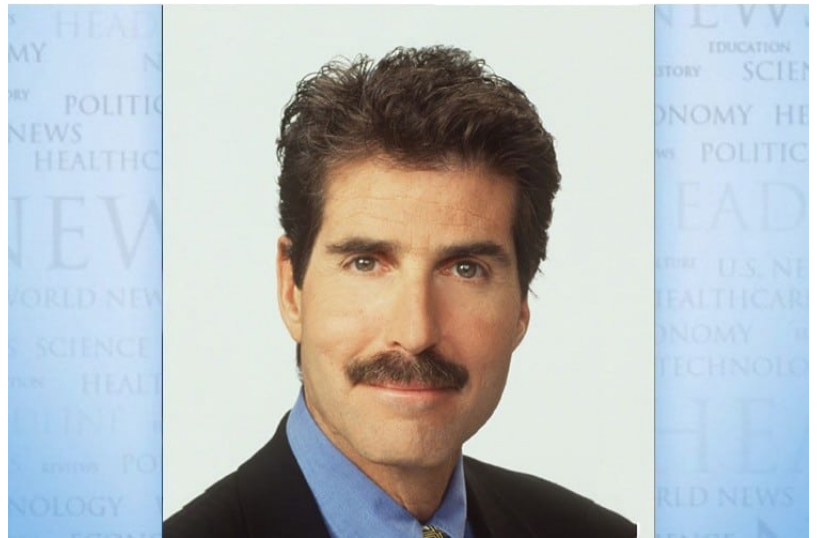
But it *wasn't* a failed experiment. COVID deaths did surge at first, but data from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development show that Sweden has done *better* than most European countries.

The OECD ranks countries by comparing "excess deaths," deaths above the pre-COVID average. That's a better way to compare because some countries undercount COVID.

India reported fewer than a million COVID deaths, but the World Health Organization says the real number is probably much higher, because there were 5 million excess deaths in India over the past three years.

Maxim Lott's excellent website, Maximum Truth, covers this "COVID Fudge Factor" in detail.

Former Soviet countries often undercount. Belarus' dictator bragged, "There are no viruses here!" But Belarus had many more excess deaths.



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Two countries that did well during COVID were in sub-Saharan Africa. I found that surprising since Africa has low vaccination rates and sparse medical care. Lott attributes it to Africa's very young population. COVID rarely harms young people.

What does the data say about countries like Australia that imposed brutal lockdowns? It's not clear that the brutality helped. But Australia's rules did save lives, mostly because for two years, the island sealed its borders. That dramatically limited COVID's spread.

But once almost every Australian was vaccinated and the government lifted its lockdown, COVID cases soared, like they are in China now.

Adjusted for population, Australia has now had *more* COVID cases than the United States.

But fewer Australians died, partly because the less-deadly omicron variant was circulating when the country lifted its lockdown.

Was Australia's strict lockdown worth it? The average Australian lived two weeks longer. To me, it's not worth it. Being locked in my apartment or shot with rubber bullets if I went out to protest just isn't worth two extra weeks of life.

Even people in China, where protesting is illegal, recently protested enough that China lifted its most severe rules.

Lockdowns also hurt us financially. New York lost 400,000 jobs since the start of the pandemic. Florida *gained* 400,000.

In New York, where schools were kept closed, child obesity increased by 5%. In Florida, obesity fell.

Kids' education suffered. Last year brought America's lowest math and reading scores in decades. In Sweden, which never closed its primary schools, kids suffered no learning loss.

I understand that three years ago, frightened politicians wanted to *do* something. A highly contagious virus does require some public health restrictions.

But I wish they'd be a little humble. All of us have different values about safety versus freedom.

Life is better when we get to make our own decisions.

*Every Tuesday at [JohnStossel.com](#), Stossel posts a new video about the battle between government and freedom. He is the author of Give Me a Break: How I Exposed Hucksters, Cheats, and Scam Artists and Became the Scourge of the Liberal Media.*

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