

[Community Voice](#)

Reopening the Economy Requires Understanding the Data

Recent studies on death rates suggest decision makers have hard calls awaiting them.

By [Cliff Slater](#)

At a meeting of state senators last week, Hawaii Department of Health Director Bruce Anderson was asked [about plans to reopen tourism](#).

He said, “No one is even talking about allowing people to start coming here except with quarantine provisions — that’s not even being discussed. We’re not close to that point.”



Let’s help him out.

We should begin with the very surprising recent results showing that COVID-19 infections have permeated communities far more than was previously thought.

A Stanford study [just released](#) found that in a representative sample of 3,330 people in Silicon Valley there are likely 50 to 85 times more people infected than those previously reported.

Separately in Los Angeles, a similar USC study found those already infected were 28 to 55 times higher than the roughly 8,000 confirmed cases that the county had in early April, when the study was conducted.

A recent New York City [study showed](#) that the people infected by COVID-19 was likely 12 times greater than the numbers of people who have been reported as being infected.

These results are prompting a surge [of further studies](#) around the country to provide more rigor to these data. In Hawaii, we would hope that our authorities are pursuing similar studies.

Death Rates

While the data we have at the moment is not robust enough for decision making, it is enough of an indication to begin planning on what actions we might take to re-open our economy if the next round of data confirms anything close to the lowest of what these three studies found.

Hawaii’s proclaimed death rate, as of April 28, is 16 deaths out of 609 reported infections, or about 2.6%. If it is finally shown that, like New York, we have had 12 times more infections through people not knowing they were infected, it would mean 16 deaths of 7,308 infected, or 0.22% deaths.

Compare that to the current statistic of 2.6%. That should have an effect on decision-making.

In the decision-making process to re-open the economy, we need to make the trade-off with potential increases in suicides and opioid deaths, which are both largely confined to young people and are usually exacerbated by deep recessions like the one we are in the throes of now.

In Hawaii, we have been averaging in excess of 200 of these deaths annually in normal times. This has to be compared to the 16 deaths from COVID-19 so far.

We should also compare these deaths to [the latest recorded](#) Hawaii influenza/pneumonia deaths of 589 deaths in 2016-2017.

If indeed we find that the new studies, which should be released soon, validate the studies we have just reviewed, we might think of strongly urging all those with underlying conditions and those over 65 to continue to self-quarantine, while letting the younger people get on with the economy.

After all, in general, those aged 18-64 are running our economy while those 65 and over are largely retired.

What will be the effect?

The virus will run rampant through the under 65 group but this should result in few, if any, deaths and few hospitalizations. Judging from the New York City data, over 90% will contract the virus without experiencing any symptoms worth reporting.

In the end, the result will be herd immunity for those not quarantined.

While those over 65 or with underlying conditions would have to wait for the vaccine to be available next year, in the meantime, the economy could start returning to normal.

The present lockdown is a classic example of Voltaire's warning that, "The perfect is the enemy of the good."

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About the Author



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Cliff Slater is a businessman who founded Maui Divers. He was a plaintiff in a federal lawsuit challenging the process by which the city selected elevated heavy rail.