

14 Public Health Organizations Condemn Herd Immunity Scheme for Controlling Spread of SARS CoVID-2

Great Barrington Declaration is not grounded in science and is dangerous

(Washington, DC) – SARS-CoVID-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 has infected at least 7.8 million people in the United States and 38 million worldwide. It has led to over 215,000 deaths domestically, and more than 1 million globally – with deaths continuing to climb.

If followed, the recommendations in the Great Barrington Declaration would haphazardly and unnecessarily sacrifice lives. The declaration is not a strategy, it is a political statement. It ignores sound public health expertise. It preys on a frustrated populace. Instead of selling false hope that will predictably backfire, we must focus on how to manage this pandemic in a safe, responsible, and equitable way.

The suggestions put forth by the Great Barrington Declaration are NOT based in science.

- There is no evidence that we are even remotely close to herd immunity. To the contrary, experts believe that 85 to 90 percent of the U.S. population is still at risk of contracting SARS-CoVID-2. Herd immunity is achieved when the virus stops circulating because a large segment of the population has already been infected. Letting Americans get sick, rather than focusing on proven methods to prevent infections, could lead to hundreds of thousands of preventable illnesses and deaths.ⁱ It would also add greater risk in communities of color which have already experienced disproportionate impacts of the pandemic.
- The declaration ignores what are our best tools to fight the virus, i.e. wearing masks, physical distancing, hand-washing, avoiding large crowds, strategic testing, rapid isolation of infected people and supportive quarantine for people who need to isolate.
- We have seen the failure of the herd immunity experiment in nations such as Sweden, which has the highest mortality rate among Nordic countries.ⁱⁱ COVID-19 carries a much higher risk of severe disease and death than other infections where herd immunity was attempted before a vaccine was available.ⁱⁱⁱ It is illogical to ignore public health and scientific evidence when so many lives are at stake.

Combatting the pandemic with lockdowns or full reopening is not a binary, either/or choice. We need to embrace common sense public health practices that allow for a safe reopening of the economy and a return to in-person work and learning while also using proven strategies to reduce the spread of the virus.

The declaration suggests a so-called focused protection approach. It suggests allowing the virus to spread unchecked among young people to create herd immunity in the entire population. This notion is dangerous because it puts the entire population, particularly the most vulnerable, at risk. Young people are not all healthy and they don't live in vacuums.^{iv} They interact with family members, co-workers and neighbors. Inviting increased rates of COVID-19 in young people will lead to increased infections rates among all Americans.

Public health guidance and requirements related to masking and physical distancing are not an impediment to normalcy – they are the path to a new normal. The goal is both public health safety and economic security; the two are not in conflict with one another, they are dependent on each other. We need to focus our efforts on the development and implementation of a national, science-based and ethical pandemic disease-control strategy.

The pandemic has created serious hardships on families' economic security and on American's mental health and well-being. What we need is a coordinated and robust national response including mask use, hand hygiene and physical distancing, while also ensuring social supports for those most vulnerable, including physical and mental health, and social factors. What we do not need is wrong-headed proposals masquerading as science.

This statement was authored by:

American Public Health Association

Big Cities Health Coalition

Trust for America's Health

Association of Public Health Laboratories

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health

de Beaumont Foundation

Johns Hopkins Center for Public Security of the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

National Association of County Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Directors

National Association of County and City Health Officials

National Association for Rural Mental Health

Prevention Institute

Public Health Institute

Resolve to Save Lives

Well Being Trust

ⁱ <https://www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousdisease/covid19/88401>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.medpagetoday.com/infectiousdisease/covid19/88401>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/from-our-experts/early-herd-immunity-against-covid-19-a-dangerous-misconception>

^{iv} https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6941e1.htm?s_cid=mm6941e1_w