

Opinions

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How much is a human life worth? Decisions about re-opening are profound

BY ANDREW CUOMO

Governor
State of New York

At his daily press briefing May 5, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo spoke about reopening economies amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.



N.Y. Gov.
Andrew Cuomo

One point I want to make about reopening, not just in this state, but all across this nation. There's a conversation that is going on about reopening that we are

not necessarily explicit about, but which is very important. There's a question that is being debated right under the surface and the decisions we make on reopening are really profound decisions. The fundamental question which we're not articulating is how much is a human life worth? How much do we think a human life is worth? There's a cost of staying closed, no doubt. Economic cost, personal cost. There's also a cost of reopening quickly. Either option has a cost.

You stay closed, there's a cost. You reopen quickly and there's a cost. The faster we reopen, the lower the economic cost; but the higher the human cost because the more lives lost. That, my

friends, is the decision we are really making. What is that balance? What is that trade off? Because it is very real. If you look at the projection models of how many lives will be lost, you'll notice they changed recently. Why did they change? And they went up dramatically. Why? Because now they're factoring in the reopening plans and the reopening schedules that states are announcing. The federal government's estimate, federal government's estimate, FEMA, has increased from 25,000 to 200,000 the number of daily cases by June.

Think about that increase. The IHME, which is a foundation model supported by Gates, which is the preferred model by the White House. When they were projecting deaths by Aug. 4, they projected in early April, 60,000 deaths. They projected, mid-April, 60,300 deaths, actually a little lower. The new projections are 134,000 deaths. How did it

go from 60,000 deaths to 134,000 deaths? This is the model which the White House relies on. When the director of the institute was asked why those revisions happened, the director said rising mobility in most US states as well as the easing of social distancing measures expected in 31 states by May 11, indicating that growing contacts among people will promote transmission of the coronavirus. That's a very nice way of saying when you accelerate the reopening, you will have more people coming in contact with other people – you're relaxing social distancing. The more people in contact with other people, the higher the infection rate of the spread of the virus. The more people who get infected, the more people die. We know that. That's why the projection models are going up.

There's a cost of staying closed. There's also a cost of reopening quickly. That is the hard truth that we are all dealing with. Let's be honest about, let's be open

about it. Let's not camouflage the actual terms of the discussion that we're having. The question comes back to how much is a human life worth? Do you see that projection model go from 25 to 200,000 cases from FEMA. You see the number of deaths go from 60,000 to 134,000. How much is a human life worth? That's the real discussion that no one is admitting openly or freely, but we should.

To me, I say cost of a human – a human life is priceless, period. Our reopening plan doesn't have a tradeoff. Our reopening plan says you monitor the data, you monitor the transmission rate, you monitor the hospitalization rate, you monitor the death rate. If it goes up, you have a circuit breaker, you stop. You close the valve on reopening. But it is a conversation that we should have openly. Hard conversation, painful conversation, controversial conversation, yes, all of the above. But, it's also the right conversation because those are the decisions we're making.

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