



Control Versus Choice

COVID cases are up. Hospitalizations climbed 24% last week.

But the media make everything seem scarier than it is. The headline “Up 24%!” comes after dramatic lows. Hospitalizations are still less than half what they were when President Joe Biden said, “The pandemic is over.”

Yet the shallow media keep pounding away: “It may be time to break out the masks” headlined CNN.

Frightened people believe. The movie studio Lionsgate reinstated an office mask mandate. Atlanta’s Morris Brown College mandated masks and even banned parties.

This month, several school districts in Kentucky and Texas closed. “The safety and wellbeing of our students, staff, and community is a top priority,” said the school superintendent in Texas.

But kids rarely get very sick from COVID, and schools aren’t COVID hotspots. Studies on tens of thousands of people found “no consistent relationship between in-person K-12 schooling and the spread of the coronavirus.”

A Lancet study found Florida had the 12th-fewest excess COVID deaths in the country, even though Florida students went back to school without masks relatively soon.

At least Texas’ and Kentucky’s closures were isolated and brief. Long-term closures during the pandemic brought America’s lowest math and reading scores in decades. Florida’s kids suffered less learning loss than kids in other states.

Sweden, which never closed its schools, suffered no learning loss. Sweden’s education minister wrote that children were “at much lower risk of serious illness” and that “keeping children learning was vital.”

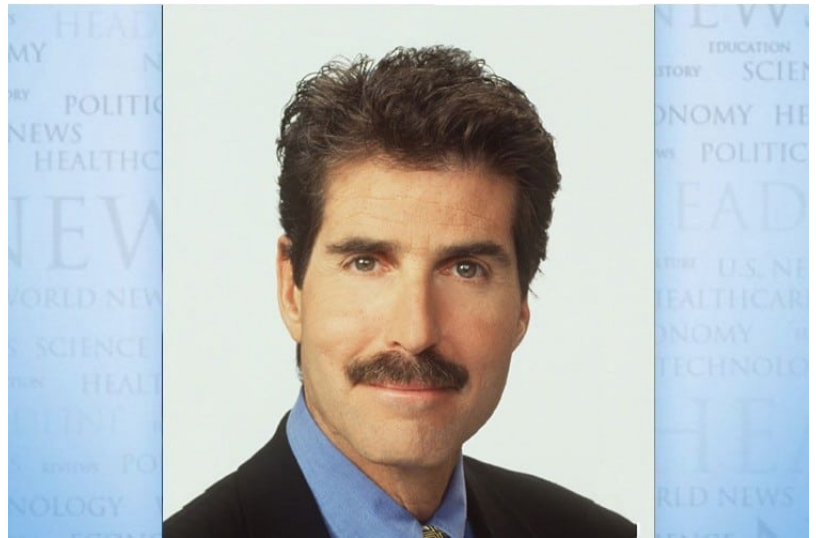
Sweden also imposed fewer restrictions on adults. At the time, Sweden was mocked in the media. NBC called Sweden’s openness a “failed experiment.”

But Sweden’s approach did work. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that Sweden had fewer excess deaths since COVID than any other European country.

Fortunately, this year, most of America seems less likely to panic.

Unfortunately, that doesn’t include Facebook and its idiot authoritarian “fact-checkers.” Even though the World Health Organization says kids under 5 should not be required to wear masks, Facebook still censors science writer John Tierney for writing that forcing children to wear masks is unnecessary.

Masks, lockdowns and closing schools won’t stop COVID. We have to live with it. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates 96.7% of us now have some immunity through vaccines or



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Written by [John Stossel](#) on August 30, 2023

prior infection. That probably means future infections will be less severe.

Still, COVID continues to kill some of us.

I'm skeptical of the anti-vax messages in my social media. Unvaccinated people are five times more likely to die. Vaccines are still the most effective way to protect ourselves.

I'm also skeptical of politicians eager to use force. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis forbade private businesses from requiring customers to wear masks or have vaccinations.

But I say privately owned should mean ... private. A store owner should be allowed to make his own choices. If customers don't like a policy, there are lots of other businesses to patronize.

I confronted DeSantis about that:

Stossel: "If it's my business, and I'm scared, and I want to have that, why can't I?"

DeSantis: "You had some big corporations basically imposing Fauci-ism, vax mandates, mask mandates. ... So we barred (them)."

Stossel: "But if I have a candy store and want to say you have to stand on your head to buy my candy ..."

DeSantis: "Yeah, but there's certain business regulations that everyone's gotta abide by ..."

Stossel: "I'm just surprised *you're* pushing them."

DeSantis: "Sometimes, you just gotta say, is this something that we want in our state at all? That's how we've come down."

That's how *we've* come down? The politician decides for *everyone*?

I hate that tyranny, whether it comes from DeSantis, who had mostly sensible Covid policies, or from worse repressers like New York's Andrew Cuomo and California's Gavin Newsom.

We individuals should get to decide what's best for us.

I'm 76. Nine in 10 COVID deaths happen people over 65.

So I'm glad I've been vaccinated. I'll get the new booster this fall.

I will wear a mask in crowded places when I travel to Chicago to speak at the Heartland Institute next week.

But that's my choice. There's a big difference between choice and force.

Individuals should decide, not politicians.

Every Tuesday at [JohnStossel.com](https://www.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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