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Want to reduce deaths? Look to TSA's PreCheck model.

Businesses can serve a critical enforcement role in ensuring people follow public health guidelines.

SHELDON H. JACOBSON



Bloomberg

A traveler wearing a face mask goes through the security screening at O'Hare International Airport on March 12.

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We need a PreCheck program for COVID-19.

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) PreCheck program classifies flyers as no risk (flight crew), low risk (PreCheck vetted passengers) and unknown risk (everyone else), effectively partitioning the haystack of flyers into three groups to match appropriate security screening resources. This is the foundation of risk-based security. The same idea can be adapted to classify people based on their risk for spreading COVID-19, with the hope of further flattening the curve until effective treatments are found or a safe vaccine is developed, resulting in fewer deaths.

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Antibody testing takes off

To achieve this, first classify people with protective antibodies as "no risk," which is becoming more feasible as antibody testing **ramps up**. Without antibodies, people who practice non-medical countermeasures in public—like social distancing and wearing a face mask—would be classified as "low risk," which is akin to voluntarily undergoing the background check to qualify for PreCheck. Classify everyone else as "unknown risk."

Recent testing of people in homeless shelters and prisons suggest there may be 10 to 50 asymptomatic cases of COVID-19 for every confirmed case. Using the lower bound, this translates into 15 million people in the nation with the antibodies, a small subset (around 5 percent) of the population. This leaves the majority of people without antibodies. These people can voluntarily practice social distancing and wear a face mask in public, effectively becoming "low risk" residents in the eyes of others.

Businesses are the ideal place to enforce this classification. As businesses reopen in the coming weeks, they can voluntarily take actions to attract low risk customers to their

establishments.

For example, they can post a sign like, “We only serve and welcome customers who practice social distancing and wear face masks”, which may serve to attract other low risk customers away from business who do not do so. This type of commercial peer pressure will provide the impetus for more businesses to create safe public health environments for their employees and customers, effectively increasing the number of low risk people community-wide.

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An Illinois-like stay-home order could have helped Iowa

Social distancing, hand washing, and wearing face masks is not the solution to stop COVID-19, but they are all we have to suppress community transmission and reduce a community's basic reproduction number. People can balk at laws that challenge personal freedoms. However, if private businesses can advertise that they will only serve properly attired customers (such as wearing a shirt and shoes), then requiring a face mask for service should be well within their rights.

Estimates of thousands of deaths in the coming months should not be a surprise to anyone. Flattening the curve with stay-at-home orders served to protect the nation's healthcare system from being overwhelmed beyond its capacity to treat COVID-19 patients. Stay-at-home orders largely achieved this objective.

However, flattening the curve did not mean flattening it to zero; the curve has stretched the number of cases and deaths over an extended time period. That period in the future begins now, as states reopen.

During this new phase of the COVID-19 epidemic, the only way to further delay deaths is to practice social distancing, good hand washing, and wearing a face mask. No government edicts can force people to practice these non-medical countermeasures. Businesses can

serve a critical role to incentivize such practices, to achieve a safer environment for a community, and save lives.

Sheldon H. Jacobson, PhD, is a Founder Professor of Computer Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He applies his expertise in risk assessment to evaluate and inform public policy.

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