

Check your understanding

1 Is your country suffering from a COVID-19 epidemic? What measures is your government taking? Would you categorize them as mitigation or suppression?

Answer [Answer varies.]

2 What is one advantage of the mitigation strategy?

Answer [Our results suggest that suppression is the far better strategy against COVID-19 for now. But it's only good as long as the measures are in place. Mitigation allows the population to achieve herd immunity, which (before a vaccine becomes available) can significantly reduce the spread of the virus.]

3 What is one disadvantage of the suppression strategy?

Answer [The same as above – suppression strategy doesn't allow for herd immunity in the population, so measures of some form have to continue until there is a vaccine available. Other disadvantages include economic impacts, ethical problems, and mental health effects.]

4 When you look at Figure 2, why is there another peak in infections in November?

Answer [After a 5-month suppression strategy the government has lifted the measures and as there is no herd immunity, nor a vaccine available, the epidemic restarts and produces a second wave of cases.]

5 What would happen if governments took no measures against the epidemic?

Answer [In just a few months, around 80% of the population would become infected with the virus and millions of people would die around the world.]

Figure 1 Which combination of measures gives the best results? Is it sufficient?

Answer [A combination of case isolation, home quarantine and social distancing of the elderly (purple line) gives best results. Even then, the healthcare system will be overwhelmed.]

Figure 2 What will a suppression strategy achieve?

There will be hardly any cases for as long as the measures are present. After that, a second wave of cases will occur unless a vaccine is available.

Answer