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ReachMD

www.reachmd.com
info@reachmd.com
(866) 423-7849

Why Social Distancing May Last Longer Than Anticipated

Dr. Matt Birnholz:

Coming to you from the ReachMD Studios, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. I'm Dr. Matt Birnholz.

The following is a brief news summary on a recent study focusing on the potential long term need for social distancing measures in the US, as reported by United Press International. Visit their site at UPI.com.

Social distancing measures have been implemented both nationally *and* globally for several months now, but according to a new analysis, these measures may have to stay in place for much longer than anyone might have anticipated, as the virus that causes COVID-19 could be seen until 2025 or beyond.

Researchers at Harvard's School of Public Health designed models to project how current containment measures will impact future waves of infections. They also examine historical examples of infections associated with the family of beta coronaviruses.

From this dual approach, the study team found that in the absence of a vaccine, maintaining some level of social distancing through early 2021 represented the only viable way for the US to achieve a dramatic reduction in new cases.

The analysis also warned that premature lifting of social distancing measures could bring on new waves of cases through the fall, followed by tens of thousands more cases through the first half of 2021. The resulting waves could be enough to overwhelm hospital capacity across the country.

According to Dr. Stephen Kissler, a research fellow in the Department of Immunology and Infectious Diseases at Harvard and co-author of the analysis, one-time social distancing measures most likely won't be enough to keep the number of COVID-19 cases within the limits of our country's critical care capacity, and so intermittent social distancing periods may be necessary.

This new analysis is yet another report adding to the research predicting that the coronavirus will *not* behave as the brief SARS outbreak did in the early 2000s, but instead take on a resurgence pattern more like influenza.

Marc Lipsitch, Director of the Center for Communicable Disease Dynamics at Harvard and another co-author of the analysis, stated that "The magnitude of such seasonality is certainly not zero. It exists, but it's not enough of a seasonal fluctuation for it to disappear in the summer in the absence of interventions."

For ReachMD, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. To access more details on this news report, visit UPI.com. And as always, to add your perspectives toward the fight against this global pandemic, visit us at ReachMD.com and become Part of the Knowledge. Thank you for listening.