

Time to Declare the Emergency Over

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The time has come to terminate the pandemic state of emergency. It is time to end the controls, the closures, the restrictions, the plexiglass, the stickers, the exhortations, the panic-mongering, the distancing announcements, the ubiquitous commercials, the forced masking, the vaccine mandates. It doesn't mean that the virus is gone – omicron is still spreading, and the virus may circulate at some level forever. But with a normal focus on protecting the vulnerable, the virus can be treated as a medical rather than a social matter and managed in ordinary ways. A declared emergency needs continuous justification, and that is now lacking.

Over the last two months in the US, the delta variant strain – the most recent aggressive version of the infection – has according to CDC been declining in both the proportion of infections (62% on December 18 to 2% on January 15 to 0.1% on January 29) and the number of daily infected people (98,000 to 15,500 to 400). During the next two weeks, delta will decline to the point that it essentially disappears like the strains before it.

Omicron is mild enough that most people, even many high-risk people, can adequately cope with the infection. Omicron infection is no more severe than seasonal flu, and generally less so. A large portion of the vulnerable population in the developed world is already vaccinated and protected against severe disease. We have learned much about the utility of inexpensive supplements like Vitamin D to reduce disease risk, and there is a host of good therapeutics available to prevent hospitalization and death should a vulnerable patient become infected. And for younger people, the risk of severe disease – already low before omicron – is minuscule.

In Connecticut, omicron itself is disappearing. It reached peak daily cases about January 10 and has been strongly declining since then. Mortality from Covid, including some from remaining delta cases, is declining in Connecticut as well. The fact that omicron has been decreasing since early January suggests that the decline is not due to seasonal factors but to built-up population immunity, which bodes well for continuing population resistance to omicron variants should any substantial ones arise.

Given that omicron, with its mild infection, is running its course to the end, there is no justification for maintaining emergency status. The lockdowns, personnel firings and shortages and school disruptions have done at least as much damage to the population's health and welfare as the virus. The state of emergency is not justified now, and it cannot be justified by fears of a hypothetical recurrence of some more severe infection at some unknown point in the future. If such a severe new variant were to occur – and it seems unlikely from omicron – then that would be the time to discuss a new declaration of emergency.

The Governor of the State of Iowa has announced that she is ending the declaration of emergency in her state. Connecticut is doing just as well as Iowa and should follow suit.

Americans have voluntarily stepped-up to sacrifice their human rights and their livelihoods for two years in the service of protecting the general public health. Omicron is circulating but it is not an emergency. The emergency is over. The current emergency declaration must be canceled. It is time.