

COVID-19: Country Exit Strategies

Common themes

- Increasing testing appears to be an important part of many exit strategies
- Utilising technology to better understand local epidemiology of the virus, contact trace and test, and gather data to give more specific and tailored advice to populations
- Those countries who have lifted sanctions, or have operated on a partial lockdown basis, are suggesting location-specific, locally-oriented measures may be an alternative to blanket lockdowns
- Many countries are considering the reopening of schools as a lower risk move to reinstating normality
- Social distancing and infection control and prevention measures remain a corner stone of exit plans

Countries with newly announced exit strategies:

Denmark

Michael Birnbaum, [Washington Post](#) – Imposed lockdown from March 11th and implemented widespread testing. Nurseries and primary schools are to re-open April 15th, with further gradual re-opening of businesses. Border controls remain in place, as do bans on gatherings over 10 people, with the plan to reintroduce previous restrictive measures if infection rates increase.

Danish Police Department, [FAQ](#) – Conditions for re-opening include the public continue to follow general hygiene and social distancing advice to limit spread of infection and the rate of hospitalised COVID-19 cases remains stable. This will require strict adherence to local infection prevention protocols, particularly within schools and nurseries.

Danish Police Department, [Controlled Reopening](#) – Secondary schools and Universities will remain physically closed, except for exam-taking students, or those in the last semester of health-care associated professional training programmes. As of 14th April, employees may return to work if they can perform their work in a manner that fully abides by continuing public health measures. There are plans to release an app, as part of the health departments on-going surveillance of the pandemic, to help support reopening measures.

Danish Health Authority, [COVID-19 Update](#) (NB: document in Danish) – Section 5 of this document contains specific details into measures Denmark will be using to reopen. Some elements from the containment approach, such as testing and quarantine, and protection measures for vulnerable groups, will need to be used in conjunction with reopening strategies.

Austria

Michael Birnbaum, [Washington Post](#) – Imposed lockdown from March 16th. Small shops will open April 14th followed by larger stores in May 1st. Decisions to open restaurant, hotels and school open in mid-May will be assessed end of April. Public health measures, such as facemasks, limited venue capacities, social distancing, will continue, but public events may not resume until July.

Austrian Government website, [News](#) – Reiterate this reopening will be a gradual return to normality, with accompanying measures. From 14th April it will be mandatory to wear mouth and nose protection in public places and transport. From this date, small shops and DIY and garden centres will be allowed to open with appropriate public health measures in place. From May 1st all shops and shopping centres can reopen. Hotels, restaurants and other services may be able to open from mid-May, but this will be decided at the end of April. Schools and universities will remain physically closed. Events are currently banned until the end of June. Movement restrictions for the general public remain in place until the end of April.

Norway

Norwegian Government, [Press release](#) – Nurseries and day care will reopen from 20th April, followed by primary schools and secondary school vocational programmes (abiding by infection control protocol) on 27th April. The current ban preventing people from travelling to their holiday cabins will also be lifted on April 20th. Services where social distancing is not possible (e.g. hairdressers) will be allowed to open if infection control measures are in place. These changes will be gradually introduced over April. Restrictions will continue until mid-June on events not meeting infection control requirements. Fitness and leisure services remain closed. Border controls preventing entry to non-Nordic residents remain in place. Food and drinks establishments appear to be remaining closed unless they can maintain 2m distances and meet infection control requirements.

Countries considering exit strategies:

Belgium

Ben Hall & Guy Chazan, [Financial Times](#) – Like Denmark, Belgium are thinking of splitting classes and the school week into two, to help with social distancing measures.
Barbara Moens, [Politico](#) – Belgium will increase testing capacity as one part of their exit strategy, and using technology to perform better contact tracing and immunity testing.
Belgium government Covid-19 Info page, [News](#) – As part of the programme to increase testing, the next phase will be to test nursing and care home residents and staff.
Belgium government, [Press release](#) – Belgium have convened a working group (Group of Experts for an Exit Strategy) to establish their exit plan, made up of a cross-section of industry representatives, academics and experts on health and microbiology. No advice has been issued from the group as of yet.

Germany

IFO Institute, [Coronavirus Pandemic Strategy](#) (pg. 12-14) – This report recommends a “gradual transition to a risk-based strategy”. They stress that central control of resuming normal practice would not be feasible and these actions must come from companies and institutions. They recommend opening up different sectors using a criteria-based approach, considering: the risk of spread, of disease severity, importance to the economy and social life of the country, and the possibility of maintaining public health measures if opened. They reiterate that reopening measures need to be in conjunction with monitoring the pandemic and acting accordingly. They also agree that nurseries, schools and universities are institutions that could be reopened relatively early.

United States

American Enterprise Institute, [National Coronavirus response](#) – This road map sets out four phases to handling the pandemic in the US. Better data, improving healthcare capacity and developing treatment and prophylaxis against the virus are integral to moving away from public health measures. Phase 2 is the reopening phase, and this can commence when it is possible to safely diagnose, treat and isolate cases and their contacts. Though reopening can occur, legacy measures like social distancing, isolation of vulnerable groups, and bans on mass gatherings will need to remain, along with adopting sanitation protocols as routine and use of facemasks amongst the public. Testing will need to be more widespread. Though epidemiological surveillance data will help guide policy, implementation of measures will need to respond at a more local and context-dependent level.

Gabriel Leung, [The New York Times](#) – Calls for a formal framework with a rationale for relaxing measures, grounded in science. Having a better understanding of country-specific basic reproductive number (R0) for the virus will better inform policies, and better data can be gathered by integrating data from apps like Citymapper and card payment locations. Suggests we will have a cyclical ‘suppress and lift’ policy, depending on the individual country’s ability to combat the disease, maintain the economy, and appease the public.

Countries implementing exit strategies or adapting non-lock down measures:

South Korea

Rozina Sabur, [The Telegraph](#) – A new element clouding the Korean COVID-19 strategy is evidence suggesting the virus may be able to reactivate, as previous COVID-19 positive patients test positive again after being cleared of the virus. Further findings have yet to be released, but the false negative rate in testing may be at fault. After the initial large breakout of cases, the government introduced mass testing, social distancing, extensive contact tracing, and transparent reporting of cases to curtail the spread.

China

Lily Kuo, [The Guardian](#) – Though Wuhan may have lifted previous restrictions there is doubt within the population, who do not fully trust the lifting of these sanctions and worry about a second wave of infections. Shops and many other institutions, such as schools, cinemas and leisure and entertainment centres, remain closed, with restaurants continuing to offer only takeout. Neighbourhoods are still ‘sealed’ off and only those with permission to attend work have regular free movement, but still with the possibility of checkpoint inspections of their coronavirus status and temperature. Previously lifted restrictions had to be reversed in certain neighbourhoods as cases increased.

Dr Gauden Galea, [WHO](#) - As China continues to gradually lift its containment measures, the next phase of their public health response is on mitigating the risk of COVID-19 across the population in the long term, by integrating infection control measures into daily life. Dr Galea believes China’s successful strategy has been due to its differentiated, location-specific response. Anticipated problems during the exit phase include: the impact on routine health programmes (e.g. immunisations, chronic disease prevention); the impacts of the pandemic on mental health; availability of non-COVID related medical and pharmaceutical supplies. Efforts will be spent looking into what makes

certain parts of the population more susceptible to the virus e.g. smoking habits, hypertension.

Taiwan

Kathrine Hille, [Financial Times](#) – Despite early action, the government think measures will have to continue for months. Like Singapore, Taiwan have had spikes in infection rates due to citizens returning from Europe.

Patrick Sawyer, [The Telegraph](#) – Taiwan has remained out of lockdown and has depended on strict border controls and testing incoming travellers, however recent spikes in infection rates have caused an increase in measures, including fines for people refusing to wear masks on public transport. As the pandemic continues, experts are suggesting a neighbourhood-based approach to applying measures.

Singapore

Michael Birnbaum, [Washington Post](#) – After initially avoiding strict measures, Singapore introduced a lockdown on schools and businesses on 7th April after infection rates reached highest level on the 5th April.

Anna Jones, [BBC News](#) – The recent rise in cases has been linked to migrant worker dormitories, and the close quarters in these facilities, all of which have now been placed under lockdown. The country is under a partial lockdown, meaning schools and non-essential businesses are now closed, and people prohibited from leaving their homes unless for essential activities, and face fines or prison sentences if they do. Previous restrictions applied to returning nationals, asking them to self-isolate for 14 days, however this advice did not extend others in the same household. New arrivals to the country are now being sent directly to government quarantine.

Singapore Government Website, [New safe-distancing measures](#) – Introduction of similar measures seen in the UK (e.g. reduced gatherings, closing non-essential services). Now preventing short-term visitors entering, or travelling through, the country.