

# THE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS WERE WORKING SO WHY DID THE COUNTY RESCIND THE HEALTH ORDERS?

By Lanny Swerdlow, RN LNC



Riverside County has been placed on the California Department of Public Health's "targeted engagement list" — effectively a watch list — due to the spike in new coronavirus cases and the increase in the positive-test rate and hospitalizations that continue to significantly exceed the state guidelines. This didn't have to happen.

It began back on Friday, May 8, when the Riverside County Board of Supervisors capitulated to an unruly cohort of Trump inspired extremists demanding an end to any and all requirements for wearing facemasks, social distancing and sheltering-in while demeaning the health care professionals who have the knowledge and experience needed to protect our communities from this contagion.



They also covered before Sheriff Chad Bianco who blackmailed the BOS by stating that he had no intention of enforcing any of the health orders issued by the County's Public Health Department mandating the wearing of facemasks, social distancing and sheltering-in.

This from the sheriff who gleefully dispatches up to a dozen sheriff officers for

Reefer Madness Mondays in the Anza Valley to bust small-time cannabis cultivators who aren't hurting anyone but refuses to enforce the county's health order that would prevent scores of people from becoming infected with COVID-19 and from dying after becoming infected.



Heeding the extremists and ignoring the advice of experienced health care experts, the BOS refused to accept the rational, reasonable and responsible guidelines issued at that time by Governor Newsom and the California Dept. of Public Health voting 5-0 to rescind the County's COVID-19 Health Orders.



During Friday's hearing, those in the Council Chambers in favor of repealing the COVID-19 Health Orders violated social distancing and safety protocols as they inundated the BOS with their demands for an immediate reopening of businesses, supporting the elimination of social distancing rules and the requirement for wearing protective masks.

Those opposed to rescinding the COVID-19 Health Orders representing community organizations, school districts, labor unions and many individuals had the common sense to follow the restrictions and utilized 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to virtually present their case to the BOS via Zoom without endangering themselves or members of the community. Unfortunately, this had the effect of the BOS mostly only hearing from the opponents of rescinding the Health Orders over their computers while most of those in support of rescinding the

COVID-19 Health Orders were directly in front of and in the BOS faces - health and safety concerns be damned.



Many of those in favor of rescinding the restrictions claimed that the dangers of the COVID-19 virus were being overblown by the media and have never been needed. They point to the fact that hospitals, rather than being overwhelmed with coronavirus cases, had many empty hospital beds.

At the time Riverside County had the state's second-highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths. Far from being an overblown threat, the real facts were that many hospital beds were empty because of the restrictions which protected Riverside County residents from exposure to the virus. Reduced exposure resulted in fewer getting sick, fewer being hospitalized and fewer dead. Without the restrictions, an already bad situation would have been far worse.

Rather than basing their objections to the restrictions on science, the open-the-economy protestors' most strident point centered on the claim that the COVID-19 restrictions violated their constitutional rights. With calls for giving them back their "freedom" and "give me liberty or give me death", they seem to have forgotten their freedom to swing their arms stops at the tip of another person's nose. In the case of a pandemic, their freedom to walk through crowds of people is revoked if they have a communicable disease that can be spread to healthy bystanders.



The knowledge of who has and who does not have the COVID-19 virus is at the heart of the matter. This is the problem with their calls for rescinding the COVID-19 restrictions – they want their "freedom" but are not willing to impose upon themselves the safeguards and procedures needed so they can have their freedom to walk through crowds without endangering everyone else's "right to remain healthy."

If they want their "freedom," they need to be responsible for their actions and know whether it is safe for them to go and be "free." To be responsible they should look for guidance to the most responsible man in the United States - Donald Trump.

As reported by the Washington Post, Trump has shown the way by imposing on all visitors to the White House the requirements that they must have their temperature taken and undergo a rapid COVID-19 test in which results are known within 15 minutes. If they pass these tests then and only then will they be admitted.



Not one of the supporters of rescinding the COVID-19 restrictions made any mention of testing or even temperature taking which health care experts have repeatedly stressed as essential and necessary for safely "opening the economy."

Until the same safeguards, protocols and procedures that protect President Trump are in place for every worker, every school child and every Riverside County resident, then the COVID-19 Health Orders should have remained in place.

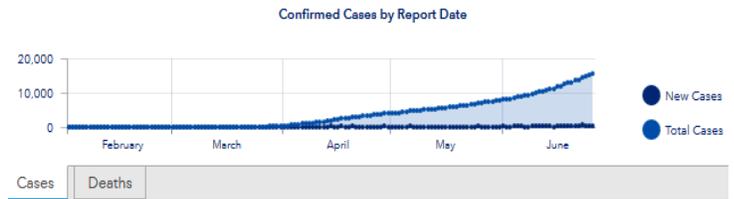
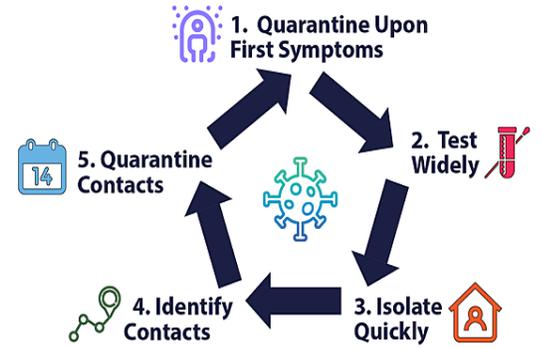
It should be noted that at the time of the BOS rescinding the Health Orders on mandatory sheltering-in and closure of non-essential businesses, Riverside County did not meet the guidelines for reopening established by either the Trump Administration or the State of California.

What had been happening was that the rate of increase had slowed BECAUSE of the COVID-19 Health Orders – NOT in spite of them. There was evidence that new cases may have finally reached a plateau hopefully leading to a decrease in cases and not just a slowing of the increase.

Widely and easily available testing along with robust case investigation and contact tracing should have been in place BEFORE the BOS rescinded the Health Orders. They had been told over and over and over again by their own Public Health Department that without adequate testing and proper safeguards that there would be a major resurgence in COVID-19 cases.

That resurgence is here but although these programs are running now in Riverside County, they got started way too late. They are still being stitched together as they struggle to keep up with the mounting number of new cases.

Rather than listen and take heed from those who knew, the BOS played Russian roulette with the citizens of Riverside in a misguided and futile attempt to rapidly open the economy. They lost and the citizens of Riverside got infected, had their health endangered, became hospitalized and died in record numbers.



As was stated by Representative Raul Ruiz to the Desert Sun “Before removing the stay-at-home protective measures, one of the criteria to control the virus was to have the appropriate safeguards in place that meet safety standards and we did not have them at that time. We removed the stay-at-home precautions too early and too aggressively.”

During the day-long deliberations on May 8, the BOS never once gave any consideration of who will pay for the care of all those who become infected when the restrictions are rescinded, who will pay for the funeral expenses of those that die and who will pay the employees and businesses for the loss of income that they will suffer for even longer now that the slowing down of infections has halted and the resurgence, warned by the County’s own health care professionals, multiplies exponentially.

The COVID-19 Health Orders were working. By not having robust testing, case investigating and contact tracing programs up and running at full capacity before rescinding the Health Orders, the County may have to reinstate business closures and mandatory sheltering-in which will be far more distressing, demoralizing and destabilizing to the economy and the residents of Riverside County then having left the Health orders in place for another month. The question remains:

The image is a meme with a brown background. At the top left is a photo of the Riverside County Board of Supervisors in a meeting. To the right of the photo is the text "Why couldn't the BOS" in yellow. Below the photo is a cartoon of a man with a hand on his chin, looking thoughtful. At the bottom, the text "KEEP CALM AND WAIT JUST ONE MORE MONTH?????" is written in large, stylized letters. "KEEP CALM" is in green, and "AND WAIT JUST ONE MORE MONTH?????" is in red.