

New Zealand has two urgent problems. A viral threat to the lives of citizens. Ending a lockdown of businesses which threatens the livelihoods of New Zealanders and our economic future.

We must solve both. Time is not a problem fixing the medical problem. We can take some months perhaps years to eliminate the virus. While this is being done, we can contain it's effects.

But time is crucial with the economic problem. Every day that passes in economic lockdown more New Zealanders plunge into unemployment, more business fail. The burden on the taxpayers increases as government takes on the burden of supporting people who just a month ago supported themselves. We risk an economic disaster worse than the great depression that lingers for years and blights the lives of millions. The current alert level four is a one size fits all solution. All retail activity in New Zealand with three exceptions, Supermarkets, Dairies and pharmacies.

Is there a way we can begin to ease out of the lockdown while not putting at risk our efforts in solving the medical problem?

I believe there is.

Lets start with the medical problem.

It is imperative to stop the spread of the virus. Keeping a distance of 2 meters from each other is the only available solution. Testing ,tracing of every contact that an infected person makes will stem the expansion of the infection throughout the population. A simple cheap immediate antibody test is coming in the next month or so. This will allow us to test immediately who has had the virus and therefore identify those who can work without spreading the disease. Eventually in a year or so a vaccine will be available.

In the meantime, in the course of business and in every aspect of our public lives we must keep 2 meter distance between us. That is a given.

But maintaining the 2 metre distance by way of a lockdown is destroying our livlihoods and employment.

If the lockdown of business continues beyond a few more weeks it will destroy the livlihoods of a third of the population ad blight the future of millions of New Zealanders. It will load the State with may billions of extra debt and make the return to a normal economy well nigh imposible.

Is there a solution that would allow the economy to stagger back on its feet while maintaining the 2 meter distance, slow the transmission of the virus and give time to solve the medical problem.

Yes there is.

It is a matter of moving from the classification of businesses which must be closed from essential vs no essential (in the governments view) to allowing business activities to occur provided the 2 meter rule is able to be practiced.

This is a question of the density of customer interactions on a particular locations.

The question then is how many customers can come on a particular premises and can they maintain a two meter distance from each other.

Can this business of whatever type operate while maintaining the medical imperative of the two meter distance problem.

Lets look at some examples.

A garden centre. It should be possible to monitor how many customers are on the site at one time. To ensure the customers can keep away from each other by 2 metres. The business will do all it can to assure customers they are safe. The customers will take care of themselves.

So the procedure for businesses will become management of customers on site.

Fast food outlets

If only the drive through portion of the business is running there is minimum interaction between staff and customers. Outlets could test their staff using the new antibody measure and identify those who are immune from the virus and test those to check if they do not. Fast effective testing will be the key. There are many many business that can operate while maintaining the 2 metre separation rule and they should be allowed to do so.

The best way the government can implement this protocol is to move back to Alert level 3 and spell out a protocol that allows businesses to operate provided the 2 metre rule is adhered to.

Queuing systems, pick up boxes for pre orders. You can rely on the ingenuity of kiwis to solve the vast range of on the spot dilemmas posed in businesses. No civil servant or politician can possibly envisage these situations. They should not be asked to. The dispersed wisdom of customers, vendors and operators will be able to sort out each unique situation. Not all businesses will be able to open. That will be determined by their ability to maintain the 2 metre rule while doing so.

There is an element of risk. It is a personal decision. Some individuals will not venture into a crowded space for years. Some are young, some are old, some are well some are not. It is up to the individual to decide the level of risk they want to undertake. We do it every day without the ministrations of the state.

The aim of the lockdown is to minimise the spread of the virus. Let us do that effectively and well while not destroying the livelihood of millions, the tax base while running the country into ruinous debt. we do not need more government welfare we need to open up as many enterprises as we possibly can while restricting the transmission of the virus.

Each week that passes Every business that opens, every wage packet that is taken home every bit of payee that is sent to the treasury, every bit of value added poured into our common wealth is a small star of light of a society opening up from the darkness of confinement and the destruction of prosperity.

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