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# COVID-19 STRATEGIC COMMENTARY

## COVID-19 HOW ARE WE DOING? – 9 APRIL 2020

By Professor Frank Gannon

A million years ago, last year, every Saturday afternoon was a time to get the soccer results. A TV voice saying “Leicester City (one of my teams) 0, Manchester City 1,” would be upsetting. Now, football and other sports are suspended, but we still get results...daily. These COVID results are not numbers, they are people, and devastating is not the word to describe the pain behind them. There are no winners.

I am confined in Ireland at present but have a great interest in other countries where I have lived and have family. Here and elsewhere, I hear of and see the great efforts that are being made to contain or delay the epidemic. Each news bulletin provides up-to-date information; however, I have not been able to get a sense of how well Ireland, Germany, Australia and other countries are performing relative to each other. Even the simple statistic of the number of deaths per million is seldom provided. The daily Irish death figure of approximately 20 seems low, but is it when compared to say, Germany? We must have that comparative information to understand how we are performing as we respond to the different recommendations and rules in different countries. This article is an effort to get some answers to how different countries are doing and some guide to the timeline of the infection’s impact.

### Comparing country data

To get an impression of what is happening when comparing different countries, we have to choose which parameter is the most reliable. The number of new cases reported daily is important. However, it is a result that is dependent on how many tests are performed and what category of individuals are chosen for the test. Cynically, zero tests mean zero new cases or tests on the general public without symptoms will give a different result to tests on people who have two key symptoms. So, I have not used these data as a guide. Other data sources are important guides to those people making decisions for the population. An example would be how close are the number of cases that require hospitalisation to the total number of ICU beds available. However, this data is not readily accessible.

I have focused on the most depressing statistics; the number of deaths reported daily. Of course, there is some room for the blurring of figures here also. Are the deaths attributed to COVID-19 all-inclusive (e.g. are deaths that do not occur in hospitals included) or must a positive Coronavirus test be obtained before inclusion. Nonetheless, I expect that in each country these data are relatively consistent internally (hence the trends are correct) and generally good for international comparisons.

I have used the excellent data reported daily on [WorldoMeter](https://www.worldometers.info/) On its site, WorldoMeter provides the number of deaths per million population. I was surprised that Ireland (as of 4.4.20) is at 28, similar to Denmark, and is not doing as well as some other countries such as Austria or Germany. The USA figure is increasing rapidly, but like China, COVID-19 has not moved into all parts of these large countries. In the table below, I calculate the percentage increase daily for the past five days (up to 4.4.20) and the number of deaths daily and how that number is trending. In most countries, the percentage increase is linear for the recent past. There are some surprises; e.g. the increase in Spain is low (8% per day) but started over a month ago and hence has accumulated to a large figure. The UK daily increase is worryingly high (28%).

When we study the daily deaths, many countries are now, apparently, at a plateau. Some have been there for a period that suggests that the increasing numbers per day may be in the past, although the daily deaths are still very high (e.g. Spain and Italy). Germany and France may be into a plateau. In another week, this will be clearer. For other countries, e.g. Ireland, the numbers are small, so the conclusion that this may be the daily level may be premature. Again, the countries where things seem to be out of control are the US and UK. Their daily death numbers continue to increase with every report, and there is no sense of optimism that they have climbed the peak. Australia has very good numbers to date by all parameters.

### Predicting the COVID-19 timeline

To get some idea of the profile of the timeline for the disease, I looked at China. From the presented data, China reached a plateau after approximately 20 days of an increasing number of deaths, which then plateaued for approximately 16 days, and then China reported diminishing numbers of deaths. It took approximately 25 days to get down to zero deaths as the norm. Iran (another early hotspot for COVID-19) has been at a daily plateau for approximately 20 days, and the number of deaths per day has not yet diminished. These inadequate pointers would suggest that it may take up to a month to reach a plateau, another month after reaching a plateau before there is a real decrease in the daily death toll and perhaps at least another month before the deaths from COVID-19 become close to zero.

Of course, all statistics can be used selectively, and I have focused on one set of data. The people making decisions for the populations have the full range of data, including local clusters, severity of the cases that are presented for clinical assessment, capacity of the system, and cultural responses to restrictions etc. They will be in a challenging position when the trends suggest the worst is over, and the demands to get the economy going again grow loud. I hope that we reach that particular conundrum very soon as it would mean that the reaper has passed these fields and the results of Sligo Rovers, Leicester City or the Queensland Reds are the source of (unimportant) disappointment or joy.

### Current Covid Death Data trends 4.4.2020

Source of primary data; <https://worldometers.info>

Country	Current Daily % increase	Daily trend	Deaths/Million
Ireland	18%	Flat for 8days (~16/day)	28
Germany	17%	Flat for 4 days (~160/day)	17
Australia	10%	Flat for 10 days (~2/day)	1
UK	28%	Up	64
France	23%	Flat for 3 days(~1000/day)	116
Italy	12%	Flat for 13 Days (~750/day)	254
Spain	8%	Flat for ~12 Days (~750/day)	266
USA	22%	Up	2
China	Stable 30 days	DOWN. Plateau (~16 days)	2