



WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS,  
THERE IS LIBERTY.

—2 CORINTHIANS 3:17

## Three Years Later

### Why Pandemic Response Made the World Sicker Than COVID Itself

It's been three years since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a "global pandemic" on March 11, 2020. From that moment, authorities scrambled to fast-track experimental vaccines, implement mask mandates and lock down whole populations in hopes of mitigating viral spread. But at what cost?

We now know that masks didn't work in preventing the transmission of COVID. Instead, they did more harm than good in concealing facial expressions



integral to human communication and causing speech delays in toddlers. Vaccine mandates violated basic ethical principles and forced countless job-or-job ultimatums. Worse still, mandates nearly succeeded in dividing the global population into a two-tiered society, vaxxed and unvaxxed. Who can forget reports of restaurants, universities and public events requiring proof of vaccination before allowing admittance?

Livelihoods were destroyed for those who, based on sincerely held beliefs, chose the hard road of noncompliance. Lockdowns closed schools, shuttered businesses and suspended in-person church services. They isolated humanity within walls of fear and confusion — ripping individuals away from the communities that gave them their sense of fundamental belonging.

If we look back, we'll survey a global landscape littered with collateral damage. The stats don't lie, and hindsight is 20/20, but to ensure that history doesn't repeat itself, we must hold our governments and public health authorities accountable to right the wrongs of the past three years while accurately assessing the outcomes of both domestic and international COVID-response policies. Did they work? Or did they unleash unintended societal contagions of worse consequence than COVID itself?

#### Here are eight facts to help you decide:

##### 1. Increased Anxiety and Depression

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, anxiety and depression increased by 25% worldwide. Young people and women were hit hardest with WHO research citing that

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## STANDING FOR FREEDOM IN A DIVIDED AMERICA:

### Part Two of a Conversation with Mat Staver

Not since the Civil War has America been so divided. The infiltration of destructive "woke" ideology into everyday American life seeks to distort, pervert and dismantle the very foundations of "one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all."

In Part Two of our conversation with Liberty Counsel Founder and Chairman Mat Staver, we discuss the growing political divide in America and how we can hold the line for freedom in an increasingly anti-Christian culture.

**LC:** It's as if red states are getting "redder" and blue states "bluer," and those two agendas are increasingly ideologically opposed to each other. We need look no further than vax mandates and other restrictions to illustrate the stark contrast in pandemic response from state to state, let alone the overreach of the federal government upon the states. Are we headed toward more interstate clashes? Or is the real clash going to be over the federal government strong-arming red states into compliance with its big government agenda? Where do you see these clashes heading?

**MAT:** I think you're going to see more litigation by the states against the federal overreach. We have already seen that with some of the Biden administration's bombed COVID mandates and other kinds of restrictions. And you will see that repeatedly,

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young people were "disproportionally at risk of suicidal and self-harming behaviors." Other stressors included loneliness, fear of infection, suffering and death for oneself and for loved ones, grief and financial worries.

## 2. Missed Milestones

The negative impacts of COVID-19 response — namely lockdowns, mask mandates and related social isolation — adversely affected babies' and toddlers' development, especially in the area of social communications skills.

A new study published in October 2022 in the academic journal *Archives of Disease in Childhood* showed delayed communication milestones for babies born in the first three months of the pandemic. There was a 12.7% decrease in the ability of 1-year-old "lockdown babies" who could verbalize one definite and meaningful word compared to pre-pandemic babies.

In alignment with these findings is a 2021 study out of Brown University that reported "children born during the pandemic have significantly reduced verbal, motor, and overall cognitive performance compared to children born pre-pandemic."

## 3. Record Inflation

COVID induced the greatest supply-chain disruption of the modern era. COVID-related business shutdowns paired with the Congress-approved \$290 billion in handouts of stimulus checks exacerbated a worker shortage that led to falling production and reduced supply. Too many dollars were chasing too few goods. These economic conditions, along with other factors, contributed to COVID-related inflation that surpassed a 40-year high of 9.1% in June 2022.

## 4. Concerning Rise in "All-Cause Mortality"

Whether insurance companies, governments or funeral directors, it seems like everyone is trying to make sense of the extraordinary rise in excess deaths. In 2021, all-cause mortality was up 40% among 18-49-year-olds, and a major insurance group confirms these rates over pre-pandemic levels. All-cause U.S. mortality was up 29% in early 2022. The CDC reports more than 1 million excess deaths in the United States alone. While much of the mainstream media attributes the phenomenon to COVID itself, a New Zealand funeral director recently reported that 95% of corpses had received the COVID vaccination within the last two weeks prior to their death.

## 5. Plummeting Test Scores

According to a 2021 report by UNICEF, 168 million children worldwide did not go to school due to COVID-19 lockdowns for almost an entire year. Although U.S. school closures didn't last that long,

>>continued from "Standing for Freedom in a Divided America..."

with states asserting their rights. Frankly, many of them are fed up with the federal government trying to take over their sovereignty. While I hope it doesn't come to this, unless there is some significant course correction, I think the country could easily fall into a civil conflict.

**LC:** Like a national divorce, but without geographic lines ...

**Mat:** Yes, the divide is becoming more severe. Politics is becoming starker. There is truly little "in between" anymore. Instead, there are these bright lines that have been developing, both in politics as well as within different states. For example, you can't get more different than California versus Florida, or Governor Newsom versus Governor DeSantis. Ron DeSantis is really pushing for freedom, and the other governor pushes everything that is antithetical to DeSantis' freedom agenda. When we start to see a nation so divided like this, eventually, it can't stand.

**LC:** What's your answer for our national predicament of existential concern?

**Mat:** Spiritual revival is really the only way out of it, I think.

**LC:** Amen.

**Mat:** Also, however, there are times when, at least temporarily, national disasters or another shared crisis can bring us together. As a people, we see that in 9/11 and with the Ukrainian people where they weather a national disaster and the people come together. But these events are temporary national unifiers. People tend to go back to their regular ways again. As in the example of 9/11, many Americans have moved on and have forgotten about it.

**LC:** There's a lot to ponder here ...

**Mat:** But, in all honesty, the only lasting change is a heart change, and the change really comes from spiritual revival. **LC**

**Stay tuned for Part Three! And more from our in-depth interview with Mat Staver about preserving religious freedom in an increasingly anti-Christian culture.**



they lasted long enough to trigger serious deficits in learning. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, reading and math scores plummeted for age-9 students in 2022 compared to early 2020. Average scores in 2022 declined 5 points in reading and 7 points in math compared to 2020 — the largest decline in reading since 1990 and the first ever decline in math.

Elementary school students weren't the only ones suffering. ACT college admission test scores hit a 30-year low as reflected in the class of 2022's average ACT composite score of 19.8 out of 36, marking the first time since 1991 that the average score was below 20.

## 6. Rising Drug Overdose Deaths

Annual drug overdose deaths were nearly 50% higher in 2021 than in 2019, according to CDC data. While overdose deaths have been rising for years in the U.S., incidents surged amid the COVID-19 pandemic. In New York City alone, data shows that overdose deaths have nearly doubled from pre-pandemic levels in the first half of 2021, an alarming 78% increase from the same period in 2019 and up 28% from 2020.

## 7. Surging Domestic Violence

The United Nations published a survey report entitled "Measuring the Shadow Pandemic, Violence Against Women during COVID-19" on Nov. 24, 2021. The survey showed that violence against women had increased to unprecedented levels. The *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* stated that domestic violence cases increased by 25-33% globally. Could lockdowns be to blame? Case in point, China saw a 300% increase in domestic violence after locking down its population the first time. Even in the United States, early pandemic data shows a 10-30% increase in family violence reports.

## 8. Increased Childhood Obesity

The psychological toll of forced lockdowns and social isolation on children during COVID showed up in increased rates of weight gain. In fact, a study of 432,302 children ages 2 to 19 found the rate of body mass index (BMI) increase nearly doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to a pre-pandemic period. Children with obesity and younger school-aged children were most susceptible to this increase. **LC**