

Climate stabilization: Lessons from the pandemic

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The pandemic has shown that when reaction time is kept to a minimum, a larger public health crisis can be averted." Credit: Davyn Ben/Unsplash

The dynamics of the current COVID-19 pandemic could offer valuable insights for the efforts to mitigate climate change. Highlighting the parallels between the global health and the climate emergency, a team of

researchers from the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK) has analyzed what policy makers and citizens can learn from the corona outbreak and how to apply it to the global effort of reducing CO₂ emissions. Their proposal: A Climate coronavirus Contract that unites the younger and the older generations.

"The corona crisis is a test case for global emergency prevention and management in general," says lead author Kira Vinke. "The pandemic has shown that when [reaction time](#) is kept to a minimum, a larger public health crisis can be averted. In fact, we should take this very lesson to heart and apply it to managing the [climate emergency](#)."

Assessing risks and predicting outcomes

Vinke and the team of authors have looked at four dimensions of risk management: diagnosis, prognosis, therapy and rehabilitation. They deduced which lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic could be used to stabilize global mean temperature. "The risks and causes of both the coronavirus and the [climate](#) crisis have to be scientifically assessed and quantified," explains PIK director and co-author Johan Rockström. But just as important as diagnostics are prognostic approaches: "Countries like New Zealand and Germany were able to predict the outbreak's possible effects and moreover had the ability of immediate action. In the same vein, the global community must integrate climate risks assessments into decision making and act accordingly."

The authors argue that insights from the pandemic can help to identify pathways for treating the causes and symptoms of [climate change](#). "Both the coronavirus and the climate crisis are the result of increasing human pressure on the planet," says co-author Sabine Gabrysch, "But the good news is that the pandemic has demonstrated that with a combination of government action and individual lifestyle changes, it is possible to prevent damages. If there is a will, there is a way."

Compassion and solidarity as guiding principles

The researchers conclude by proposing an intergenerational climate coronavirus contract informed by reason and the principle of social justice. Former PIK director and co-author Hans Joachim Schellnhuber explains: "Younger generations would agree to protect the elderly from COVID-19 by adhering to social distancing measures, while the [older generations](#) would push for measures to keep global warming in line with the Paris Agreement." Thus, the researchers' outlook is cautiously optimistic: The outpouring of generosity and new forms of social interactions in the wake of the pandemic show great potential for cooperation towards the much needed stabilization of the global climate.

More information: Kira Vinke et al, Corona and the climate: a comparison of two emergencies, *Global Sustainability* (2020). [DOI: 10.1017/sus.2020.20](#)

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