


# Australia a 'standout loser' for damaging economy without COVID-19 immunity, Nobel prize-winner says

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By **ADAM CREIGHTON**, ECONOMICS EDITOR  
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One of the world's top scientists has branded lockdowns a "huge mistake" and called Australia a "standout loser" for "massively" damaging its economy and society without obtaining immunity to COVID-19.

In an extraordinary 30-minute interview Michael Levitt, who won the Nobel prize for chemistry in 2013, also slammed Baby Boomers for "really screwing up" the world. "If I was a young person now I would say, you guys are going to pay for this," said Professor Levitt, 72.

Professor of structural biology at Stanford University, he said "panic" stemming from "incorrect numbers" had prompted lockdowns whose damage "will exceed any saving of lives by a huge factor – there is no doubt in my mind".

Uploaded to UK website Unheard overnight, the professor said Germany and Sweden, with deaths so far per million from COVID-19 of 81 and 264, respectively, were "standout winners" in their response.

"They didn't practice too much lockdown, enough people got sick to get some herd immunity," he said.

"And the standout losers are Austria, Australia, Israel, which have had strict lockdowns without many cases. They have damaged their economies, society, harmed the education of their children but not obtained any herd immunity," he added.

Deaths per million so far from COVID-19 in Austria, Australia and Israel were 66, 4 and 26 as of Sunday.

The remarks came as virus-stricken Newmarch House nursing home in Sydney confirmed another fatality, bringing the national death toll from COVID-19 to 95.

“Children, even if infected never infect adults, so why not have children at school? Why not have people working?” Professor Levitt said.

His comments came as Education minister Dan Tehan accused Victorian premier Dan Andrews of taking a “sledgehammer” to students’ education for refusing to re-open its schools in line with other states.

On Friday the Prime Minister indicated that National Cabinet might ease restrictions a week earlier than planned, if new infections remained low.

Professor Levitt said “excess deaths” in Europe so far this year had been around 140,000, which was “actually not that much” when seen in context of severe flu seasons. “In some of the worst flu episodes we get to those kinds of numbers, sometimes a bit more or sometimes a bit less,” he added.

“Flu kills young people two or three times more than the coronavirus ... if we put those facts into the situation the burden of death from coronavirus will in Europe be less than that of bad flu,” he explained.

Professor Levitt said the response was “another foul up” for his boomer generation. “We’ve caused pollution, global warming, allowed world’s population to increase three fold, and now we’ve left your generation with a real mess,” he said.

The federal government has budgeted around \$214bn in stimulus spending to curb the damage caused by lockdown policies, and the RBA expects the economy to shrink 10 per cent this year.

Professor Levitt said “herd immunity” was the “right policy”. Britain, with 441 death per million, “was on exactly the right track before they were fed wrong numbers, and now have made huge mistake,” he said, referring to modelling in March that said 500,000 people would die in Britain.

“If we were to do this again we would insist on face masks, hand sanitiser, and some kind of payment that didn’t involve touching,” he added.

The Stanford professor, who has been closely analysing the infection and fatality numbers globally since January, said the growth in infections was “never exponential” and tended to peter out after about four weeks regardless of the severity of lockdowns.

Epidemiologists had a track record of exaggerating likely death tolls. “They see their role as scaring people into doing something,” he said.

He also slammed the mainstream media for its reporting of the virus. “They should have stressed to people that every day someone dies and these people are in same age band as those who do,” he said.

“I’ve become a huge fan of Twitter, I never used it before, but it’s the best discussion forum I’ve seen since I was a student at Cambridge,” he revealed.

**ADAM CREIGHTON, ECONOMICS EDITOR**

Adam Creighton is an award-winning journalist with a special interest in tax and financial policy. He was a Journalist in Residence at the University of Chicago’s Booth School of Business in 2019. He’s written ... [Read more](#)



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