

NSW

# Coronavirus Australia: Lockdown based on calculation error

**Coronavirus modelling used by the Federal Government to send Australia into a financially crippling lockdown accidentally made the effect of the pandemic appear four times worse than intended. HERE IS WHAT THEY GOT WRONG**

Matthew Benns, The Daily Telegraph

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Coronavirus modelling used by the Federal Government to send Australia into financially crippling lockdown used the wrong figures and dramatically over-estimated how many people could need intensive care.

When the modelling was released at the start of the pandemic by the Melbourne-based Peter Doherty Institute, it horrified health officials.

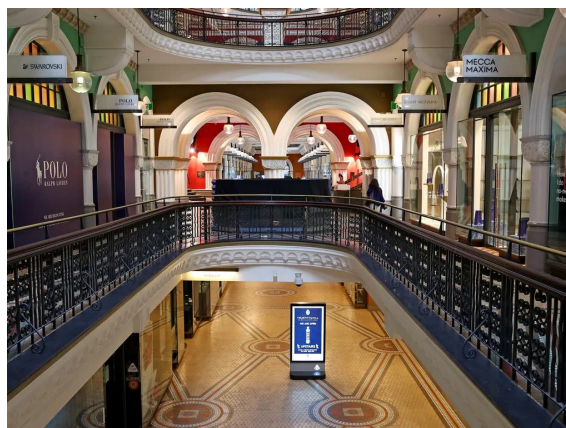
“This is a horrendous scenario,” chief medical officer Brendan Murphy said at the time. “A daily demand for new intensive care beds of 35,000 plus.”



Modelling incorrectly predicted 12,000 people in NSW would go into ICU rather than 3000. Picture Rohan Kelly

But The Daily Telegraph can reveal the modelling that Prof Murphy said was “highly technical” and could only be understood by people with “scientific brains” was wrong.

The modelling accidentally transposed the figures for the number of people who would be hospitalised during COVID-19 if no measures were taken for the number of people who would be admitted into intensive care units.



The lockdowns have been financially crippling for businesses. Picture: Toby Zerna


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The error made the effect of the pandemic appear four times worse than the modelling actually intended, predicting 12,000 people in NSW would go into ICU rather than 3000. And it informed the advice that led to economically crippling lockdowns across the nation.

“I strongly believe we lock down too hard,” James Cook University professor of infectious diseases modelling Emma McBryde said.

Her team in Queensland uncovered the error after they were left “scratching our heads” over why the Melbourne modelling was so much worse than their own.



 James Cook University epidemiologist Michael Meehan and Professor of Infectious Diseases Modelling and Epidemiology Emma McBryde had co-authored a paper strategies to limit the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Once her team had worked out how the error occurred, they contacted the Doherty researchers and received an email back confirming the modelling would be updated.

“That was three months ago and we are still waiting,” Prof McBryde said.

The ABC quoted the incorrect figures again this week.

“Leaving something inaccurate uncorrected on the public record is pretty close to research misconduct,” Prof McBryde said.

Professor Jodie McVernon, from the Doherty Institute, confirmed the error was noticed in June but said it was confined to two graphs and “the conclusions on the response strategies needed to ensure enough ICU beds were available were still accurate”.

She said they informed the government of the mistake at the time.

Originally published as [Revealed: Australia sent into lockdown on wrong figures](#)