How Effective Are Social Distancing Policies? Evidence on the Fight Against COVID-19 from Germany

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Abstract
To fight the spread of COVID-19, many countries implemented unprecedented social distancing policies. This is the first paper that uses an event-study approach to examine the effects of the German social distancing policies on (a) individual behavior and (b) the spread of the epidemic. Combining administrative health data and cell phone data, we find that the policies, first, heavily reduced citizens’ mobility and, second, strongly contained the epidemic. In comparison to a benchmark without social distancing, within three weeks, the policies avoided 84% of the potential COVID-19 cases (point estimate: 499.3K) and 66% of the potential fatalities (5.4K).

Data description
Administrative health data and cell phone data

JEL codes
I18, H12, I12

Key-words
COVID-19, social distancing policies, policy evaluation, mobility behavior

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