

Rejecting conspiracy theories aids public health

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New research has found that UK adults who reject COVID-19 conspiracy theories are more likely to comply with social distancing measures.

Several [conspiracy theories](#) have spread in recent weeks, including claims that COVID-19 is caused by [electromagnetic waves](#) from new 5G telephone masts, and that governments are deliberately creating panic in order to introduce tighter controls over their populations.

The findings of the new study, led by Professor Viren Swami of Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), indicate there are [health benefits](#) to be gained from helping the public to reject COVID-19 [conspiracy](#) theories.

Preliminary results from the study, which is yet to be peer-reviewed, also demonstrate for the first time a significant association between people's tendency to think analytically and their compliance with social distancing rules.

The study involved a nationally-representative sample of 520 adults from the UK, with an average age of 46, who were surveyed between 9-10 April. It found that adults who had a tendency to think analytically were more likely to reject COVID-19 conspiracy theories, and rejection of conspiracy theories in turn was associated with greater compliance with the Government's social-distancing rules.

Viren Swami, Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), said:

"Ensuring the largest possible number of people are complying with social distancing is essential to minimize the threat to life caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our results suggest that individuals who think more analytically—characterized by deliberative, demanding, and slow thinking styles—tend to be more compliant with social distancing rules. In addition, individuals who think more analytically are also more likely to reject conspiracy theories about the pandemic, which in turn is

associated with greater compliance.

"Finding ways to nudge citizens towards thinking analytically and questioning, and ultimately rejecting, conspiracy theories—and those who promote them—may be vital at this time."

The conclusions of the study are tentative until after [peer review](#).

More information: Viren Swami et al. Analytic Thinking, Rejection of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Conspiracy Theories, and Compliance with Mandated Social-Distancing: Direct and Indirect Relationships in a Nationally Representative Sample of Adults in the United Kingdom, *Open Science Framework* (2020). [DOI: 10.31219/osf.io/nmx9w](https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/nmx9w)

Provided by Anglia Ruskin University

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