

# Coronavirus misinformation and vaccine research among key priorities for public

April 6 2020, by Ryan O'hare, Dr Sabine L. Van Elsland

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Information overload and conflicting guidance are among the biggest concerns for the public during the current coronavirus outbreak, surveys reveal.

The findings, published in a new report from researchers at Imperial College London, come from online surveys of members of the public, carried out by the Patient Experience Research Centre (PERC).

They reveal that ineffective communication, including access to information and misinformation, are key concerns for the public, while vaccine development was considered the most urgent research priority.

The report is the latest in a series to be released by Imperial's COVID-19 Response Team—including the Patient Experience Research Centre (PERC), NIHR Applied Research Collaborative North West London, the MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis (GIDA), Abdul Latif Jameel Institute for Disease and Emergency Analytics (J-IDEA).

As part of Imperial's response to COVID-19, the PERC has been exploring people's view, experiences and behavioral responses to the [outbreak](#) in the UK and elsewhere. The team launched an online community involvement initiative to gather insight from members of the public, aiming to establish a network for ongoing community engagement.

Dr. Philippa Pristera, report author and research associate in the School of Public Health, said: "It is our duty as researchers, and a research community, to ensure patient and public perspectives are not forgotten as we rapidly develop our plans or deliver innovative solutions in response to the outbreak."

In the latest report, the authors highlight findings from their community engagement, with members of the public reporting key unmet needs around information they're receive about the outbreak—including an overload of information, as well as misinformation and conflicting advice. Respondents described feelings of concern, confusion and, in some cases, panic as a result of these communication and information

challenges.

## Public frustration

Others shared frustrations that there was nowhere to post their concerns or questions. In addition, respondents expressed a need for more detailed and bespoke practical guidance about their risk and how best to prepare and protect themselves and their loved ones.

Almost half of those surveyed (47%) wanted to hear about the latest research on the virus, and 45% wanted a dedicated internet portal where they could access the latest information and trusted guidance. Making information more accessible to different communities, including those who are not online and those who have English as a second language was also highlighted as a priority.

## Research priorities

When asked about which areas of research should be prioritized, many respondents considered the development of a vaccine against COVID-19 was the most urgent priority.

The majority of respondents (95%) felt that social studies exploring the public's experiences, risk perceptions and behaviors during this outbreak were necessary and important. Such research could:

- Improve the way the current outbreak response is planned and implemented;
- Improve the way [information](#) and guidance is provided to and understood by the public;
- Optimise the support provided to communities and vulnerable groups; and

- Improve future outbreak preparedness.

Other recommended areas of research included:

- Understanding the role of the media in influencing how people react and respond;
- Furthering our basic understanding of the virus—how it spreads, who it affects the most and why, and whether people achieve and maintain immunity after being infected;
- Critiquing the UK's response to the pandemic against that of other countries; and
- Ensuring lessons can be learnt from this outbreak to better equip us for future outbreaks, and public health emergencies in general.

Professor Helen Ward, from the School of Public Health and Jameel Institute at Imperial, said: "Community involvement and engagement is a crucial part of outbreak response, but is often overlooked in the early days.

"Building on our existing relationships with the public and patient groups we have been running online engagement activities to help guide our research and identify the needs of different communities. We feel this is an important step in building trust between researchers, public health responders and local people."

Dr. Pristera added: "This exercise emphasized that members of the public want to get involved in supporting the outbreak response. And doing so can improve the relevance and impact of our work. As one respondent put it: "It's people and not government that will determine how things evolve."

The full report "Online Community Involvement in COVID-19 Research & Outbreak Response Early Insights from a UK Perspective' is available

on the [MRC GIDA report website](#).

Provided by Imperial College London

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