

Survey tracks how North Carolina residents are changing behavior in pandemic

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A new Duke survey finds almost all North Carolinians were practicing social distancing by the end of March, but many were still engaging in behaviors that could spread coronavirus.

The survey was designed by the Duke University COVID19 Digital Lab, a joint project of Duke Forge and the university's Social Science

Research Institute.

"About half of respondents said that North Carolinians are reacting appropriately to the outbreak, which is great, and only a minority said that we are overreacting," said Dana Pasquale, an infectious disease epidemiologist in the Duke University COVID19 Digital Lab. "I hope that speaks to a community will to keep social distance as long as we need to."

The survey will be repeated weekly to provide insight to how people in North Carolina are changing their [behavior](#) over time in response to the outbreak.

"Nearly all respondents answered yes when asked 'are you practicing social distancing,'" said Jessilyn Dunn, an assistant professor of biostatistics and bioinformatics. "But they reported a variety of behaviors that could spread the coronavirus."

The initial survey was conducted by phone between March 29-31. It asked 1,274 North Carolinians about their behavior in the week prior to the survey—before Gov. Roy Cooper's statewide stay-at-home order took effect at 5 p.m. March 30.

"It will be interesting to see if behavior changes after the stay at home order has taken effect," said Don Taylor, a professor of Public Policy at Duke's Sanford School of Public Policy and director of SSRI. "Small changes in individual behavior can change the peak and length of the epidemic."

Among the findings:

- Two-thirds of respondents said they made large changes to their routine due to the coronavirus

- Respondents were evenly split in whether a household member left the household in the previous three days to go to work
- Ninety-seven percent of respondents said they were socially distancing, but when asked about specific behaviors, a substantial proportion of respondents reported behavior that could spread the [coronavirus](#).

"It will be interesting to see how these responses change with the enactment of the statewide stay-at-home order," Pasquale said. "We of course hope to see a decrease in the proportion of people who were in groups of more than 20 people."

Pasquale said following isolation recommendations is especially important because so little is known about transmission and how widespread the virus really is in the state.

"The best thing that all of us can do to reduce transmission is reduce the number of close physical interactions that we have with people outside of our households," she said. "I know how hard it is to keep kids home right now, and I know that not everyone can stay home with their kids, but reducing non-essential contact between kids for things like playdates is important right now, too."

Provided by Duke University

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