

# Most people accessing USC COVID-19 patient self-assessment tool report mild symptoms

June 16 2020

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Of the more than 275,000 people worldwide who accessed a USC web-based [COVID-19 patient self-assessment tool](#), only 20 percent reported severe symptoms requiring immediate medical attention, according to new research published in the [Journal of General Internal Medicine](#).

The study was done by a group of researchers led by William Mehring, a first-year medical student at Keck School of Medicine of USC.

"Among users of our tool with symptoms of COVID-19, 80 percent reported mild symptoms that can likely be managed with simple home self-care," Mehring said.

The tool, which is freely available in English and Spanish, was developed in partnership with AltaMed Health Services, the nation's largest independent federally qualified community health center. AltaMed, which specializes in safety-net multi-ethnic populations, operates nine COVID-19 testing sites throughout Los Angeles County. AltaMed has been using the tool to help triage patients seeking care for symptoms that may be due to the infection.

## **Removing barriers to health care**

"During normal times, there are many barriers to our communities seeking [health care](#) services," said Dr. Ilan Shapiro, Medical Director of Health Education and Wellness at AltaMed. "Digital tools like the patient self-assessment tool, coupled with access to in-person consultations like our testing and evaluation sites, are critical for ensuring patients can receive the care they need now and after the pandemic."

The self-assessment tool was initially developed in March by a team of researchers from the USC Gehr Center for Health Systems Science and Innovation, within the Keck School, and Akido Labs, a Los Angeles-based health data technology company. The team used information from the Centers for Disease Control as a guide. The tool asks users to provide answers to six simple questions about their current situation, including the nature of the user's symptoms; [risk factors](#) for COVID-19 such as advanced age or presence of high-risk chronic medical conditions; and

whether they work in a high-risk environment that requires close physical interaction with others. Based on these answers, the tool provides an assessment along with customized recommendations regarding evaluation and treatment, self-care and infection-prevention practices.

"Although the new study does not validate the appropriateness of the guidance provided by the tool, it highlights the eagerness of the public to engage with digital health tools and self-assessment in this time of public health crisis," said Andrew Poksay, from Akido Labs.

## **De-stressing overburdened health care systems**

Mehring sees the COVID-19 assessment tool as a potential way to ease the burden on overwhelmed health care systems while gathering data on the pandemic's spread.

"This could be a way to de-stress the system, which in some areas became quickly overburdened and still is," said Mehring. "In the future it could be used as a way to collect data on outbreaks and determine where they are occurring."

Close to 450,000 people have accessed the tool since it was launched. The USC Gehr Center, Akido and AltaMed teams plan to continue developing the self-assessment [tool](#) as part of a holistic digital approach that other communities around the nation can use as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold.

**More information:** William M. Mehring et al, Initial Experience with a COVID-19 Web-Based Patient Self-assessment Tool, *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1007/s11606-020-05893-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11606-020-05893-0)

Provided by Keck School of Medicine of USC

Citation: Most people accessing USC COVID-19 patient self-assessment tool report mild symptoms (2020, June 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-06-people-accessing-usc-covid-patient.html>

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