

# Preventing virus spread within households could be key to controlling new outbreaks of COVID-19

August 17 2020, by Sophie Belcher

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More effective measures to prevent infection spreading within households are a vital part of preventing a second wave of COVID-19, say researchers at the Universities of Birmingham and Warwick.

In an article published in the *BMJ*, experts at the University of Birmingham's Institute of Applied Health Research and Warwick Medical School argue that robust strategies are needed to prevent in-[household transmission](#), particularly within large, multi-generational [households](#). This should now be a core part of government strategy for controlling the spread of the virus.

Dr. Shamil Haroon, of the University of Birmingham's Institute for Applied Health Research, says: "Recent outbreaks of the virus in English towns such as Oldham predominantly involve communities with large, multigenerational households. Within household infection is thought to be responsible for around 70 percent of SARS-CoV-2 transmission. Until an effective vaccine is available, strategies to prevent household transmission need to be prioritised."

Measures recommended by the team include:

- Effective isolation of the family member first showing symptoms of the virus
- Wearing of facemasks within quarantined households, ideally as soon as infection is suspected or confirmed
- A renewed emphasis on personal hygiene, including cleaning and disinfecting shared toilets, [door handles](#) and other common spaces
- Staggering meal times in households where infection is suspected or confirmed.

The team also recommends the use of special isolation facilities for those who are unable to successfully self-isolate. This could be in field hospitals, or in hotels and hostels—an approach already adopted by several European countries. Effectiveness would depend on reliable and rapid testing measures being implemented. This would enable speedy identification of cases where isolation would be an appropriate

intervention.

Co-author, Professor K K Cheng said: "The epidemic in Wuhan was only brought under complete control when "Fangcang" field hospitals were introduced to centrally isolate cases. In the UK, it should be possible, for example, to repurpose the Nightingale Hospitals to support isolation of infected individuals with mild-to-moderate symptoms.

"Public trust and confidence that [isolation](#) in these facilities is voluntary, safe and supportive is critical. We believe this approach should be evaluated as a matter of urgency. It is [high time](#) that the UK government amend its mantra of 'test and trace' to 'test, trace, isolate and support'."

Co-author Dr. Joht Chandan, from Warwick Medical School at the University of Warwick and the University of Birmingham added: "Household quarantine is likely to remain an important pandemic control measure. Encouraging simple interventions like the wearing of face coverings within quarantined households and providing clear advice on enhanced [personal hygiene](#) and the cleaning of shared spaces would be steps that could be vital in protecting the most vulnerable individuals within multi-generational households."

**More information:** Shamil Haroon et al. Covid-19: breaking the chain of household transmission, *BMJ* (2020). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.m3181](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m3181)

Provided by University of Birmingham

Citation: Preventing virus spread within households could be key to controlling new outbreaks of COVID-19 (2020, August 17) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-08-virus-households-key-outbreaks-covid-.html>

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