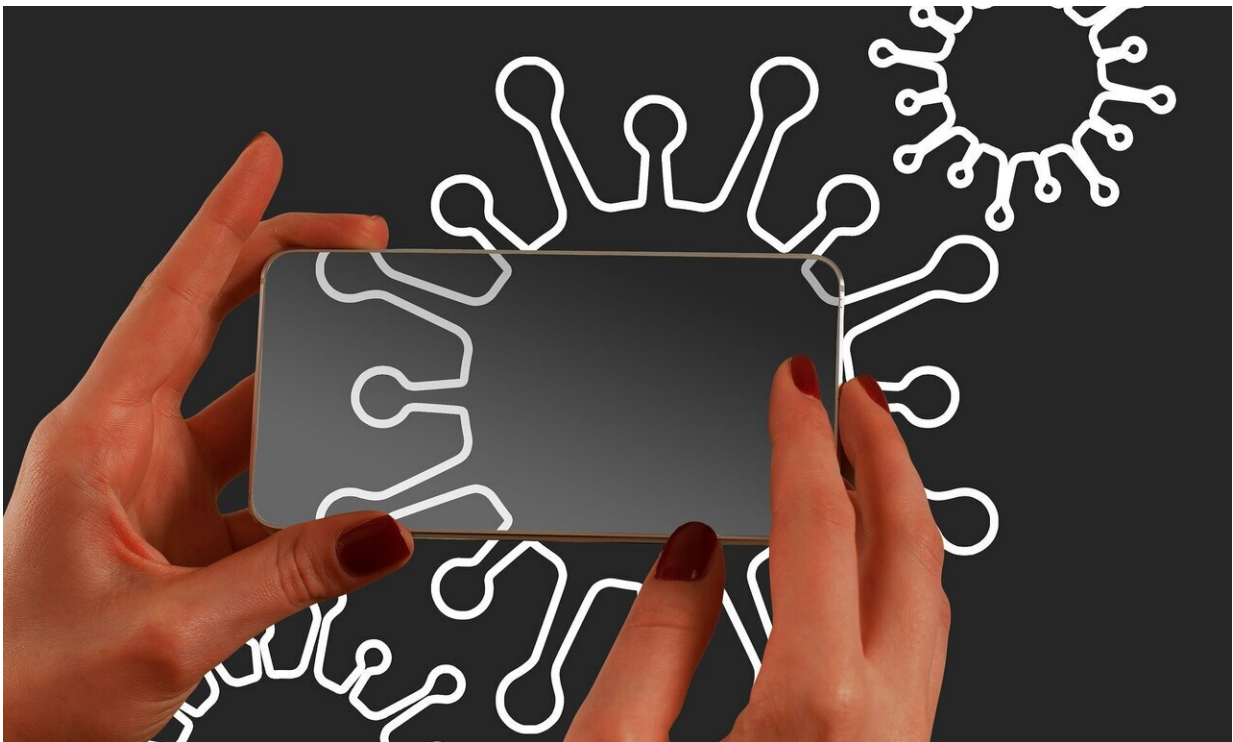


COVID-19 contact tracing less successful in more deprived areas, new analysis reveals

December 7 2020, by Peter Thorley



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New analysis from the Health Foundation, led by an Honorary Associate Clinical Professor at University of Warwick, published in *The Lancet* shows that a smaller proportion of positive COVID-19 cases and their contacts are reached by NHS Test and Trace in more deprived areas than in less deprived areas.

The analysis found that among the most deprived group of local authorities in England, 83% of positive cases were reached as compared to 86% in the least deprived. The difference was greater when it came to reaching the contacts of those who had tested positive—56% were reached in most deprived areas as compared to 62% in the least deprived.

This means that an additional 9,000 positive COVID-19 cases and 42,500 contacts would have been reached in the most deprived group of local authorities in England if they had had the same success rates as the least deprived.

The authors note that it is not clear why there should be these differences between different local authority areas. Dr. Adam Briggs, Honorary Associate Clinical Professor at Warwick Medical School and Senior Policy Fellow at the Health Foundation, said:

"There may be many possible reasons why a lower percentage of people are reached by NHS Test & Trace in more deprived areas, but the information available doesn't enable us to understand this in more detail. Knowing why people in more [deprived areas](#) seem to have less contact with NHS Test & Trace is crucial to ensuring the system isn't inadvertently widening inequalities, particularly as COVID-19 already hits vulnerable communities hardest.

"Policies need to be developed to improve engagement with contact tracing, and to help people to isolate when necessary. This may include better use of local expertise and knowledge, and addressing any gaps in available social, practical, and financial support for people isolating."

As part of the [analysis](#), all 149 upper tier local authorities in England were grouped into five levels of deprivation, from most to least deprived. This was mapped against the number of positive cases and

their contacts who were successfully contacted by the national NHS Test & Trace system between 28 May and 18 November.

More information: Adam D M Briggs et al. Is NHS Test and Trace exacerbating COVID-19 inequalities?, *The Lancet* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)32593-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)32593-9)

Provided by University of Warwick

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