

COVID-19 messaging towards youth leaves room for improvement: study

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A new study published in the journal *PLOS ONE* from researchers at Simon Fraser University (SFU) and the University of British Columbia (UBC) has found that young adults feel highly responsible for protecting

themselves and others against the spread of COVID-19, but face confusion when trying to comply with public health orders due to inconsistent messaging and ineffective outreach strategies.

The qualitative study, co-led by SFU Faculty of Health Sciences professor Scott Lear and UBC Okanagan Psychology professor, Lesley Lutes, used focus groups to examine the attitudes and perceptions of 50 [young adults](#) in British Columbia between the ages of 18 and 40.

The study found many in this age cohort are employed as essential workers. As a result, participants were acutely aware of their roles in protecting themselves and their communities during the pandemic. Overall, this age group is known to face a higher risk of depression and anxiety compared to other age groups, especially when they take on multiple [social roles](#) such as caregivers and parents.

Participants also found public health messaging to be confusing and often negative, especially when [media reports](#) covering the rise of COVID-19 cases focused on 'blaming and shaming' rather than contextualizing this group's exposure risks.

They also noted public health information outreach methods for their group were ineffective and did not enable two-way communication, thus missing an opportunity for this group to engage directly with institutions to ask questions and/or relay their concerns.

The researchers recommend tailoring [public health messages](#) to consider the context and lived experiences of young adults, and suggest keeping messages positive to increase their effectiveness.

They also emphasize strengthening social platforms that facilitate interaction to better enable their compliance with [public health](#) orders—and allow this group to voice their concerns and feel heard.

More information: Tina Cheng et al, The Role of Tailored Public Health Messaging to Young Adults during COVID-19: "There's a lot of ambiguity around what it means to be safe", *PLOS ONE* (2021). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0258121](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0258121)

Provided by Simon Fraser University

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