

New study shows links between family dynamics and COVID-19 preventative measures

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New research from Penn State suggests that supporting strong family relationships and reducing chaos at home may increase the likelihood

that parents and children will engage in behaviors intended to prevent transmission of the COVID-19 virus.

Researchers from the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center (PRC) surveyed 204 families about their health protective behaviors, such as mask wearing and hand washing. They also asked about how the families were functioning in the face of disruptions during the first two months of the pandemic.

"All the indoor gathering spaces, [social activities](#), and schools were shut down, placing an increased burden on families to continue the hard work of supporting their children's social and [emotional development](#)," said Gregory Fosco, professor of health and [human development](#) and co-principal investigator for the study. "As [social scientists](#), we were curious to see how families were handling the additional challenges of adopting new behaviors such as mask wearing, [hand washing](#) and social distancing."

The researchers found that when family cohesion—how well family members supported each other and worked together—was disrupted, parents and children were less able to adopt health-protective behaviors.

"As boundaries between work and family blurred, and stress about the pandemic was high, we encouraged families to find ways to spend intentional time together participating in fun activities as a family, such as game nights, cooking together, or safe family outings."

The study also found that the greater the chaos in the home, the more consistently the parents struggled to adopt the health-protective behaviors. To address this, the researchers recommended designating specific areas of the home for certain activities such as working from home or studying, creating schedules for [screen time](#), and specifying quiet times.

This study was part of a larger project that examines outcomes for families headed by parents who participated in the PRC's PROSPER prevention program as adolescents.

The study's findings were published in the journal *Families, Systems & Health*.

More information: Gregory M. Fosco et al, Family vulnerability, disruption, and chaos predict parent and child COVID-19 health-protective behavior adherence, *Families, Systems, & Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1037/fsh0000649](https://doi.org/10.1037/fsh0000649)

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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