

# Study reveals more depression in communities where people rarely left home during the COVID-19 pandemic

September 28 2023, by McKenzie Ridings

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Higher levels of depressive symptoms have been reported during the COVID-19 pandemic compared with other times in history, and as much

as three times higher than prior to the pandemic. A team led by investigators at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) has found that social isolation may have been a contributing factor. [Their findings are published in JAMA Network Open.](#)

In [surveys](#) conducted between May 2020 and April 2022 that were completed by 192,271 adults living in all 50 US states and the District of Columbia, the average county-level proportion of individuals not leaving home on a daily basis was associated with a greater level of depressive symptoms.

"We integrated our data with another data set compiled by Facebook that looked at aspects of mobility on the basis of an app, including how often people in a particular area left home," explains lead author Roy H. Perlis, MD, MSc, associate chief of research in the department of psychiatry and director of the Center for Quantitative Health at MGH. "We found that in communities and at times when fewer people left home, levels of depression in our survey were greater."

This link held even after considering local COVID-19 activity, weather, and county-level economics. Certain [pandemic](#) restrictions—in particular, mandatory mask-wearing in public and policies canceling public events—were modestly related to depressive symptom severity, but these associations were substantially smaller than the magnitude of the association with community mobility.

"In most of the analysis we used cross-sectional data—measurements at the same time of community mobility and depression. But when we looked at the relationship between mobility in a community and subsequent depression, we observed similar effects," says Perlis.

The investigators note that finding ways to increase [social engagement](#) and limit [social isolation](#) during times of limited mobility may be

important for mitigating the effects of future pandemics or other long-lasting disasters to potentially decrease some of their mental health impacts.

**More information:** Roy H. Perlis et al, Community Mobility and Depressive Symptoms During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States, *JAMA Network Open* (2023). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.34945](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.34945)

Provided by Massachusetts General Hospital

Citation: Study reveals more depression in communities where people rarely left home during the COVID-19 pandemic (2023, September 28) retrieved 8 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-reveals-depression-communities-people-rarely.html>

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