Researchers present findings on role of Google search early in COVID-19 pandemic
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The study, conducted by Pascual and his mentor Ali Pourmand, MD, MPH, professor of emergency medicine at SMHS, utilized Google Trends to assess the extent of the public's perceived exposure to COVID-19 as it relates to disease prevalence during the early phase of the pandemic in the U.S. The team collected four weeks of search volume index (SVI) data from March 2020.

Out of the five queries analyzed, two that signal perceived exposure to the virus, "How do I get tested for coronavirus?" or "Do I have coronavirus?" had statistically significant differences in mean SVI between states with the highest and lowest numbers of COVID-19 cases. Generic queries such as "What is coronavirus?" or "How is coronavirus spread?" that do not necessarily reflect perceived exposure to the virus were not associated with the number of COVID-19 cases. The study findings imply how analyzing specific phrases, in lieu of those borne out by general interest, may yield more meaningful data about perceived exposure to a communicable disease on a population level.

"Early access to population health data is crucial and potentially lifesaving," said Pascual. "Digital tools such as Google Trends may help bridge the gap in knowledge and transparency."

The findings will be available 24/7 on demand during the Research Forum at the American College of Emergency Physicians annual conference, the world's largest emergency medicine conference, Oct. 26–29. The abstract is also published in the supplement to the November 2020 issue of the Annals of Emergency Medicine.

More information: els-jbs-prod-cdn.jbs.elsevierh...pb/assets/raw/Health%20Advance/journals/ymem/YMEM764Sfinalv2.pdf