

Social influence matters when it comes to following pandemic guidelines

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New research published in the *British Journal of Psychology* indicates that social influence has a large impact on people's adherence to COVID-19 guidelines.

In the analysis of information from 6,674 people in 114 countries, investigators found that people distanced most when they thought their

close social circle did. Such [social influence](#) mattered more than whether people thought that distancing was the right thing to do.

The findings suggest that to achieve behavioral change during crises, policymakers must emphasize shared values and harness the social influence of close friends and [family](#).

"We saw that people didn't simply follow the rules if they felt vulnerable or were personally convinced. Instead, this uncertain and threatening environment highlighted the crucial role of social influence," said lead author Bahar Tunçgenç, Ph.D., of the University of Nottingham, in the UK. "Most diligent followers of the guidelines were those whose friends and family also followed the rules. We also saw that people who were particularly bonded to their country were more likely to stick to lockdown rules—the country was like family in this way, someone you were willing to stick your neck out for."

Tunçgenç noted that efforts to improve adherence to COVID-19 guidelines might include the use of social apps, similar to social-based exercise apps, that tell people whether their close friends are enrolled for vaccination. Using [social media](#) to demonstrate to friends that you are following the rules, rather than expressing disapproval of people who aren't following them, could also be an impactful approach. In addition, public messages by trusted figures could emphasize collectivistic values, such as working for the benefit of loved ones and the community.

More information: Bahar Tunçgenç et al, Social influence matters: We follow pandemic guidelines most when our close circle does, *British Journal of Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/bjop.12491](https://doi.org/10.1111/bjop.12491)

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