

Significant rise in 'high-risk' behavior during second lockdown

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Despite near identical restrictions, 'high-risk behaviors' were significantly higher in the second COVID-19 lockdown than the first, finds a new UCL led study.

The research, published in *PNAS*, found that during the second (November) lockdown people in the UK spent 35 minutes longer, on average, engaged in 'high risk' behaviors (where 'high risk' is identified as mixing with people outside the household, or doing work or [leisure activities](#) away from home), compared with the first (March to July).

Researchers say this new evidence should inform UK Government and policy makers on the likely effectiveness of particular restrictions during any future COVID lockdown or pandemic.

The main cause of this shift in behavior was a greater amount of time spent doing paid work in the workplace, with an average of 33 minutes more time spent in the workplace than during the first lockdown.

Lead author, Professor Oriel Sullivan (UCL Social Research Institute, Institute of Education) said: "Our research shows that there was an increase in high-risk behavior during the November lockdown, compared to the first lockdown in March to July.

"Interestingly, however, we do not find evidence that this is due to behavioral 'fatigue' with restrictions, as the data shows no more time being spent in out-of-home leisure or caring related activity.

"Instead, the main driver of high-risk behavior seems to have been a return to the workplace. The potential reasons for this include schools being open, allowing parents to return to in-person work, and an increase in businesses such as takeaways remaining open during the second lockdown compared to the first.

"At a time when both immunization and track-trace technology are limited, governments must rely on [behavioral changes](#) to contain the spread of COVID-19 and any similar viruses. This research shows that that differences in lockdown regulations can lead to meaningful differences in risk-related behavior, enabling the pinpointing of which regulations are likely to be most successful in minimizing behavioral infection risk."

Researchers collected time use diary data using four cross-sectional quota-sample waves. Time use diary surveys are unique in providing a detailed chronicle of daily behavior; 24-hour continuous records of the populations' activities, their social context and their location. The data were collected in February, October and December of 2016 (representing pre-pandemic behavior patterns), May-June 2020 (during the first UK lockdown), August 2020 (during the summer relaxation of lockdown restrictions), and November 2020 (during the second UK [lockdown](#)).

Each respondent completed time use diaries for

between one and three days, yielding a total across the four waves of the survey of 4,360 days from 2,202 individuals.

Behavioral risk levels were assigned based on three diary fields: activity type, location of activity, and presence of other people. The levels took into account literature on COVID-19 transmission, which considers time at home alone or with members of the same household as lowest-risk, with the main focus for transmission being contact with non-household members, both at, or away from, home. The virus is more likely to be transmitted indoors, in unventilated spaces, in crowds, and through prolonged personal contact. An example of an activity rated 1 (the lowest risk rating) is exercising alone at home, while an example of an activity rated 4 (the highest risk rating) is playing sports with non-household members, whether at home or away from home.

More information: Oriel Sullivan et al, Using time-use diaries to track changing behavior across successive stages of COVID-19 social restrictions, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (2021). [DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2101724118](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2101724118)

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