

UP-led behavioural study explores patterns of compliance to Covid-19 regulations

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A study led by researchers at the [University of Pretoria](#) (UP) has found that people who believe that others are complying with Covid-19 regulations are more likely to comply as well.



Together with a team of researchers in South Africa and France, [Dr Nicky Nicholls](#) and [Dr Eleni Yitbarek](#) of UP's [Department of Economics](#) studied beliefs and behavioural preferences as predictors of compliance with regulations aimed at reducing the transmission of COVID-19 in South Africa.

The researchers observed a positive link between people's beliefs about the compliance of others and their own compliance. However, they found that a higher perceived risk of infection was not associated with greater compliance.

"We found that people who believe that others in their area are complying with lockdown regulations are more likely to comply with the regulations themselves," Dr Nicholls says. "Yet, how likely people think they are of contracting Covid-19 doesn't seem to predict how likely they are to adopt preventive measures (such as mask wearing or social distancing) or comply with lockdown regulations."

With no immediate prospects of eradicating the virus, encouraging people to adopt preventive behaviours – such as social distancing, regular handwashing, wearing masks and observing lockdown regulations – has been the central focus of public health policies. For this reason, investigating ways to improve compliance with recommended and required behaviours is important for informed policymaking.

The team also found that people who are more patient or altruistic showed greater compliance with measures aimed at preventing the spread of Covid-19. This is in line with findings in other countries where researchers have established that altruism increases preventive health behaviours in the context of communicable diseases.

"To help less patient people to cooperate in reducing the spread of disease, we need to do all we can to make behaviours that reduce spread easy to adopt," Dr Nicholls says. "For Covid-19, this would include things like making masks inexpensive and easy to access, and having sanitisers readily available in public places. We also need to emphasise how big the benefits of adopting these behaviours can be, both in the short term (you're less likely to get sick) and in the long term (we'll have fewer cases to overwhelm the healthcare system)."

"Because people's concern for others predicts behaviour, we can also highlight the importance of caring for others in these

situations; this includes thinking about the risk to more vulnerable South Africans. And given that beliefs about the behaviour of others predict our own behaviour, highlighting good behaviour – the adoption of preventive measures – in others might encourage people to increase their own compliance.”

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