# Study finds regional Covid-19 restrictions did not change behaviour in Scotland



Researchers from the University of Aberdeen have found that regional restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic did not significantly influence people’s behaviour in Scotland, despite rising Covid-19 case numbers. The study, published in the US journal Translational Behavioral Medicine, examined adherence to public health measures such as social distancing, mask-wearing, staying at home, and handwashing between March and November 2020.

The research involved a random sample of 1,724 people across Scotland to obtain a representative view of how individuals responded to varying levels of restrictions implemented throughout the pandemic. The study specifically compared behaviours before and after the introduction of local restrictions and contrasted residents in high-restriction areas with those in low-restriction zones.

Contrary to expectations, the findings revealed no significant change in people’s behaviour following the tightening of restrictions. Participants did not increase their compliance with measures such as maintaining a 2-metre distance, mask usage, or hand hygiene, regardless of residing in areas with enhanced restrictions. This included assessments of both intention to follow instructions and confidence (“self-efficacy”) in doing so, which were evaluated through questions such as, “Do you intend to follow all the government instructions?” and “How confident or not are you that you can follow the government instructions?”

Dr Chantal den Daas, a senior lecturer in health psychology and a collaborator on the Covid Health and Adherence Research in Scotland (Charis) project, highlighted that the research challenges assumptions about behaviour change in response to local lockdown measures. Speaking to The Irish News (Belfast), she said: “When local restrictions were introduced in 2020 due to an increase in Covid-19 case numbers, we thought we would see a change in behaviour after they were implemented. But this was not what we found.”

Dr den Daas emphasised the importance of the findings for future public health responses, suggesting that restrictions based solely on case numbers may not be the most effective means of influencing public behaviour. She stated, “It is really important to build an understanding of what could have been done differently and how we can effectively influence public behaviour in the future should we be faced with another public health crisis.”

The research also underlined the necessity for ongoing assessment of behaviour and beliefs about the virus during acute outbreaks. According to Dr den Daas, “Future research in acute outbreaks should assess behaviour and beliefs about the virus, risk on an ongoing basis and identify the need for intervention even before cases rates start to go up.”

The study’s insights could inform how authorities design and implement future measures to manage public health emergencies, possibly by focusing on factors beyond just regional case statistics to better predict the need for restrictions and their likely impact on behaviour.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/24299/> - This article from the University of Aberdeen reports on new research showing that Covid restrictions had no significant effect on people's behaviour in Scotland, confirming the claim that behaviours such as social distancing and mask-wearing did not change after restrictions were tightened.
* <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/> - The University of Aberdeen's news page confirms that people did not alter their behaviour to follow enhanced local restrictions during the pandemic, supporting the study's findings that regional restrictions did not significantly influence behaviour.
* <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/stories/covid19-health/index.html> - This page discusses the CHARIS project, led by the University of Aberdeen, and its research into adherence to Covid-19 preventative behaviours in Scotland, including mask-wearing and social distancing, corroborating the method and scope of the study mentioned.
* <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/14057/> - This news article highlights ongoing research at Aberdeen regarding the lockdown’s impact in Scotland during Covid-19, offering context on the broader research environment and supporting the notion of continuous assessment of behaviour during the pandemic.
* <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northernirelandnews/2020/12/29/news/local-lockdowns-did-not-change-covid-behaviour-in-scotland-2160023/> - An article in The Irish News quotes Dr Chantal den Daas discussing how local lockdowns introduced in 2020 did not lead to changes in public behaviour in Scotland, directly supporting her statements in the article.