

COVID-19 restrictions: Implications over trust in government and health concerns

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Abstract:

Does government mobility restrictions prompt health anxiety (worry for ones own health)? We exploits cross-country variation in mobility restrictons amidst the COVID-19 pandemic to understand how they influence peoples health worry above and beyond the disclosure of the actual risk exposure information. We examine data from European countries fielded on March 20th and April 6th, 103,153 surveys were collected from 178 countries. Using an event study and a difference in differences design we show that as risk exposure increased COVID-19 individuals health worry, current and future country specific restrictive policies and that of the neighbouring countries exert a far larger effect on both risk perceptions and worry. We find that the effect of these measures on health status concerns is higher in low risk countries (4.6 and 7 times higher than moderate and high risk countries). Restrictive measures are associated with increased confidence in good government performance in low risk countries (9 pp on the day after the announcement), and higher compliance with health recommendations (stay at home, not attending social gatherings and maintaining a social distance of 2 metres). In contrast, lack of greater adherence to health recommendations is observed for high risk countries.

Keywords: risk exposure, pandemics, COVID-19, event study, risk policy, worry about one's health.

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