

Transcript Details

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The Strength of Social Distancing Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dr. Birnholz:

Coming to you from the ReachMD Studios, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. I'm Dr. Matt Birnholz.

The following is a brief news summary on social distance modeling and simulations, reported by the University of Western Australia's News Center. Visit the site at news.uwa.edu.au.

In the absence of confirmed and mass-produced vaccines or antivirals against COVID-19, mitigation strategies to contain and control the virus's transmission have been essential in every country affected by this disease. Most have implemented various forms of social distancing to lesser or greater degrees, but recently, researchers from the University of Western Australia have reported on two types of strategies they project will be the most effective to employ.

These social distancing measures were (1) self-isolation, and (2) a 70% reduction of community-wide contact, meaning any social contact outside of school, work, or home.

The strategies derived from a computer model using data from the outbreak source in Hubei Province in China before containment measures were activated, and extrapolating that to an individual-based simulation of a city in Australia that has a population of over 272,000 people.

The researchers were then able to compare the transmission of the virus in the simulation model *without* interventions to one that implemented social distancing strategies.

Among its findings, school closures alone led to the least effective changes in viral transmission, in addition to adding high levels of social disruption due to parents needing to care for younger children.

As lead researcher Professor George Milne from UWA's School of Computer Science and Software Engineering explained, "Its moderate effectiveness arises from our assumption that children still have contact in the wider community when schools are closed. This suggests that combining school closure with even a 30 per cent reduction in community-wide contact will be significantly more effective."

But regardless of which social distancing strategy was used, the model projected that both the timing and strength of social distancing measures would have the largest impacts on the ability to reduce the number of infections.

Though this model doesn't address how public health authorities in other countries can or should balance social distancing measures with their respective capabilities to implement them, the researchers claim it does provide guidance on just how beneficial these strategies can be.

For ReachMD, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines*. To access more details on this news report, visit the University of Western Australia's News page. And as always, to add *your* perspectives toward the fight against this global pandemic, visit us at ReachMD.com and become Part of the Knowledge. Thank you for listening.