

# How personality affects who follows COVID-19 rules

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Individual personality traits make people up to a third more likely to adopt guidelines aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19, a new study has found.

Researchers said the results suggested that governments could use different messages to target different [personality](#) groups to improve compliance with [coronavirus](#) rules.

People who were more conscientious were 31 percent more likely to follow COVID-19 [guidelines](#).

Those who were more intellectually curious and open to experience were 19 percent more likely to follow the guidelines, while more agreeable people who valued co-operation were 17 percent more likely.

However, the study found that extroverts were seven percent less likely to follow the rules than introverts, particularly among men.

Nick Lee, Professor of Marketing at Warwick Business School and a co-author of the study,

said: "During the past six months, the world has lost almost 950,000 lives because of the outbreak of COVID-19.

"Lockdowns and various other policies have been implemented in response to this. Unfortunately, it's not always the case that individuals follow these policies.

"The way people respond to advice on how to prevent transmission can be just as important as Government actions, if not more so.

"Therefore, we believe different personality traits need to be considered to encourage more effective compliance with COVID-19 guidelines."

The peer-reviewed study published is titled "Who complies with COVID-19 transmission mitigation behavioural guidelines?" It was carried out by academics at Warwick Business School, Emlyon Business School in France and Hankamer School of Business at Baylor University in Texas.

It was published in the *Public Library of Science* journal *PLOS One*.

Researchers used data from a sample of 8,548 people and examined their 'big five' personality traits—extraversion, emotional stability, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness—and how this was associated with their response to COVID-19 guidelines.

Professor Lee said: "This research has many potential applications. For example, countries are still struggling to develop effective ways of contact tracing. Our findings suggest governments could focus efforts on groups that are less likely to have [personality traits](#), such as conscientiousness, that encourage them to comply with COVID-19 guidelines.

"One quite feasible way of using our results is by

sending out short surveys using [social media](#), such as Facebook or Twitter, and use those to help tailor alternative messages to different personality groups.

"Another way is through occupational categorising, for instance, other research has found that entrepreneurs tend to have high levels of conscientiousness. Therefore, governments could send different messages to different occupational groups and increase the likelihood that they comply with the guidelines."

**More information:** Ahmed Maged Nofal et al. Who complies with COVID-19 transmission mitigation behavioral guidelines?, *PLOS ONE* (2020). DOI: [10.1371/journal.pone.0240396](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0240396)

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