

Stress associated with an increased risk of getting COVID-19, study finds

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A new study has found that people who experienced increased stress, anxiety and depression at the start of the pandemic, were at greater risk of getting COVID-19.

The research, published in *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, found that greater [psychological distress](#) during the early phase of the [pandemic](#) was significantly associated with participants later reporting SARS-CoV-2 infection, a greater number of symptoms and also more severe symptoms.

Professor Kavita Vedhara in the School of Medicine at the University of Nottingham, led the study, along with colleagues from King's College London and the University of Auckland in New Zealand.

Previous research has shown that [psychological factors](#) such as stress and [social support](#) are associated with increased susceptibility to viral respiratory illnesses and more severe symptoms.

During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a well-documented deterioration in psychological wellbeing and increased social isolation. The purpose of this study was to find out whether people who experienced these difficulties during the pandemic were more at risk of contracting and/or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

The team of experts conducted an observational study of nearly 1,100 adults, who completed surveys during April 2020 and self-reported incidence of COVID-19 infection and [symptom](#) experience across the pandemic through to December 2020.

Regression models were used to explore these relationships, taking into account demographic and occupational factors.

The results showed that COVID-19 infection and symptoms were more common among those experiencing elevated psychological distress.

Professor Vedhara said that "the significance of the work is in that it turns the debate regarding the mental health aspects of the pandemic on

its head. Our data show that increased stress, anxiety and depression are not only consequences of living with the pandemic, but may also be factors that increase our risk of getting SARS-CoV-2 too."

"Further work is now needed to determine whether and how public health policy should change to accommodate the fact that the most distressed people in our communities appear to be at greatest risk of COVID-19 infection."

Professor Trudie Chalder, Professor of Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapy from King's College London says that "previous work has shown a clear relationship between distress and the development of viral infections indicating a vulnerability. Our study found that distress was associated with self-reported COVID-19 infection and the next step is to investigate whether this association is found in those with confirmed [infection](#)."

More information: Kieran Ayling et al, Psychological Predictors of Self-reported COVID-19 Outcomes: Results From a Prospective Cohort Study, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1093/abm/kaab106](#)

Provided by University of Nottingham

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