Teens more likely to hoard and not follow pandemic recommendations if they ignore the news
By Alison Knopf

**précis**

- Teens are less likely to engage in social distancing and disinfecting, and more likely to hoard, if they have greater self-interest than community interest and don’t monitor the news.
- The self-report survey was conducted during the first week after the national emergency was declared.
- Emphasizing the severity of COVID-19 might be important for this population.
- Teens may feel less affected by the virus, as they see themselves as having lighter or no symptoms.

**Results**

Many teens (69%) did not engage in social distancing but were monitoring the news (89%) and disinfecting daily (88%). Some teens (20%) reported hoarding.

Teens were more likely to view COVID-19 as severe if they:
- engaged in social distancing, monitored the news, and
- hoarded.

However, greater social responsibility was associated with:
- more disinfecting
- more news monitoring, and
- less hoarding.

Greater self-interest was associated with:
- less social distancing and
- more hoarding.

Greater social trust was associated with less hoarding.

**“Findings from this study stress the importance of increasing adolescents’ social responsibility values and decreasing self-interest values as a preventive measure for future pandemics and public health concerns.”**

**Implications**

Hoarding, the researchers write, is an antisocial behavior that may contribute to food and other resource shortages in the community. As COVID-19 spreads and overwhelms the medical system, it’s important to understand psychological factors associated with preventive behaviors (social distancing, monitoring the news, and disinfecting) as well as antisocial behaviors such as hoarding supplies.

During adolescence, autonomy and peer relationships become more important, which can mean teens don’t want to socially distance, as they need peer social interactions. In addition, young people seem to have less severe symptoms of COVID-19 or to be asymptomatic even when they test positive, which contributes to teen behavior that can spread the vaccine as well as teens ignoring the news, the researchers write.

Some teens — and adults — recognize the importance of community, such as greater social responsibility values and prioritizing others over the self. The researchers propose that because COVID-19 symptoms appear to be less severe among pediatric patients, efforts to contain the virus in that population may be motivated by community rather than personal motives, but for this to happen, adolescents need to recognize the severity of the virus.

For the question on the survey about hoarding, a single item simply asked respondents how often they hoarded supplies from a grocery store or department store in the past 7 days, with responses scored on a five-point scale.

Because of the imminent nature of the public health concern of COVID-19, everyone must engage in preventive measures, the researchers write. For teens, this is particularly important, especially when considering the role of peer pressure. “Findings from this study indicate that adolescents’ beliefs about the severity of the virus, the extent to which they value social responsibility, their social trust, and their prioritization of their own self-interest over others were independently associated with their news monitoring, social distancing, disinfecting, and hoarding behavior in the days after the United States declared COVID-19 a national emergency,” they write.

Concern about social issues may motivate teens to act more socially responsibly, and one way to do this could be informing them “about potential asynchronies between the effects of COVID-19 on adolescents vs. adults,” the researchers conclude. “Findings from this study stress the importance of increasing adolescents’ social responsibility values and decreasing self-interest values as a preventive measure for future pandemics and public health concerns.”

One of the limitations of the study was that most of the sample were white, and more research should be done on other populations, the researchers write. There was no conflict of interest disclosed. Funding for the study came from the Center for American Indian and Rural Health Equity.

Oosterhoff B, Palmer CA. Attitudes and psychological factors associated with news monitoring, social distancing, disinfecting, and hoarding behaviors among US adolescents during the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. JAMA Pediatr 2020 Jun 29; e201876. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1876. Epub ahead of print. Email: benjamin.oosterhoff@montana.edu.