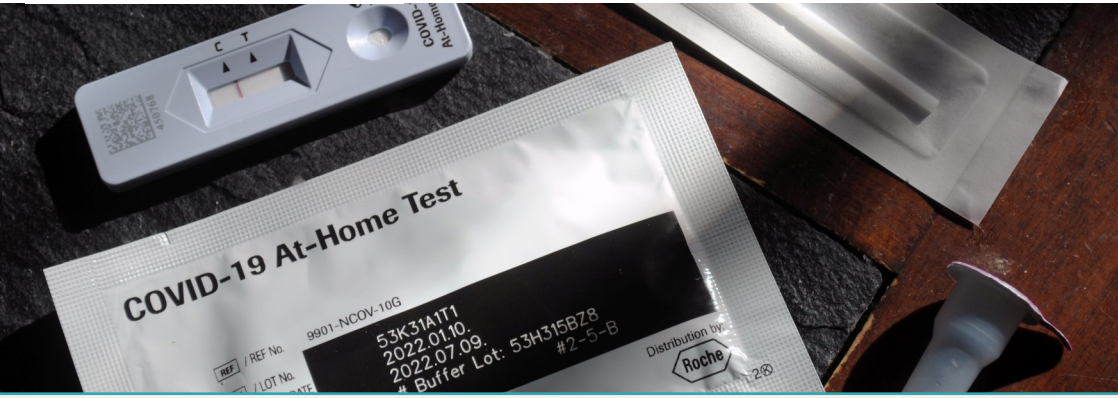
NIHR | Health Protection Research Unit in Behavioural Science and Evaluation at University of Bristol

December 2023

IMPACT FOCUS

Exploring the impact of COVID-19 testing messages on residual risk



"Through the conduct and presentation of this robust, high-quality research we were able to identify some concrete recommendations to inform the development of evidence-based modifications to messaging. This work therefore represents a gold-standard for using scientific research to inform policy and practice". Dr Dale Weston, UKHSA

Research Context

During the COVID-19 pandemic HPRU BSE affiliated researchers conducted a study aimed at informing the government response around messaging after a negative lateral flow test (LFT).

Asymptomatic testing via rapid antigen tests, such as LFTs, became widespread as part of the global effort to reduce the transmission of COVID-19. However, individuals who received a negative LFT result might misunderstand it as meaning 'no risk of infectiousness', giving false reassurance.

We carried out an online experiment to test the impact of adding information to negative test result messages about residual (or ongoing) risk and the need to continue protective behaviours. Results demonstrated that the addition of a single sentence ('But there is still a chance you may be infectious') to NHS T&T wording increased understanding of residual risk (Batteux et al., 2022).

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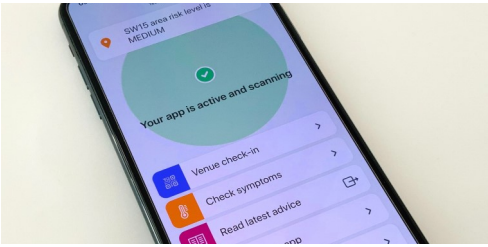
Route to Impact

The experiment involved close collaboration with NHS Test & Trace (T&T) to make sure the experimental text lined up with the actual messages used within system. Other collaborators included stakeholders involved in the UKHSA testing interventions evaluation board (TIEB). These stakeholders supported the dissemination of the published paper.



Impact Outcomes

The findings from the experiment had a direct impact on the messages sent to all NHS T&T users in England who received a negative COVID-19 lateral flow test result through the service, by informing an update to the message text. Based on the findings from the experiment, the updated messages are likely to have improved public perception of their residual risk. The relationships developed with NHS T&T led to further work including a full review of messaging, summarised in an overarching report representing the embedding of behavioural science in evidence-based messaging.

Making a Difference: Lessons for Success

A strength of this project was the opportunity to collaborate with relevant responsible colleagues in NHS Test & Trace and facilitate input from behavioural scientists. Building relationships between stakeholders allowed joint input into messaging as well as supporting the sharing of findings and recommendations. This increased visibility, in turn, informed ongoing practice, strengthening and supporting the use of scientific evidence.

Read the paper

Batteux et al. Impact of residual risk messaging to reduce false reassurance following test-negative results form asymptomatic coronavirus testing: an online experimental study of a hypothetical test. BMJ Open 2022

Find out more

To find out more about this research and the work of the HPRU in Behavioural Science and Evaluation please contact: admin-hprubse@bristol.ac.uk or visit our website https://hprubse.nihr.ac.uk

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