What have we learned from Psychology for the next pandemic?

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Independent Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B):

What is SPI-B:

- Not a permanent group – SPI-B does not exist outside of emergency response.
- Independent, voluntary, consensus view.
- Range of expertise - health psychologists, social psychologists and behaviour change specialists, plus anthropology, ethics, and legal/criminology experts, etc.
- Academic rigour – advice founded on behavioural science principles plus incoming data on behaviours and new research
- Fast turn-around – advice regularly produced within 1 week…sometimes within hours.
- Papers produced on a range of Covid-19 topics, including joint papers with other SAGE subgroups (SPI-M, NERVTAG, EMG, Children, Large Events, Testing, etc.)
- SPI-B Secretariat and SAGE Secretariat support are crucial

Annex 1

Table 1: Some common behaviours associated with UK celebrations, risk factors, and examples of potential mitigation measures.

Behaviours related to UK celebrations	**Risks** *Additional risks at community-/population-level (italics)*	**Examples of mitigation measures** *Elimination and substitution/alternative behaviours*
Increased local mixing and pressure on retail, including days out, travel to events and shopping for gifts	• Prolonged increased mixing in days and weeks prior to celebratory occasion. For Christmas celebrations this may be compounded by the inability for people to do normal seasonal shopping in November. • Gatherings at events, shopping centres, beauty spots, and other popular venues. • *Additional pressure on retail outlets and personal services (e.g. hairdressing) will increase queuing for long periods.* • *Additional pressure on delivery services and availability of items in a timely manner if activity is moved online.*	• Sending and buying presents online. • Making/crafting gifts and decorations at home. • Families can consider still doing some activities at home. • Physical gatherings at events may be supplemented by remote access.
Increased travel to destinations, including journeys over greater distances	• Travel in private and public transport, potentially between or through areas with different levels of restrictions. • Mixing with other travellers outside of household, in some cases for a prolonged duration. • *Mass travel of large numbers of people on the same day will create additional risks for travellers and transport workers.* • *Mixing between individuals in areas with different prevalence can lead to additional risks for those in lower prevalence areas*	• Visiting with friends and family through video calls or in a socially distanced manner. • Celebrate with local community instead of faraway family and friends. • Support community groups (including financial) to organise safe alternative celebrations particularly for vulnerable groups. • Stagger travel to reduce pressure on transport systems and travel risks.
Overnight stays	• Prolonged mixing with friends and family across a number of days. • Prolonged use of shared facilities, including bathrooms. • Extended duration and proximity to others (e.g. room sharing)[i,ii]. • *Multiple small mixing events with different groups over the course of several days leads to larger risk of transmission*	• Avoid repeated and extended overnight stays. • If possible and circumstances allow, self-quarantine for 2 weeks before and after visit • Maintenance of existing 'bubbles' rather than creation of new ones

SAGE and SPI-B:

Principles for the design of behavioural and social interventions (20th April 2020):

Epidemiological/modelling principles (SPI-M):

- Reduce number of contacts per day.
- Reduce exposure of vulnerable groups.
- Reduce probability of infection per contact.
- Reduce number of susceptible people.

Behavioural Principles (SPI-B):

Seek to maximise the effectiveness of the above (not an exhaustive list).

- Provide a credible, rationale for guidance and any changes (transparency, rationale, feedback).
- Engage all sectors of society (co-create solutions, allow time for sector planning)
- Enable changes and provide support (harness organisational structures and processes, redesign shared indoor and outdoor spaces)

SPI-B behavioural and social considerations when reducing restrictions (10th February 2021):

This update to our April 2020 guidance on factors to consider when easing national restrictions maintains the principles targeted at:

- Maintaining public trust by defining criteria for selecting what activities to resume based on need, risk, and equity;
- Providing clear guidance that helps people understand and adhere to the changed restrictions; and
- The importance of trialling the changing restrictions in careful sequence, with time to analyse data to assess the impact of each change, and making of making this process public

What psychological and social science contributions were made?:

Successes

- Challenging some of the behavioural science notions embedded in policy options.
- Making a case for the importance of understanding the wider impacts of NPIs (e.g. schools first to open/last to close).
- Greater understanding of participatory and local consultive approaches in government.
- Ability to work on complex areas within departments and across disciplines whilst providing an independent view.
- SPI-M/EMG collaborations were a highlight.

Challenges

- Lack of policy-level understanding about the robust, well-tested theory and methodological procedures underlying our data.
- Access to data and information flows blockages.
- Infodemic – how to manage information and quality.
- Lack of clear targets for behaviours → prioritization of easier interventions (mostly comms).
- Over reliance on self-report data.
- Lack of transparency of the other sources of information and advice considered by policy-makers.
- Concern about the wellbeing of colleagues.

The Future

- Improve policy-level understanding about the robust, well-tested theory and methodological procedures underlying our data.
- Improve and enhance data quality, access, and flow.
- Full-system engagement to enable departments to understand the benefits of incorporating behavioural and social science throughout.
- Systematic assessment to better understand the roles that academics can play and how to make these most effective (e.g. research, independent advice, advocacy, etc.).
- Creation of and maintenance of a covenant of trust for citizens → also important between independent advisors and policy-makers.
- Transparency expected for all independent advice (i.e. caution re security risks).

Thank you

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