

Understanding, knowledge and willingness to comply with health advice on COVID-19 in rural Australia: Results of a cross-sectional survey.

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Abstract

Purpose Rural populations were particularly vulnerable to Covid-19. Understanding, knowledge and willingness to comply with health advice varies across population groups and is influenced by perceptions of risk. This study aimed to identify if there was any variation in perceived risk and compliance with health advice among different groups in rural Australia that could inform health communication strategies in future pandemics. **Methods** The study used a cross-sectional on-line survey with Australian residents aged 18 years and over, residing in Western NSW, Australia. Both bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted, including multinomial logistic regression modelling. **Results** The characteristics that predicted both intention to comply with health advice and actual behaviour were gender (being female), First Nations status (Aboriginal) and age (older). The lower the perceived risk to the individual the more likely they were to have limited or no intention to comply with preventative measures. A bivariate correlation analysis determined there was a small ($r= 0.265$) significant ($p < 0.001$) correlation between intention to comply with preventative measures and the frequency with which people engaged in good hygiene practices. **Conclusions** The results suggest there are groups in rural areas who need tailored health communications to encourage compliance with health advice. The members of the community who were less vulnerable, particularly young men, were less likely to comply. In future pandemics governments could take both a geographic and a population group segmented approach to health communications instead of a blanket approach.

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