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Lichtner V. Rapid Response: Re: Two metres or one: what is the evidence for physical distancing in COVID-19? - Traffic lights and shades of risks. Response to: Jones N R, Qureshi ZU, Temple RJ, Larwood JP J, Greenhalgh T, Bourouiba L et al. Two metres or one: what is the evidence for physical distancing in COVID-19? *BMJ* 2020;370:m3223

<https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3223/rapid-responses>

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Re: Two metres or one: what is the evidence for physical distancing in covid-19? - Traffic lights and shades of risks

28 August 2020

Valentina Lichtner

Marie Curie fellow

South of France

@VLichtner

Dear Editor,

Over the summer I have been following the debate on mask wearing as a precaution against COVID-19, to which this paper contributes. The reasoning in favour of masks, ventilation and distance, on the basis of mechanisms of transmission, has made sense to me from the start, even in the context of uncertain evidence.

I have however some concerns over Figure 3, and in particular the use of green to indicate low risk of infection.

Read in the context of the article, with assumptions and limitations clearly in view, 'low risk' as green may not be an issue. However, the Figure is being translated in several languages and circulated on social media as guidance for people to make decisions around social activities, and read without assumptions and limitations in view. Many of us are looking for reassurance to return to a normal not-socially-distant life and may seek refuge in a decision tool such as the one provided by Figure 3.

But colours may also be misleading [1]. Green is the 'go' colour and in Figure 3 it may suggest a higher level of safety than there may be in reality. I wonder if instead of a traffic light system, shades of a colour may have been more appropriate to use in this context, with darker shades to signal greater risk. Perhaps shades of pink?

References

[1] Jonathon P. Schuldt (2013) Does Green Mean Healthy? Nutrition Label Color Affects Perceptions of Healthfulness, *Health Communication*, 28:8, 814-821, DOI: 10.1080/10410236.2012.725270

Competing interests: I have been wearing for weeks my home-made mask wherever I go, even before masks were made compulsory. I currently live in France in a red zone area.

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