

Us and the Virus: Our Behaviour Matters

It has become clear that local risks and local behaviour have a significant impact on how serious the coronavirus is in each local area. There are many risk factors—not wearing masks, not observing social distancing, not washing hands, travel on public transport and gathering in churches and public places. Any one of these risks can create a local “hot spot” in which the virus spreads rapidly. For example, Stockport is not yet a “hot spot;” however, every day since last Thursday (July 23) there have been between 5 and 15 new cases detected.

This pattern of local variation is very important, especially because those who are infected will not know for the first few days whether they have been infected. Furthermore, 10% of those infected are causing 80% of the infections. They are “super-spreaders” for unknown reasons, likely to include their own behavior, such as meeting with a large group. A particular problem now is that young people are spreading the virus because of their wish to leave lockdown behind. In the United States, adults aged 18 to 49 now account for more hospitalized cases than people from aged 50 to 64 or those aged 65 and older.

We need to accept that we will be going into and out of lockdown for many months to come. How many risks we take will have a big influence on whether we experience the virus. A major guideline in making risk assessment is that when there is a low probability for a high and dangerous risk, that risk must be taken seriously. That is now our situation in every home and every locality: The more risks we take, the greater the probability of a viral infection. Our behaviour matters.