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Talk

Does triggering the behavioural immune system influence spatial proximity?

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ABSTRACT

The behavioral immune system is thought to reflect a series of psychological mechanisms to detect and avoid potential sources of pathogens. When individuals perceive cues associated with potential pathogens, they often experience feelings of disgust and aversion, which motivate them to avoid contact with the source of contamination. For example, people may avoid sick individuals or environments that seem unclean. Here we investigated whether exposure to such cues would influence social proximity in interactions between uninfected people. In two experiments (n = 143 and 180; both conducted pre-COVID), we asked people to look at images that manipulated pathogen threat and then measured how closely they approached a confederate in a subsequent interaction. We will show that, in both studies, triggering disgust increased subsequent social distancing. We will also examine the potential effects of participant sex, perceived vulnerability to disease, and women's contraceptive use on social distancing.