

How COVID-19 Risk Information Affects Beliefs and Behaviors: Experimental Evidence from Bangladesh

Abstract: The local prevalence of an infectious disease and the severity of its consequence are among the key determinants of the adoption of preventive behaviors. In a phone survey of more than two thousand individuals in Bangladesh, I find that most people either do not know or underestimate the local prevalence of COVID-19 infections and overestimate the fatality rate. In a randomized experiment, I give treatment group information about the coronavirus case number in their districts and the case fatality rate in Bangladesh and worldwide. Nine to fifteen days after the intervention, the treatment group update their belief about infection risk upward and fatality rate downward. Potentially due to this countervailing update of risk beliefs, the information intervention does not have any effect on the self-reported preventive behaviors.