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Sixty seconds on . . . the two metre rule

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We know, keep two metres apart

Not any more. While UK guidance for the past three months has been to stay 2 m apart from anyone outside of your household or support bubble,^{1 2} this week the prime minister announced a relaxation of the rule.

Hey, don't stand so close to me!

Alright, no need to call the police. Actually, the World Health Organization has always recommended distancing of 1 m.³

Why's that?

Well, some experts say there is little evidence to support the 2 m rule. Carl Heneghan and Tom Jefferson of the Centre for Evidence Based Medicine in Oxford recently highlighted that all of the 172 studies included in a *Lancet* review⁴—which found evidence supporting distancing of 1 m or more—were “retrospective and suffer from biases that undermine the reliability of their findings.”

Free hugs all round?

Not quite. Heneghan and Jefferson say that GP consultation data have shown that encouraging social distancing, as well as hand washing, can help reduce the transmission of infections. “Hand washing and encouragement are what we need, not formalised rules,” they say.

Is anyone against this relaxation?

The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (iSAGE) has urged caution, warning that the reduction of social distancing from 2 m to 1 m will, in reality, result in the end of distancing entirely.

What might that mean?

Member of iSAGE warn that it will put those who cannot work from home, many of whom are from ethnic minority communities or are low paid workers, at most risk. “Reducing distancing will make these populations less safe, running the danger of making already stark health inequalities much worse,” they said.

Maybe we should all take a step back?

Yes, good plan.

- 1 Cabinet Office. Guidance: Staying alert and safe (social distancing). 12 June 2020. www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing.
- 2 Iacobucci G. Sixty seconds on . . . bubbles. *BMJ* 2020;369:m2381. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m2381 pmid: 32532709
- 3 World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease advice for the public. www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public.
- 4 Chu DK, Akl EA, Duda S, Solo K, Yaacoub S, Schünemann HJ. COVID-19 Systematic Urgent Review Group Effort (SURGE) study authors. Physical distancing, face masks, and eye protection to prevent person-to-person transmission of SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Lancet* June 2020. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31142-9. pmid: 32497510