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## Covid-19: Official data on England are patchy, say researchers behind new evaluation dashboard

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Significant gaps exist in the quality and availability of official published data on the covid-19 pandemic in England, say researchers who have developed an interactive dashboard that aims to give the public a fuller picture of how the country is doing.

The i-sense COVID Response Evaluation Dashboard (Covid Red) collates data from the Office for National Statistics, Public Health England, and the NHS.<sup>1</sup> It groups indicators of England's performance into five categories—Find, Test, Track, Isolate, and Support—and identifies areas where more data are needed.

Christina Pagel, professor of operational research at University College London and part of the team behind the dashboard, said, “Increasing volumes of data are being shown in the media and in government press conferences as a basis for local tightening of restrictions. However, these data are often from disparate sources and are not linked together to give a more complete picture of how we are doing.”

In developing the dashboard the researchers found that no routine data were collected on how well requests for 14 day isolation were adhered to, making it impossible to know how effective NHS Test and Trace is in reducing covid-19 transmission. They also found a lack of data on people who needed or were receiving support.

### Local data

Funded by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the dashboard presents key metrics using graphs and bar charts. It is continually updated and allows users to drill down and access local data.

It shows, for example, that in the context of the total number of estimated infections the proportion of cases whose contacts are asked to isolate is small. For example, using the Office for National Statistics' infection survey figures of the 247 500 new infections from 8 to 14 October, 39% of estimated positive cases were tested, 31% were reached for contact tracing, and 16% were advised to isolate.

The researchers also criticised the fact that the best available data from some areas of the dashboard were as much as two weeks old, and they called for real time information to help inform and support necessary responses including local lockdowns.

Deenan Pillay, professor of virology at University College London and dashboard co-developer, said, “Coronavirus case numbers are doubling every two weeks at the moment, and access to real time data will be essential during this time to monitor ‘hotspots’ of infection as we head into winter, so that local health authorities can better control community spread.”

1 i-sense. COVID Response Evaluation Dashboard. 2020. <https://covid.i-sense.org.uk/>.

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