

COVID HotSpots Could Be Predicted by Google Searches

An increased number of google searches for gastrointestinal issues corresponded with an increase in COVID-19 cases, according to a new study published in *Clinical Gastroenterology and Hepatology*. Researchers were inspired to look into this phenomena by the tendency of patients with COVID-19 to report symptoms like abdominal pain and diarrhea.

Our data underscore the importance of GI symptoms as a potential harbinger of Covid-19 infection and suggests that Google Trends may be a valuable tool for prediction of pandemics with GI manifestations..."

Kyle Staller, director of Mass General's gastrointestinal motility laboratory

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Researchers used Alphabet Inc.'s Google Trends online tool to compare searches for diarrhea and loss of taste and appetite with reported COVID-19 cases. They found a positive correlation. Areas that experienced a high volume of gastrointestinal symptom searches, like New York, New Jersey, California, Massachusetts and Illinois, became states with high-disease burdens three to four weeks after the searches.

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This study comes on the heels of another study that COVID-19 patients often have prolonged viral intestinal infections. Patients with gut infections continued to have positive stool tests, even after respiratory tests came back negative.