

We conducted a survey experiment during the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan to examine the effects of information treatments on individuals' cooperation with social distancing measures. Using a 2X2 factorial design, we examined the effects of messages that contained information about the length of time individuals spend outside the home compared with the social norms. We also examined the effects of the identity of the messenger by comparing information delivered by a powerful messenger who rarely speaks up publicly with that delivered by a familiar face. Based on a sample of about 3,000 respondents, we find that our subjects cooperated with social distancing measures more when they understood they had spent a relatively long time outside the home in the previous week. We also find no backfiring effects among subjects who stayed home longer than the social norms, and little evidence that a powerful messenger increases the persuasiveness of the message. Our results suggest that a feasible and repeatable policy intervention to induce citizens to cooperate with social distancing measures is simply informing them about society's statistics and letting them make comparisons with the social norms.