

# The general interest in running and walking has increased during the COVID-19

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## To the Editor,

We read with interest the recent article of Coppi et al. (1), who concluded that physical activity in medical college students sharply decreased during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, leading to an increased burden of sedentary behaviours.

With the purpose of providing further insights on this important matter, we have planned this infodemiological analysis by performing a digital search in Google Trends (Google Inc. Mountain View, CA, US), using the keywords “running” and “cycling”, setting the geographical area to “United States”, and a search period comprehensive of the last 5 years (i.e., between October 2017 and October 2022). US-site specific selection was driven by the possibility to use to English terms in a prevalently English-speaking country. The weekly Google Trends scores for both search terms were classified within two different periods, as “pre-COVID-19” (between October 2017 and February 2020) and “during-COVID-19” (between March 2020 and October 2022). The Google Trends scores were then compared using Student’s T-test and Pearson’s correlation, using Analyse-it (Analyse-it Software Ltd, Leeds, UK).

According to our analysis, the overall volume of Google searches (i.e., the Google Trends score) in the US was found to be slightly but significantly higher during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to the period before, for both running ( $68.0 \pm 7.2$  vs.  $65.7 \pm 4.4$ ;  $p=0.002$ ) and cycling ( $22.7 \pm 4.7$  vs.  $20.0 \pm 3.7$ ;  $p<0.001$ ). A highly significant correlation was also

found between the Google Trends score of running and cycling, both before ( $r=0.608$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) and especially during ( $r=0.692$ ;  $p<0.001$ ) the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evidence emerged from our infodemiological analysis suggests that the general interest for both running and cycling (i.e., the two most common types of outdoor recreational sports) has slightly but significantly increased (by 3.5% and 13.1%, respectively) in the US during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus probably reflecting a major need of counteracting or overcoming the psychological burden and threat appraisals generated by COVID-19 in the general population (2). Although such an enhanced interest in these two popular recreational sports could be reflected by a real increase in their practice remains to be established by means of large epidemiological surveys, the data emerged from our study would suggest that the volume of outdoor recreation physical activity may have not been dramatically jeopardized by COVID-19.

**Ethic Committee:** Not applicable

**Conflict of Interest:** Each author declares that he or she has no commercial associations (e.g. consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangement etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

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## References

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