Inequality and Social Distancing during the Pandemic

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We study how pre-pandemic inequalities in America influenced social distancing over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. Richer counties tended to see more protective mobility responses in the initial (pre-pharmaceutical) phase, but less protective responses later. Near linearity of this income effect implies that inequality between counties contributed very little to overall mobility reductions. By contrast, higher within-county inequality and/or poverty measures came with substantially larger attenuations to non-residential mobility at given average incomes. There were also significant effects of the county’s racial and age composition. Standard epidemiological covariates of contact rates were also relevant, controlling for the socioeconomic factors.

**Url:**<https://www.nber.org/papers/w30540>