The COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented levels of disruption to countries throughout the world. As the disease spread globally, all countries were impacted to one extent or another. However, the response to the global pandemic declaration has been uneven and varied, depending on factors such as wealth, availability of health care, socialized medicine, public welfare, and the extent of authoritarianism in government.

Because the specific mechanisms for the transmission of the virus were largely unknown during its onset period in the United States and there was a limited ability to test for infection, public officials throughout the country had few options to limit the rapid spread of the virus other than to call upon people to maintain physical distancing from one another. In the United States, governmental directives varied over time, beginning with voluntary stay-at-home requests and restrictions on large public gatherings, then, later, virtual statewide lockdown quarantines. However, travel in various forms continued throughout the country. Most notable of these were activities deemed essential for the public good, such as for people to access food, medical care, and other basic life necessities for public health, welfare, and safety.

While the ultimate intent of these restrictions, to slow the progression of the virus and limit fatalities, will take time to assess, other effects of travel and social interaction restriction can already be studied. Therefore, this study seeks to assess people interaction and social behavior using travel data at a megaregional level during COVID-19 pandemic which could be useful for operational and strategic planning of recovery efforts and for dealing with future pandemics.