

Your health and wellbeing in the COVID-19 pandemic

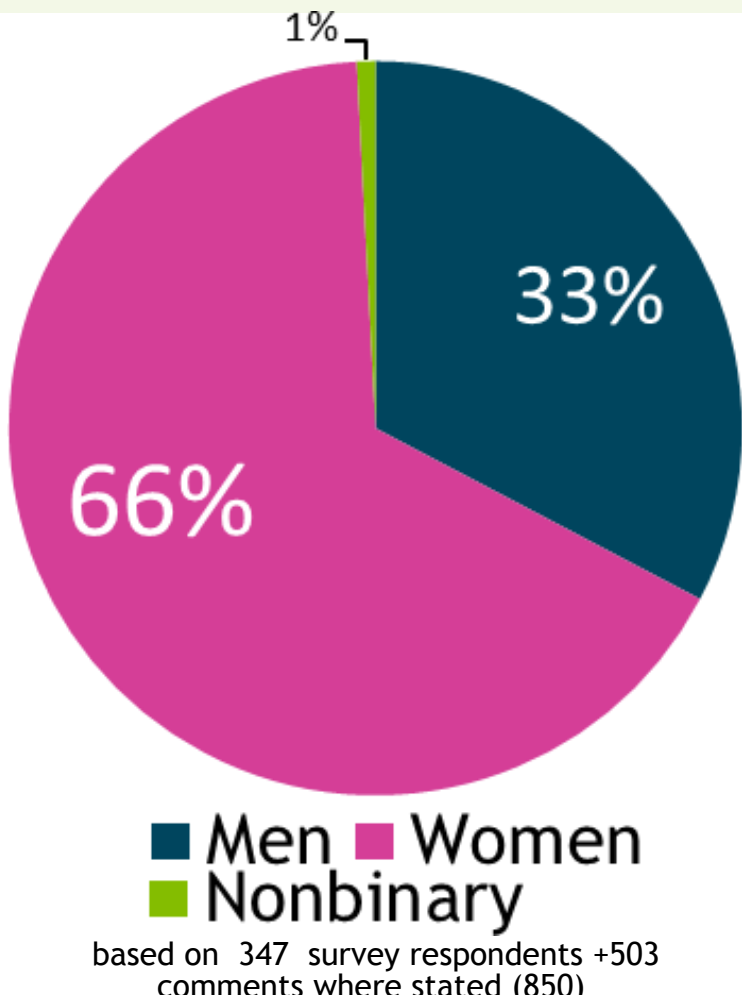
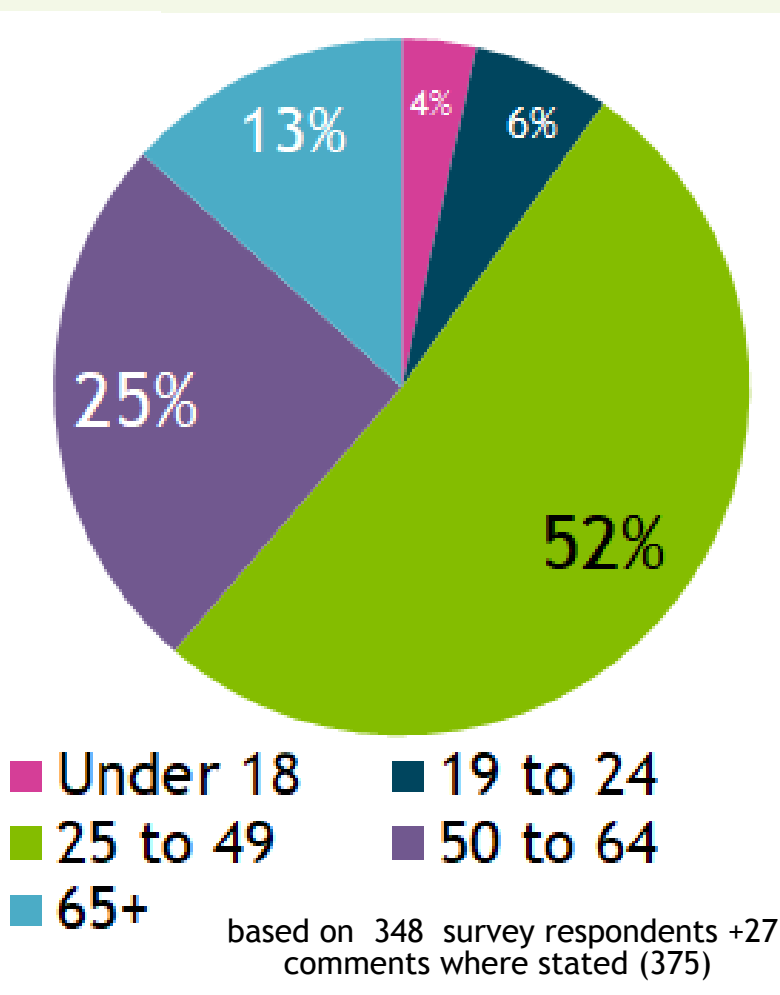
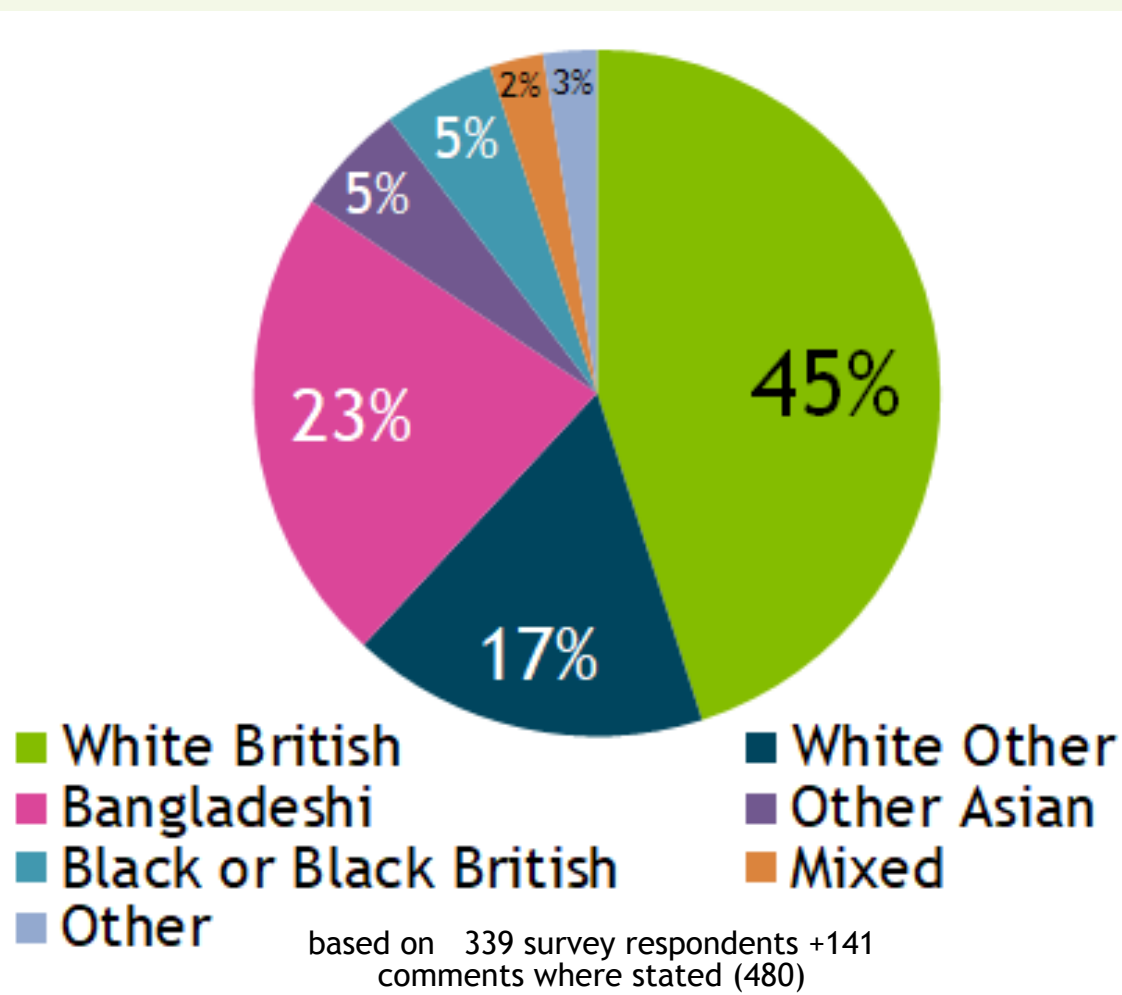


We are in the process of carrying out a survey online and on the phone.

We also analysed comments received from local people via telephone and email, NHS Choices, patient opinion and social media.

354
respondents
to date

1237
further
comments



22%
had children
aged under 18

5%
were
carers for
an adult

based on 354 survey respondents

What we have learned

Digital Inclusion



The internet plays a crucial role in how local people cope with the pandemic. Relatively few of those we spoke to are digitally excluded; they tend to be older, more deprived, non-White and in poorer health.

Staying Informed



More than half of survey respondents used the internet to stay informed about keeping themselves safe during the pandemic.

The Government website, the NHS website, BBC News and social media were important sources of information.

While most respondents found it easy to stay informed, some voiced concerns about contradictory or unclear advice.

Staying Involved

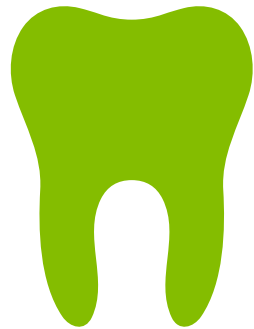


Online support groups represent a useful resource for local people to organise and offer advice. Access to food (including supermarket shopping among neighbours and support for vulnerable people struggling to afford food) is one of their main areas of concern.

NHS Services - Primary Care



Some people are accessing GP services via phone and online; patients who need routine support or repeat prescriptions have had mostly positive experiences. It is harder for GPs to support patients who experience new, unfamiliar symptoms or need extensive diagnosis and testing. Some patients are reluctant to access GP services, expecting them to be over-stretched.



All but the most urgent appointments for dentists and opticians are being cancelled; patients are concerned about the effect this may have on their long-term health.



Patients found pharmacy staff to be helpful and supportive, but admin and communications problems happen, particularly in relation to repeat prescriptions and third parties picking up medicine.



The 111 advice line is often overstretched, but the 111 online service is useful for patients.



Primary care professionals, including GPs and 111 dispatchers, are not always able to answer patients' queries about Covid-19, as it is a new phenomenon and many aspects are unknown to the scientific community. This causes further worry to patients.

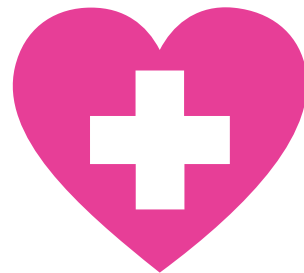
NHS Services- Hospital and Specialist Care



Some community psychotherapy/mental health support services continue remotely via telephone while others are subject to cancellations. Patient opinion of telephone psychotherapy sessions vary. Complex patients under the care of Community Mental Health Teams can feel particularly unsupported.



New and expecting parents are experiencing disruptions to maternity and neonatal services, including some cancellations to antenatal and postnatal appointments, and delays in registering babies with a GP.



Patients hospitalised with Covid-19 report a good standard of care. On the other hand, there are reports of inpatients with other issues being discharged prematurely to free up beds for Covid-19 patients.



Multiple specialist outpatient appointments have been cancelled and treatment plans have been delayed or put on hold. Patients who had routine consultant appointments by telephone found them efficient; there are, however, limits to what can be done remotely.

Staying Well During the Pandemic



Survey respondents stay physically active by engaging in a combination of outdoor socially distanced exercise (primarily walking) and indoor exercise (such as yoga, pilates, using exercise equipment or weights). The internet is an important resource for learning indoors exercise.



Survey respondents were more worried about the health of loved ones than about their own health; they also experienced sadness about missing out on leisure or travel.



Keeping in touch with friends and family online or over the telephone, engaging in hobbies and using websites/ apps for mental health support helped people's mental health. A smaller number engaged in mindfulness meditation, spiritual/ religious practices or learned a new skill.

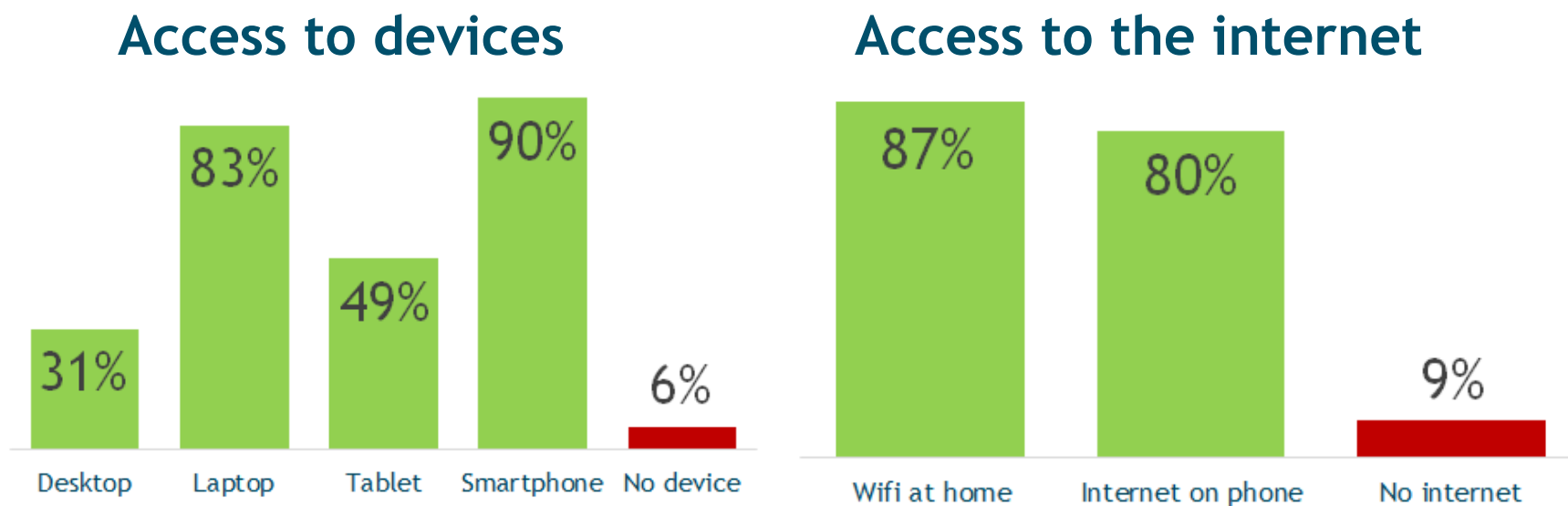


Younger people, those living with a mental health issue, those living alone or with housemates were more likely to experience social isolation. Those living with relatives other than their spouse and those experiencing financial precarity were more likely to have tense or unpleasant relations with members of their household.

Digital inclusion and the pandemic

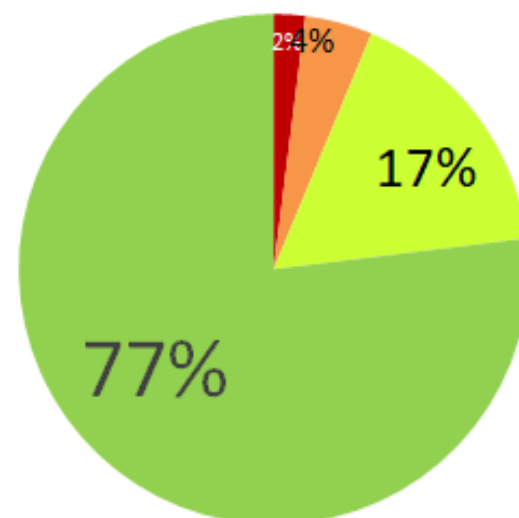


Most survey respondents had access to the internet and were able to use it.



Ability to use a computer or smartphone

- Not at all confident
- Not very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Very confident



The internet plays a crucial role in how local people cope with the pandemic

Staying well and involved



Accessing NHS services



Digital inclusion and the pandemic

Who is excluded?



14%

of survey respondents were digitally excluded; either by having no access to internet-accessing devices or by not knowing how to use the internet.

Compared with other respondents they were:



Slightly more likely to be women



More likely to be of Black ethnicities.



More likely to be older.



More likely to be in poor health and to worry about it



Less likely to be working or financially secure

I have a work smartphone but I can't use too much data. I don't have any internet connection.

I have a smartphone and a mobile data package which gives me data but I do not know how to use the internet so it is not useful for me. I also do not understand how the data stuff works on my phone. I only know that I have data on my phone because this is what I was told when purchasing the phone contract.

New online access to services is causing some problems for Age UK clients. Not only the difficulty in using new technology but the cost on data. Phone or food is becoming a choice that needs to be made.

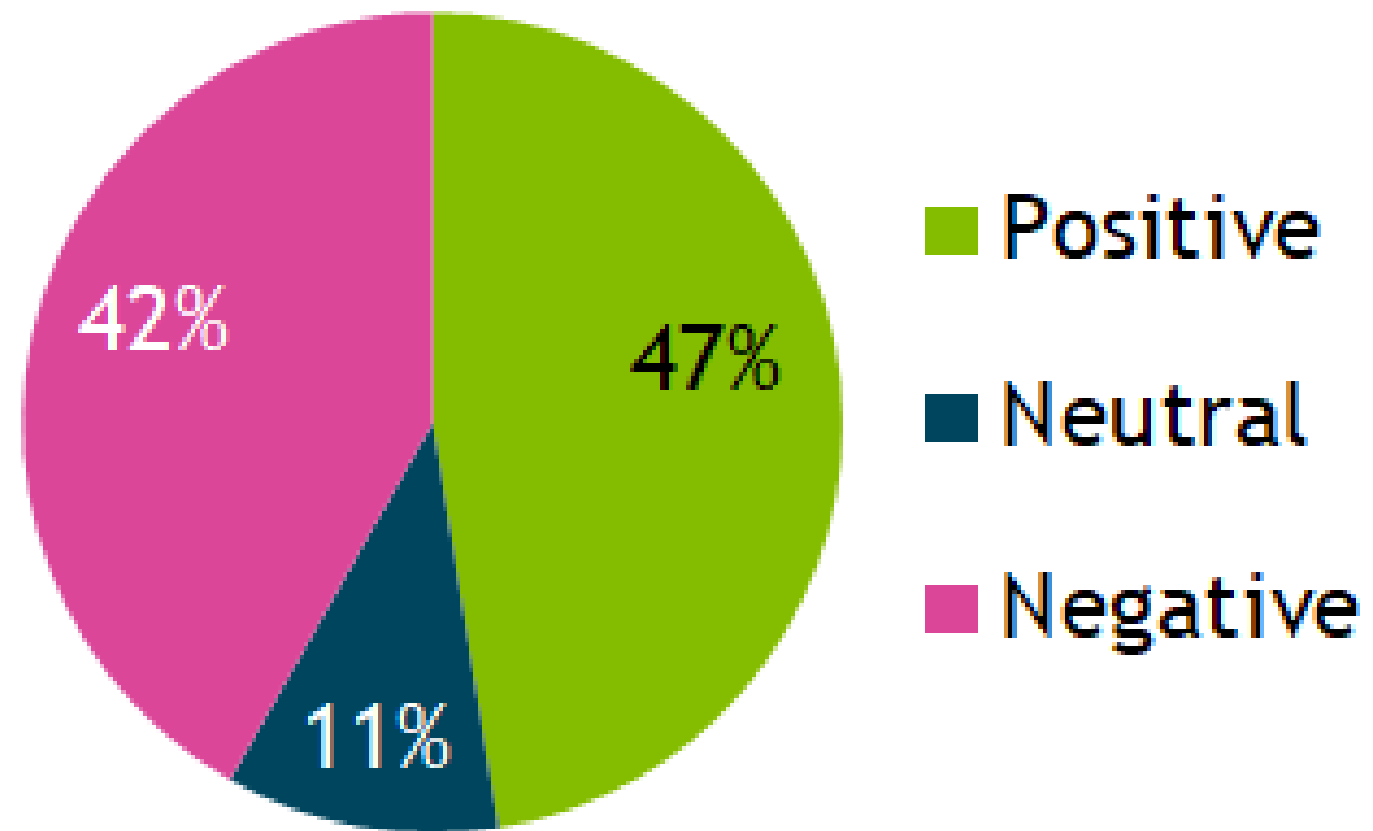
Our internet service has been very spotty. We contacted the internet provider and were scheduled to have a technician come and have a look, but they did not show up, and we have not been able to get in touch with the service provider since (on hold for 1-2 hours only to have the call dropped on the other end)

Using NHS services during the pandemic

GP surgeries

Local people's experience of GP surgeries in Tower Hamlets has been mixed.

Accessing GP services remotely



based on 120 comments, from survey and other sources

14%
of survey respondents had a telephone consultation with a GP or practice nurse.

5%
filled in an E-consult form to receive a call back.

3%
had an online consultation with a GP or practice nurse.

10%
ordered a repeat prescription online.

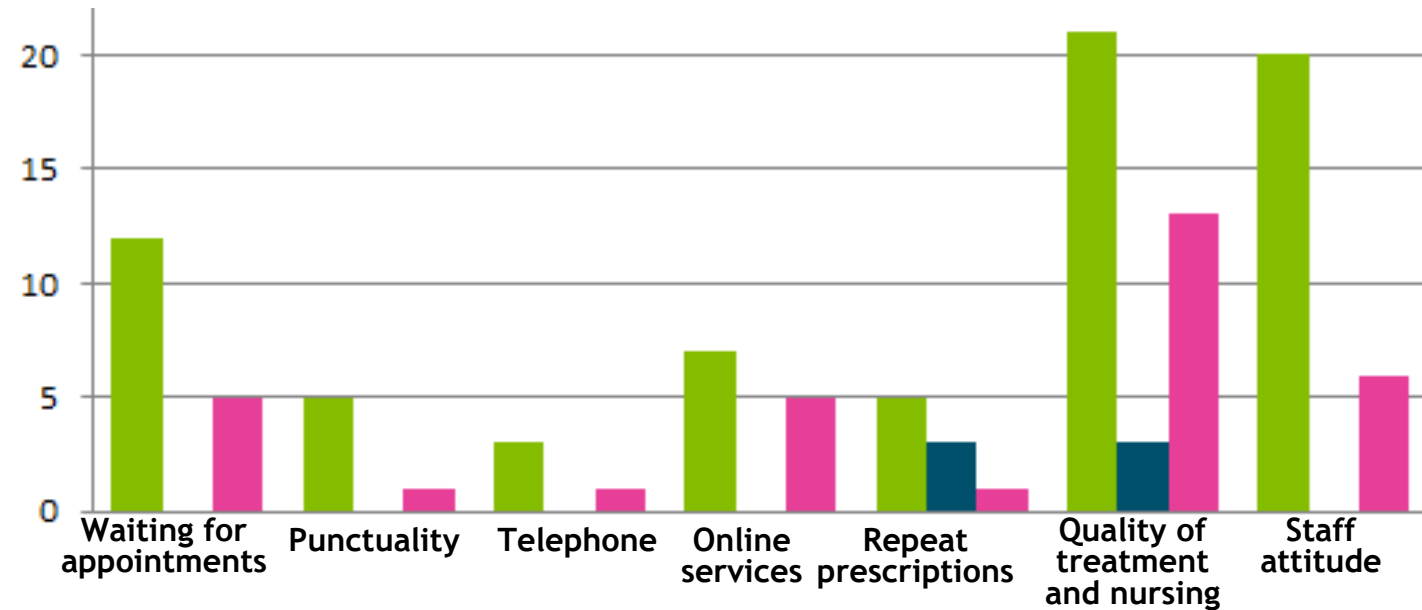
1%
accessed test results or referrals online.

based on 354 survey respondents

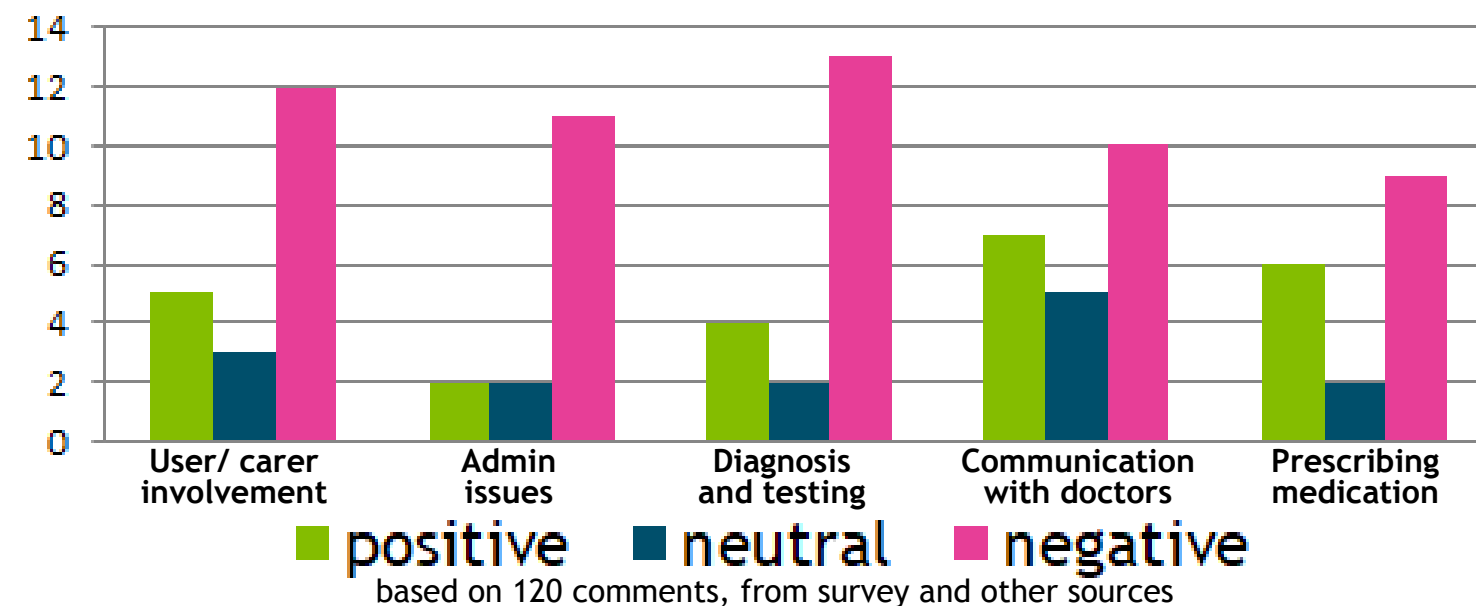


Using NHS services during the pandemic

What works well



What needs improvement



8%

of survey respondents said they needed a GP appointment and could only be seen remotely.

8%

of survey respondents said they needed a GP appointment and could not get one at all.

GP surgeries



Most people who need to see a GP are able to do so promptly.



Those who had telephone or online consultations tended to be happy with them. Overall, patients are happy with the quality of their treatment and the attitude of all staff members.



Patients seek reassurance for doctors both about COVID-19 and about accessing care remotely; the extent to which doctors are able to offer clarity varies.



Diagnosing illness and prescribing new medicine is a challenge to do remotely. Patients who are not used to telemedicine feel disconnected from their own care.



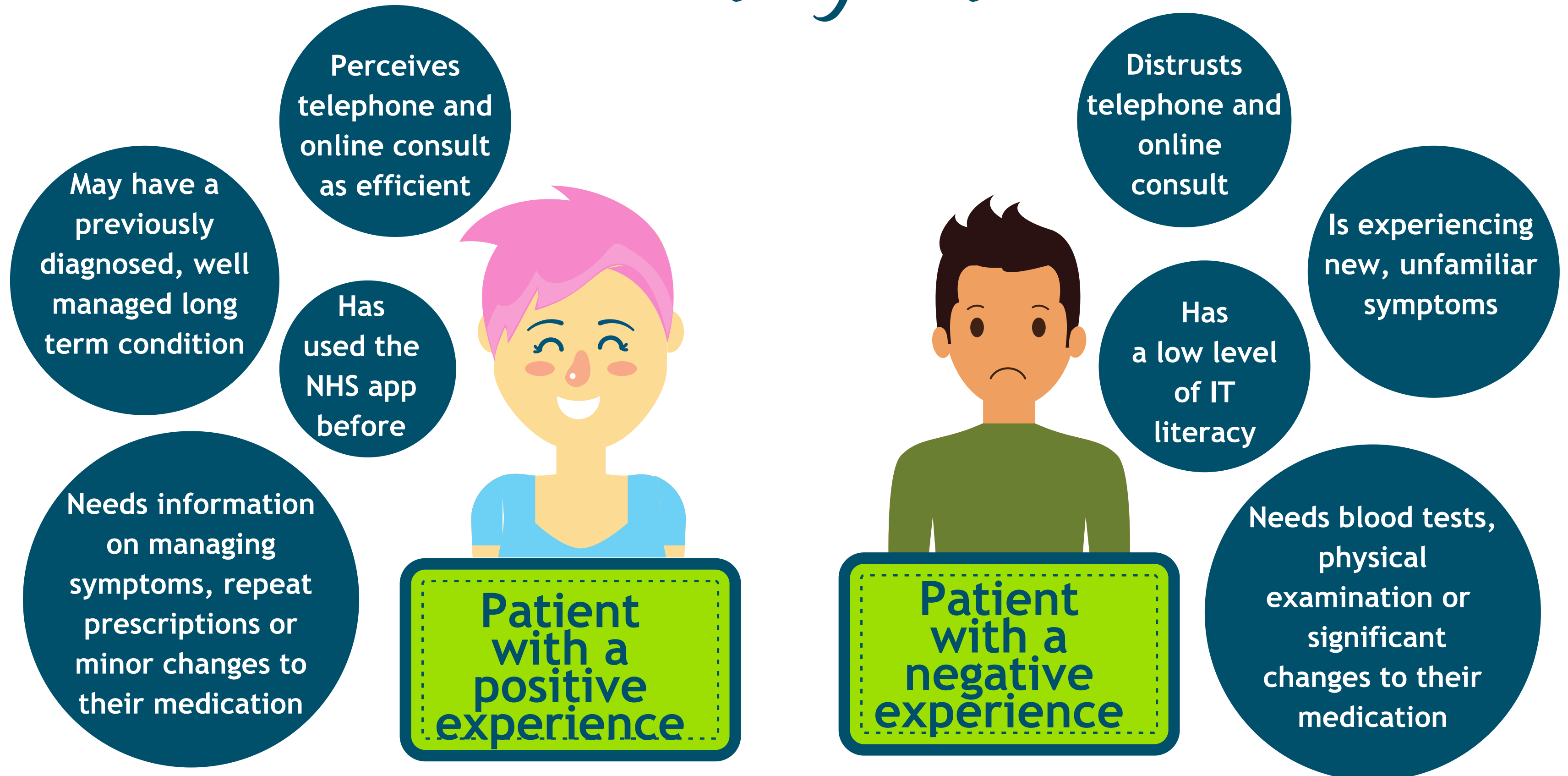
Despite some admin and technical issues, receptionists deal well with online repeat prescription orders.



Some patients feel reluctant to attempt accessing GP services, which they perceive as overstretched.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

GP surgeries



Using NHS services during the pandemic

GP surgeries- what patients are saying



Telephone consultations

Routine appointments and urgent appointments of less complexity can often be done by telephone, working out as well as in person.

A phone appointment was suitable. It was a quick review of my year for my prescription. I also had blood tests done at the time and it was quick and easy.

The Doctor rang me back quite quickly and gave me advice about what to do, as I thought I might have Covid-19.

My telephone consultation with GP was good; I was not responding to painkillers properly so I got prescribed new ones. GP listened, and I was given extra resources for ordering meds online, but had problems accessing them, so the issue was sorted by telephone; my GP sent the new prescription to the pharmacy, and a family member picked them up for me

Telephone consultations can also work as triage to identify patients that absolutely have to be seen in person.

Speedy, excellent phone contact with St Stephen's Health Centre receptionist and RLH Gynae Cancer consultant's nurse, ensuring speedy first appointment cleared me of cancer symptom.

It was time for my B12 injection which I get every 3 months. I called the GP to see if I could book an appointment as I start to feel very tired and exhausted without the injection. I had a telephone appointment with a doctor and, after I explained the situation to the GP, they gave me an in-person appointment with a nurse at my GP for the B12 injection. It was an easy process to book the appointment as they were understanding of my situation.



Online consultations and services

Patients who used e-consult or other forms of online consultations found it easy and efficient.

I used an e-consult form. Very efficient - completed the e-consult form and had a call back within 2 hours. Had to provide a sample to the practice and had initial results within another 2 hours. Would be happy with this service in normal life as well!

I had a very good experience with an online consultation with my GP (Docklands); I sent them an email at 5 pm and they got back to me by email at 9 am the next day.

I filled in an e-consult form and got a telephone consultation. Received phone call and information from my GP and nurse.

Online automated systems are prone to technical and admin errors; reception and medical staff are working to mitigate this.

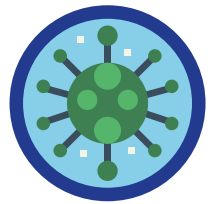
Used the e-consult feature through my GP's website. Found it hard to find the right e consult and had to phone the surgery in the end. Repeat prescription- did online no problems.

GP automated service is awful. But sent them an email and managed to get appointment over the phone within a few hours. Best I have ever received a response and appointment.

I think more information about how to contact my GP would've been useful. I didn't realise they could write prescriptions for me without seeing me in person. All I did was fill out a form online and got my prescription the same day. It was very useful.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

GP surgeries- what patients are saying



Possible COVID-19 diagnoses

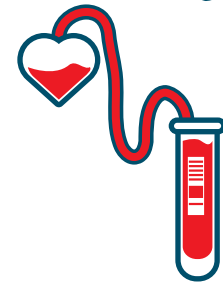
GPs try to provide advice and reassurance; however, because of the lack of available testing and scientific knowledge on the virus, their scope is limited.

I found out that my sister has had coronavirus symptoms. My baby then got sick with a temperature and cough, I called our GP as I was hoping he might get tested but the GP just said to look after him at home and they weren't testing anymore.

I experienced loss of smell and taste with possible COVID19 symptoms- my GP reassured me that because of my lupus I will take longer to recover, but it will eventually be fine.

The GP was very understanding but there is not much known about pregnancy and Covid-19; the same was with a midwife.

I had moderate symptoms- tightness in the chest and panic attacks with breathlessness. Since recovering from most symptoms, I cannot sleep and still have tightness in the chest. My GP is making assumptions on it being Covid-19 again. I feel anxious because I don't know if I am still infected or re infected.



Diagnosis and testing

Running examination and tests to diagnose illness can pose challenges.

After self-isolating with possible COVID-19 symptoms, I started getting gastro pain. GP said I should take paracetamol and see if it got worse. As it did, phoned the GP again and she said I should try and bring in a urine sample. Took quite some time to convince a neighbour to take in a urine sample as he had Covid 19.

I can't see my GP on face to face consultation to be able to check on me properly.

I had an appointment with the GP and she was asking me weird stuff like whether I have a blood pressure machine at home to take my own BP and send her the results. I get that everyone's doing social distancing but I don't understand why until yesterday she was saying it's okay for me to come into the GP Practice to only end up doing a telephone consultation that lasted seconds.



Communication about changes

Some GPs have been proactive in sharing information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

I was able to find information about how to keep myself safe during the pandemic through my own GP.

In other cases, patients felt they were poorly informed on how the surgery now operates.

I don't know if I will be getting a phone call for the appointment. It's like being left in limbo.

I tried to order a repeat prescription online. Getting a repeat prescription was very challenging and my doctor actually rejected my initial request with no reason given creating an heightened state of anxiety

Can't seem to find information on my GP practice's website about how to order a repeat prescription.

Some avoided seeing a GP even if needed, to avoid over-burdening practices.

I tried calling them once- they said they were out of telephone consultations for the day and they could only help people with respiratory or COVID-19 related issues. They told me to ring back the next morning; but I didn't ; and haven't bothered trying since. They are overburdened, I don't want to impose on them .

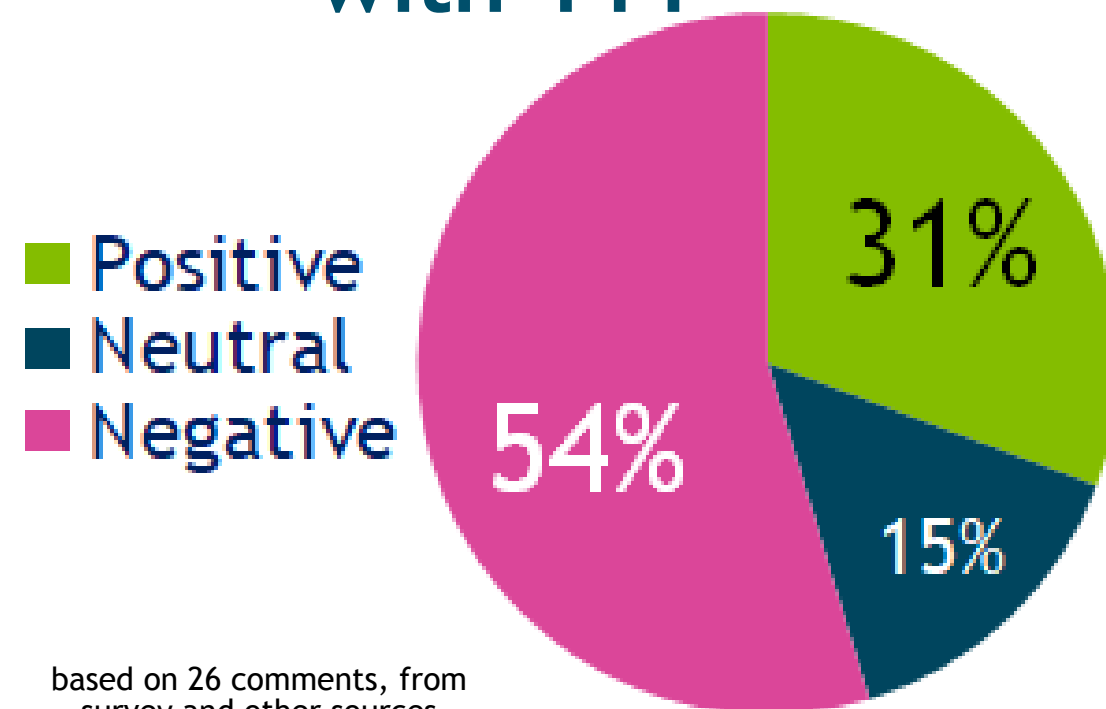
Using NHS services during the pandemic

NHS 111 line and website



based on 354 survey respondents

Patients' experience with 111



based on 26 comments, from
survey and other sources

Getting through on the phone
can take a long time, but the
online app is useful.

111 dispatchers are reported
to be polite and helpful, but
the level of information they
offer varies, with many
patients still feeling left in
the dark.

I rang 111 and they were really good and supportive. I think it is unlikely I had covid19 unless it was very mild but I was told exactly what to look out for because I was worried. It was good to have clear advice and that reassured me.

I found it very difficult to access 111 on the phone, I could not speak to anyone because it was a very long wait. I went to 111 online and completed a short form, where I identified that I had symptoms of coronavirus; but could not get tested.

It's not enough referring people to the 111 website and then getting disconnected. If you are lucky then you get through after waiting hours and then have to further wait hours to speak to a clinician.

All information I have found has been via online sites, I made one call to NHS 111 for advice and was shocked at the response I got, simply just information read from a sheet from a kid who has just finished school. Completely shocking.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Other primary care services



Routine dentistry and optician appointments are subject to cancellations. Some patients are concerned that delays in receiving care may put them at risk of acute or serious issues.

A serious filling advised by the Royal London Hospital Dental Clinic has been postponed indefinitely - not causing pain yet, but...

I don't know when I can see my dentist again. It may make my dental health bad.

I am diabetic and my eye screening appointment was cancelled.

I need eye tests and a colonoscopy but am delaying these until after lockdown.

There are also limitations to the extent to which acute dental issues can be treated.

My husband has a bad toothache, his dentist has given him antibiotics in hope will fix it, but can't see him.

I have a broken tooth, with pain, but I am still not getting treated.

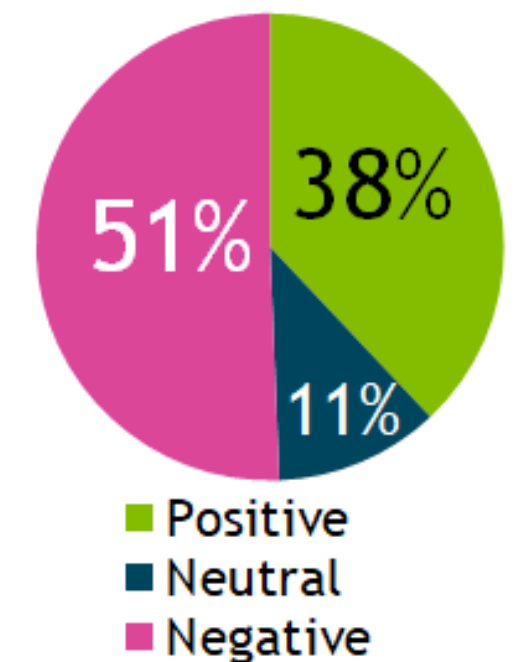
People's experience with pharmacies has been mixed. Patients found pharmacy staff helpful and supportive, but communication issues were reported.

My husband had a ventilator that needed to be picked up, and we were self-isolated so we sent someone to pick it up, only to find the pharmacy wouldn't give it to that person- because the pharmacist was away. We had to call them several times until the issue was sorted out.

My son has a heart defect, daughter has asthma, we stay home. My son's medication is delivered to our home by the pharmacy, so far no issues.

I had to seek medical advice from the chemist. He was competent and helpful

Opinion of pharmacies



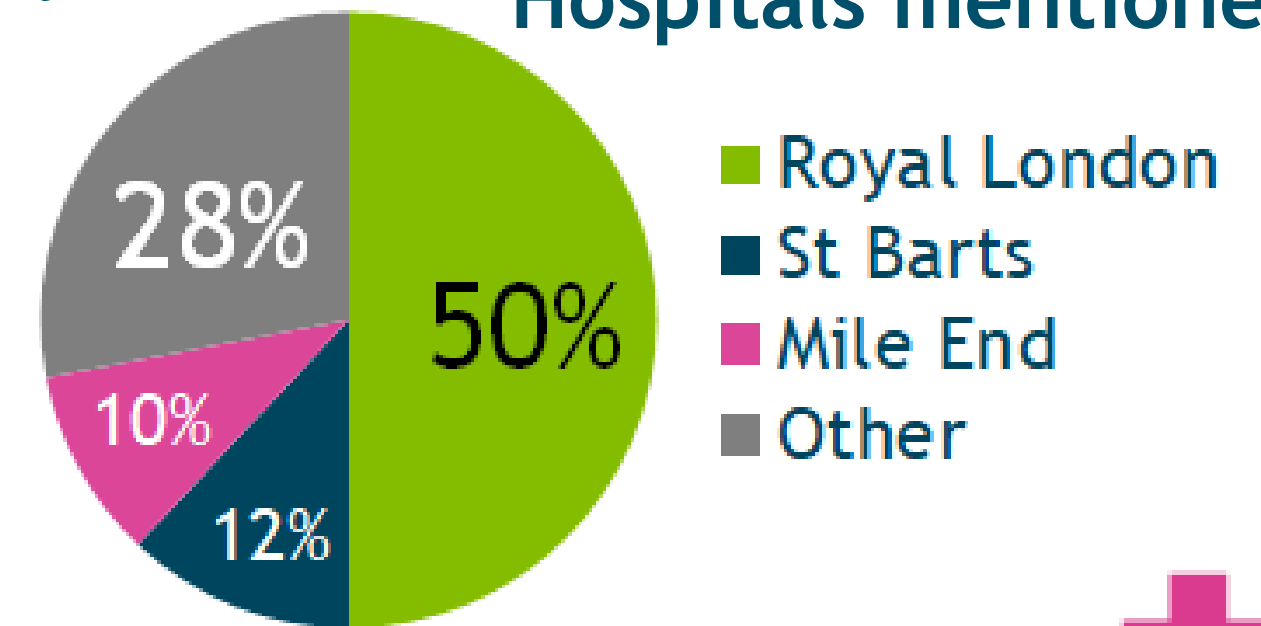
based on 32 comments, from survey and other sources

Using NHS services during the pandemic

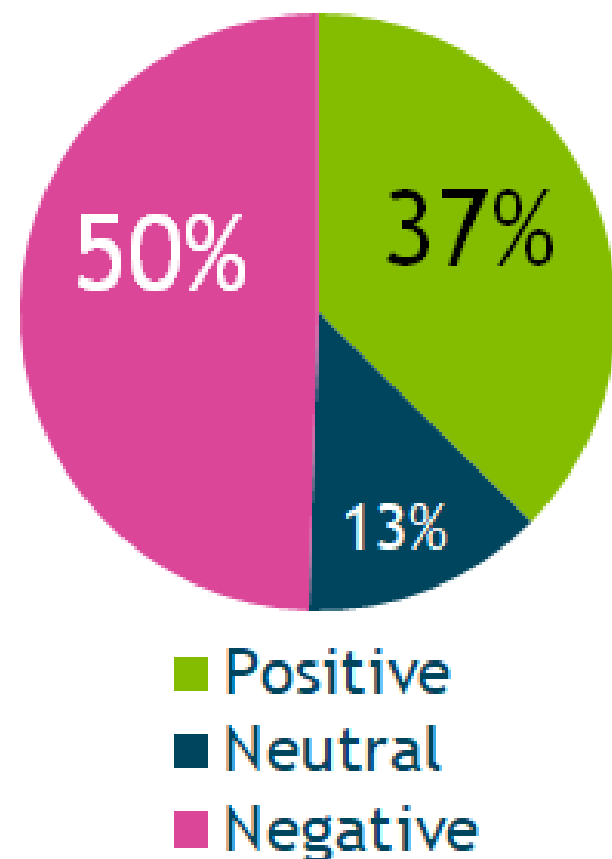
Hospital services

Hospital inpatients feel generally well looked after; while the experience of those using urgent care is mixed. Routine outpatient treatment is disrupted; but telephone and online consultations are helpful.

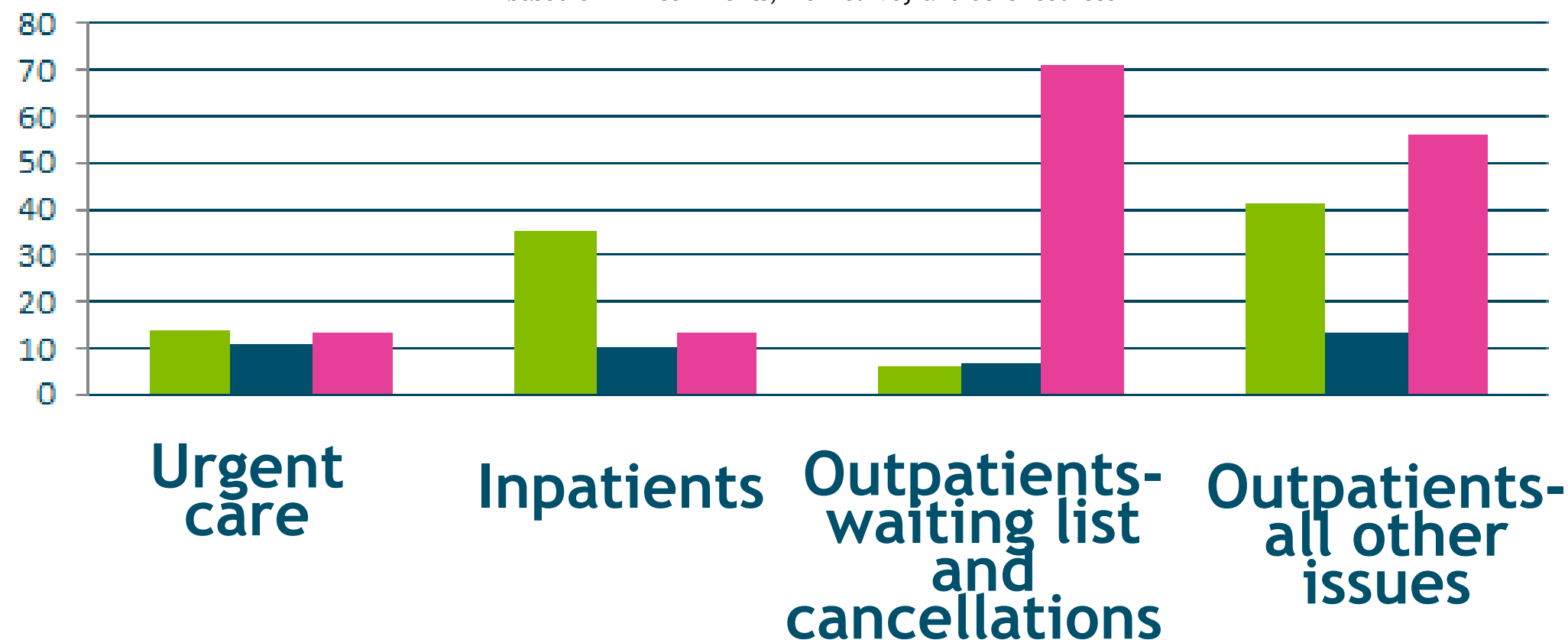
Hospitals mentioned



Opinion of hospitals



based on 114 comments, from survey and other sources



Using NHS services during the pandemic

Hospital services- urgent care



At the beginning of lockdown, there was some uncertainty around whether hospital A&E's are still operational and the extent to which they are under pressure. People also felt somewhat reluctant to call 999 if needed, knowing services are likely to be overstretched.

“My neighbour is on day 13 of Covid 19 and I'm worried about her breathing. She is reluctant to call her doctor again. We tried calling the ambulance on Sunday and they said if she can talk she's OK. I've just spoken to her and she said she doesn't feel quite as bad as she did. She is reluctant to call 999.”

I'm glad to hear from Barts Health that the A&E's are still open, recently it's been hard getting appointments or even being seen by a GP.

[I'm an ER nurse and can confirm] A&E is still open and have worked very hard at having separate areas for infection control. No one wants anyone suffering unnecessarily [so if you experience shortness of breath please call 999].

The ambulance service can take over an hour to reach patients with Covid-19 symptoms.

“[My wife had Covid-19 and her cough kept getting worse. On Thursday, as her cough was not getting better, we called 999. It took about 15 minutes until we were transferred to the paramedics, and then the ambulance arrived in about an hour- an hour and a half. They did the finger test for oxygen on her and it was at 79- so they told her “You need to go to the hospital” and she has been in the Royal London since.]”

In some cases, ambulance crews help people in their own home, with no hospital admission.

“[It was quite a bad night, I couldn't sleep due to the coughing and breathlessness. We called the ambulance at 3am in the morning. They took my oxygen and blood. My oxygen was normal but I had a high blood sugar level (24), my diabetes meds were arriving the next day. I also had a temperature. The paramedics decided to leave me at home because there was nothing they could do for the cough.]”

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Hospital services- inpatients



Patients hospitalised with Covid-19 report that their care has been good. Their families praise hospital staff for allowing them to maintain contact remotely, deliver essentials to their loved-ones and stay involved in their care.

My mum was in hospital for nearly 4-and-a half weeks. She was really happy with the doctors and nurses! Communication was a slight barrier, but she somehow overcame it. The nurses allowed us to communicate with her via Facetime which really helped us and her as well. They were really kind to allow us to cook and deliver food to her whilst she was in ICU. This was a special requirement because of having a really bad mouth sore and ulcer. This was super helpful as it helped her carry on eating a very tiny amount which she had actually stopped doing. This gave her the energy and boost she really needed.

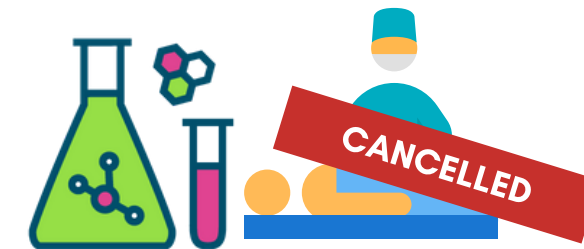
Having Covid-19 & pneumonia was frightening for me but the care I received was heartwarming. I also had a personal issue & a Nurse supported me with her own personal supplies, which was so generous & thoughtful.

My wife is in the ICU with Covid-19 and pneumonia. This morning she is better, we had a video call. She couldn't hear me because of the oxygen tank over her head, but I could hear her. She was smiling, she looked much better and her appetite is coming back. She said the care she receives in hospital is very good, she couldn't fault it in any way.



There were reports that patients with issues other than Covid-19 were discharged from hospital earlier than they should have been, to make room for Covid-19 patients.

I'm just upset that everyone is praising the NHS at a time I felt they let my mother of 72 down in her last days. Mum passed away, not COVID but she was released from hospital early to free up beds, without an adequate care package in place; and she passed away within 48 hours.



Planned admissions for investigations or elective procedures are cancelled, leaving patients uncertain.

Ironically, the hospital admission I was going to have was going to assess whether I had a condition that would make me high risk. This [cancellation because of Covid-19] is now leaving me in an uncomfortable place with regards to the virus because I don't know what level of risk I'm really at and can't proceed.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Hospital services- outpatients

14%

spoke on the phone to a consultant or another professional

7%

spoke online to a consultant or another professional

12%

experienced disruptions to their long-term hospital-based treatment



Patients who had appointments with medical professionals over the phone or online were happy with their experience.

“ I suffer from fibromyalgia and myalgic encephalomyelitis. Online conversation with hospital consultant was most helpful as part of an online appointment instead of face to face appointment. He was able to give advice tailored to my medical conditions, which largely supported government advice, but also covered issues such as whether it was safe for me to take or continue certain drugs.

Speedy, excellent phone contact with St Stephen's Health Centre receptionist and RLH Gynae Cancer consultant's nurse [also by telephone], ensuring speedy first appointment cleared me of cancer symptom

Sadly many hospital appointments cancelled. Rest replaced with virtual appointments which I hope continues long term. There is no need to travel to go somewhere when you can do a task from home



There are limits to how much can be achieved via online or telephone consultation.

“ I am sight impaired; I suffer from diabetes and high blood pressure. I had been referred to Barts nurse specialist; the nurse rang on the phone 40 mins, said they couldn't do anything at present- that I should just continue with my medication and ring 999 if in crisis.



Essential appointments continue as scheduled; while other patients wait to start or resume treatment after the end of lockdown.

“ My son had a broken arm and he needed to have his cast removed a few weeks ago- he could still do it, despite lockdown being instituted.

“ After extensive testing, the specialist at Guy's Hospital offered me a treatment plan for my arthritis. I was going to have hand physio, foot treatment, but because I have chronic heart and lung issues, for the time being I was advised not to go in hospitals at all- have to be very careful. Will start having treatment after the pandemic subsides. Guy's Hospital wants to keep all patients safe.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Hospital services- outpatients



Hospitals did not communicate clearly about the COVID-19 pandemic and their changes to service provision in response to it.

I received a text message at 5.30pm from gov UK telling me I need to shield for 12 weeks. I had to wait until the next morning to speak to my GP who told me it was most likely a false alarm because they saw my cancer diagnosis from 18 years ago, but I should double-check with my late effects clinic who are tracking my heart and lung symptoms. I can't get a response out of them so I still don't know what I should be doing.

I suffer from lupus. I emailed my rheumatologist (RLH) about the antibody test for COVID19- he didn't answer



For some, Covid-19 related cancellations come after they had already waited for a long time for their procedures.

My son now has to wait for bone marrow transplant due to covid19. My parents too- all their treatments have been rescheduled after months of waiting for appointment.

I am not sure I'll ever be able to have a child. After one miscarriage and one failed IVF, my next was due in May and is cancelled. I turn 44 in June.



Cancellations to planned procedures and consultations leave patients feeling in limbo and worried about their health.

Due to have a heart scan due to suspected heart condition, now cancelled. Leaves me uncertain but also unsure if I am vulnerable.

I was due for blood tests. I have no idea whether to ask for them or not, under the circumstances.

Gyno appointment cancelled and blood tests not followed up. This was not a routine checkup.

Daughter had kneed operation cancelled and is afraid of dislocating or straining it further. Worry if someone gets seriously ill, I won't be able to do anything.

I have lupus and fibromyalgia. Pain management appointment got cancelled, I'm still in pain.

I suffer from a chronic lung condition. For my Lung treatment I was all ways visited by specialist and they gave me thoroughly check up. For this situation all appointment has been canceled. I'm little worried and concerned about my health.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Maternity and neonatal services



There were reported disruptions to antenatal and postnatal services during lockdown; this results in uncertainty and stress.

6 *My partner can't attend the scans or any appointments, i have experienced a previous loss ,so this is stressful for me.*

I am 10 weeks pregnant, I have endometriosis and haven't heard from midwifery services despite chasing. The Royal London antenatal team simply do not answer the phone.

I have a 6 weeks old baby who has not been seen by a health care professional since he was 5 days old.

I am pregnant. I am worried that I might find it hard to get help if there is an emergency.

Support with midwife and heath visitors have been unclear and also very brief. Quite disappointed with the lack of support. I don't get regular check up calls I have to contact them if I have any questions and wait for a call back.

I am pregnant. I cannot see a doctor for any other pregnancy related issues as my gp surgery has closed due to shortages of doctors

Mum to a newborn of 3 weeks so pregnant during the start of social distancing rules. As I have not registered the birth of my child due to Covid the baby is also not registered at the GP.



As little is currently known about the impact of Covid-19 on pregnancies and neonates, medical professionals struggle to provide reassurance.

6 *The GP was very understanding but there is not much known about pregnancy and Covid-19; the same was with a midwife.*

I'm pregnant and my husband is sickly, we don't know what it is. I called NHS 111, they said all he need to do is stay at home, but I'm mainly worried for my baby. We don't know anything about this virus and the effect it can have on the baby. I just pray to God that this goes soon and it all calms down.



Expecting parents are careful about social distancing and isolating, which can pose difficulties in everyday life.

As I am 39 weeks pregnant, I am looking for face masks, preferably reusable ones. I have ordered some online but haven't been delivered after 2 weeks.

I just gave birth; my mother lives next door but she cannot come meet her grandchild and help me around the house, because of lockdown rules.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Mental health services



16% of survey respondents suffered from a mental health condition.

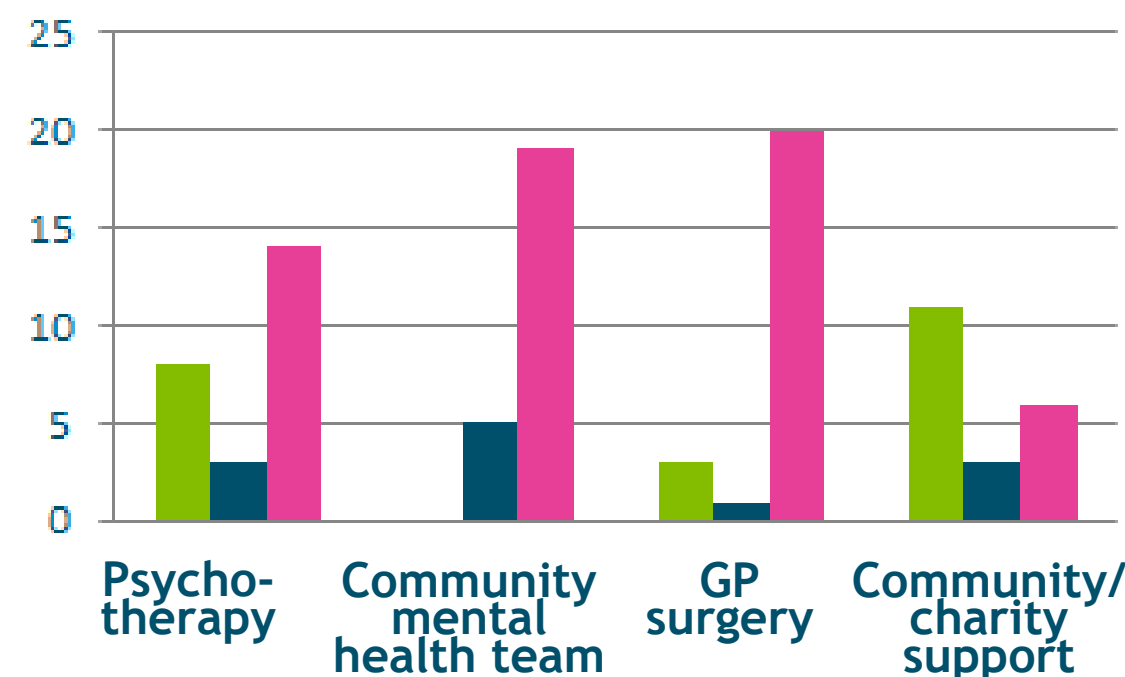


40% of those who used mental health services experienced disruptions or cancellations.

29% of people with a mental health condition said they couldn't access support to begin with.

Experience of mental health service users

■ positive ■ neutral ■ negative



based on 63 comments, from survey and other sources

Communication around continuity of services has been poor; leading some to believe help is unavailable.

“I’ve been waiting for Talking Therapies since October, got to the top of the list last week but missed the call, been calling back and left a message but nothing so far, so I’m assuming I’ve now been kicked off the list for ‘not responding’. I’ve not been informed of any workshops or alternatives except to call the crisis hotline or Samaritans.

I need counselling but I know there's absolutely no chance anyone will get any. I'm used to coping without support but sometimes I'm so tired of coping I want to cry.

Some users with complex needs have felt unsupported by community mental health teams, leaving them more vulnerable.

“I have a mental health diagnosis but no support from CMHT- not even when I left the Mile End Hospital under section. It's ongoing, not just because of the epidemic. I'm waiting for referrals- its been over one year. I had to give up my dog last year because the guy who was meant to support me said he was uneasy about dogs. The senior occupation therapist left; staff leave all the time and those who have to catch up don't exactly know what they are doing. They tried to prescribe medication off-label when I didn't need it. I was supposed to be referred for community support and it didn't happen.

I helped a homeless person who was sleeping in a church backyard under the rain, he even didn't have any proper warm clothes, just a dirty blanket. He remembers that he was discharged last year (July-August) from the Mental Health Unit of Mile End Hospital, he's a paranoid schizophrenic. He doesn't have any geographical sense, he was asking to be taken to Mile End tube station from Bethnal Green. He was staying at the Dellow centre, but the hostel didn't even notice he was missing.

Using NHS services during the pandemic

Mental health services



Some appointments and psychotherapy sessions are done by telephone. Some users are happy with this, others less so.

“Appointments moved online. ELFT are planning virtual appointments long term. I am used to this, because I have been having my weekly private therapy sessions over the phone; it's very helpful to keep going during these times. If appointments with your GP and your psychiatrist could be in-person again, or at least via video call, then I think there'd be less tension in the relationships, and if tension in health care services could be released, that would drastically improve my life.”

In some cases, service provision is delayed until the end of lockdown.

“I was being assessed for therapy before the crisis and that assessment is continuing over the phone, but once it's done unfortunately I can't begin the therapy itself until this is over and we can do it in person. This scares me because I need this therapy ASAP. Usually I have therapy in Bethnal Green for my depression, but am unable to go due to social distancing and self-isolation. However, that does seem relatively unimportant in the grand scheme of things, and I am grateful to be safe.”



Some GPs surgeries appear to be less prepared to deal with patients' mental health needs in the pandemic.

“I experienced panic attacks, GP told me contact me again if it happens. I couldn't possibly go near a hospital because of my chronic conditions and vulnerability to pneumonia.”

I had moderate symptoms which caused me to have Tightness in the chest and panic attacks with breathlessness. Since recovering from most symptoms I cannot sleep and still have tightness in the chest and my GP is making assumptions on it being covid19 again. I am suffering from some anxiety because I don't know if I am still infected or re infected.”

Charities and community organisations play an important role in meeting beneficiaries' mental health needs.

“I appreciated Age UKs newsletters which had advice on coping with the effect the virus was having on our mental and physical health.”

I can access my MIND support group by telephone.

Using social care services during the pandemic



10%

of survey respondents received care at home from family or friends.

5%

were carers for a family member or friend.

Some service users were unable to get the care they needed during the pandemic.

Social Care determined that I was in need of a carer, but then told me that they weren't going to provide me with one, because they didn't have the resources.

Found it hard to get a new care agency and could only get an expensive one. A new pa left the country before starting work to avoid lock down. I have now got budget issues from spending above budget.

My Mum passed away after she was released early from hospital. The care workers failed to show up without being called to administer planned injections both nights prior to her passing away. We waited over 2 hours the first night and over six hours the second night. This meant she was in pain and in comfortable. The district nurses said they were busy with COVID and that the care plan was not set up correctly initially but would be in place the second day. This did not happen and we had to call again.



3%

received care from professionals in their own homes.

1%

lived in sheltered or supported accomodation

Some reported concerns about their safety and their carers' safety.

I tried to speak to the care coordinator in my building about carers coming in and out- and about the fact that I need help since I can't leave my flat- they put the phone down on me! We're really being forgotten here.

I have switched to live in care for safety but I don't think all my staff are social distancing adequately.

My carers are a bit scared, they don't have anything extra for their protection from their agencies. They have aprons and gloves but no masks, no eye protection, nothing extra. To their knowledge no one they care for has the virus, but no one trained them one what to do if any of their clients gets it.

Staying well during the pandemic

Physical activity

50% **44%**

of survey respondents practiced socially distanced outdoors exercise

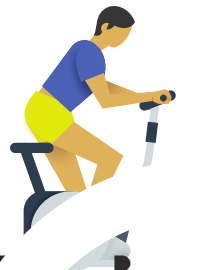
of survey respondents exercised indoors, in their own homes.



Walking was the most popular form of outdoors exercise, followed by **running**.



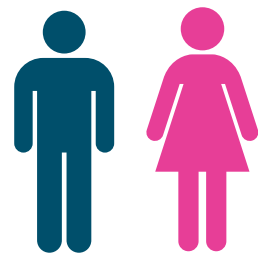
Yoga was the most popular form of indoors exercise.



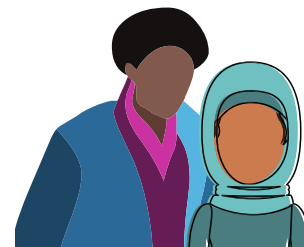
Pilates, weight lifting and using home exercise equipment were also mentioned.



24% of those who exercised indoors used an app or online tutorial.



Men exercised outdoors more, while **women** were more likely to use the internet for indoors exercise routines.



Black and **Bengali** residents were less likely to exercise outdoors than other groups.



Young people (under 24) were less likely to take walks.

The closure of Victoria Park in April was controversial with local residents; as the park has always been seen as an essential resource for physical and mental wellbeing.

“The closure has seriously affected everyone's physical and mental health. It flies in the face of the government's explicit instruction to keep parks open. It is a lazy dereliction of duty on the part of the mayor and local councillors,

The reopening of the park has been welcomed, but concerns over social distancing remain. This is in line with local residents' desire for relaxing lockdown rules, but only with reassurance it is safe to do so.

“Please keep the parks open. If people aren't following the rules, they need to be punished as individuals, otherwise they will just break the rules somewhere else while everyone suffers from a lack of green space.

Staying well during the pandemic

Mental health and wellbeing

The challenges



Younger people were the most likely to feel sad about missing out on travel and going out.

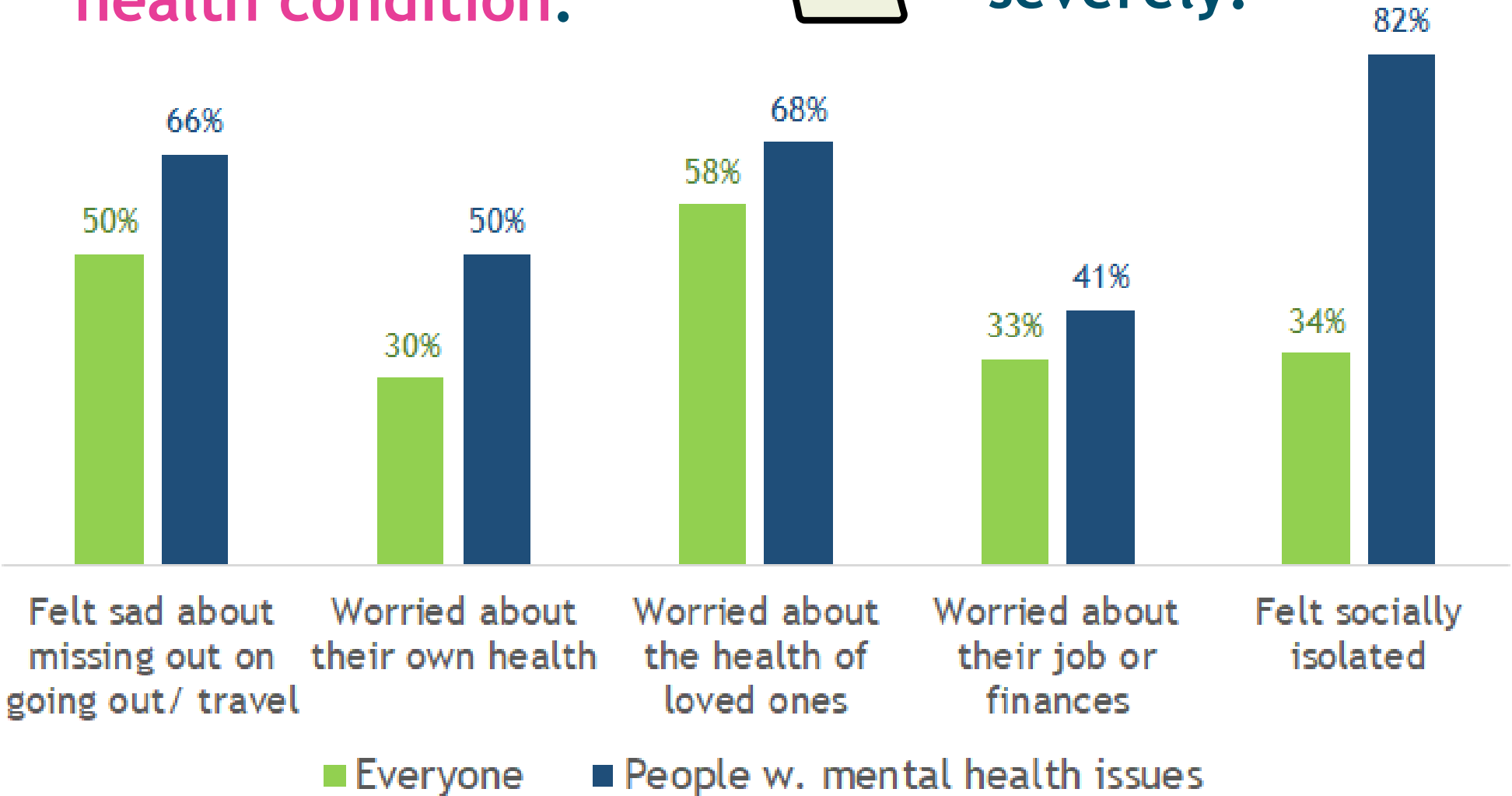


Over half of those with a long-term condition were worried about their own health.

16% of survey respondents suffered from a mental health condition.



The COVID-19 pandemic impacted them significantly more severely.



Staying well during the pandemic

Mental health and wellbeing

The solutions

17%
used a website
or app for their
mental health

13%
engaged in
hobbies and
leisure activities

3%
engaged in
worship or
prayer

3%
engaged in
mindfulness
meditation.

3%
learned a
new skill

3%
maintained
a routine

1%
rested or
relaxed

6 The Headspace app is great, I'm loving it.

I was experiencing a low mood, so I went to the Mind website to look up my symptoms.

My clinical depression has been made worse because I am 71 years old with several conditions; but I appreciated Age UK's newsletters which had advice on coping with the effect the virus was having on our mental and physical health.

I gave Moodpath a try- not really helpful, doesn't work for me- doesn't help when you're very stressed, just when you're bored.

I'm doing mindfulness and online yoga classes, walking the dogs is very therapeutic.

We read the Quran and pray congregational prayers together as a family.

Limiting the number of times I check the news daily. Watching selective TV programs, including comedy. Meditating and listening to online Dharma talks. Trying to focus on the concerns and fears of others, not just my own. Trying to be grateful for the moment and not look too far ahead.

I'm reading and doing some DIY.

Staying well during the pandemic

Maintaining social contact

46%

of survey respondents socialised remotely with friends and family.



Women kept in touch with loved-ones remotely more than men did.

34%

of survey respondents have been feeling socially isolated.

71%

of those who did used the internet for this purpose.



People of Asian and non-British White backgrounds were the most likely to keep in touch with loved-ones remotely.

26%

of those who did used telephone calls for this purpose.



Over half of those over 65 who kept in touch with loved-ones did so by phone; those under 24 predominantly used the internet.

Lives alone or with housemates

Is not working

Has a mental health condition

Has higher risk of COVID-19 due to LTC

Is a young adult

Is female

Person most likely to feel socially isolated

Is Bengali



Staying well during the pandemic

Relationships within households

Living with...

Partner 53%

Children 29%

Other family 12%

House-mates 9%

Living alone 19%



14%

of respondents sharing a house with other people said their relationships were tense or unpleasant.



- Parents living with their children (whether single or in a couple) and people living with housemates experienced this more than childless couples.
- Those in a precarious financial situation experienced it more than their better-off peers.



My partner can no longer work and I worry about how we will make the already extortionate rent on one one paycheck and an ineffective, slow benefits system. I can't take my daily walk since my nearest park closed, so we're stuck in a 25sqm flat with two going crazy, arguing, and no way to escape.

I just gave birth to my third child, and my mum who lives next door cant come visit or help out. My husband is trying to work from home. It can get a bit overwhelming with all of us in the house 24/7, we can get on each other's nerves.



Staying well during the pandemic

Who is left behind?

8%

of survey respondents felt that there was very little they could do to maintain a good level of health and well-being during the pandemic.



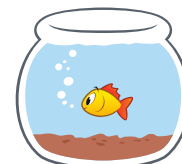
Compared with other respondents they were:



More likely to be disabled or in poor health



More likely to have a mental health condition



More likely to feel socially isolated



Less likely to be working or financially secure



More likely to be digitally excluded

I have a bad leg so I can't do much; when I used to go on trip with my friends before lockdown that would be my exercise. But since lockdown I can't walk to their house or anything so it's difficult. I can feel my leg begin to get sore, so I try at home but I don't have that much space and I'm not as young as I use to be.

Can't do much. Still need suitable wheelchair so I'm not bed-bound. I'm feeling increasingly ill so I can't socialise at all.

I live in an overcrowded home, it's really taking an effect on my mental health not having much privacy. I can't do much because the fear has caused my mother to make things difficult if anyone tries to leave the house.

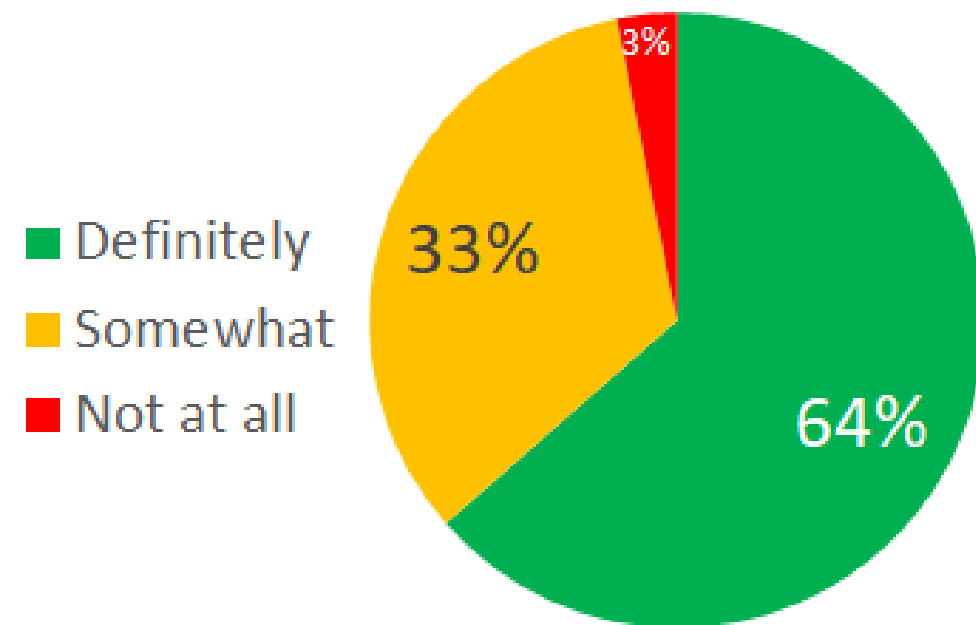
I feel very stressed and bored; having small children doesn't help.

I tried doing an exercise tutorial on Youtube, but couldn't last for five minutes with the kids.

I feel like I gave up a long time ago. I keep dozing off- I can't go out.

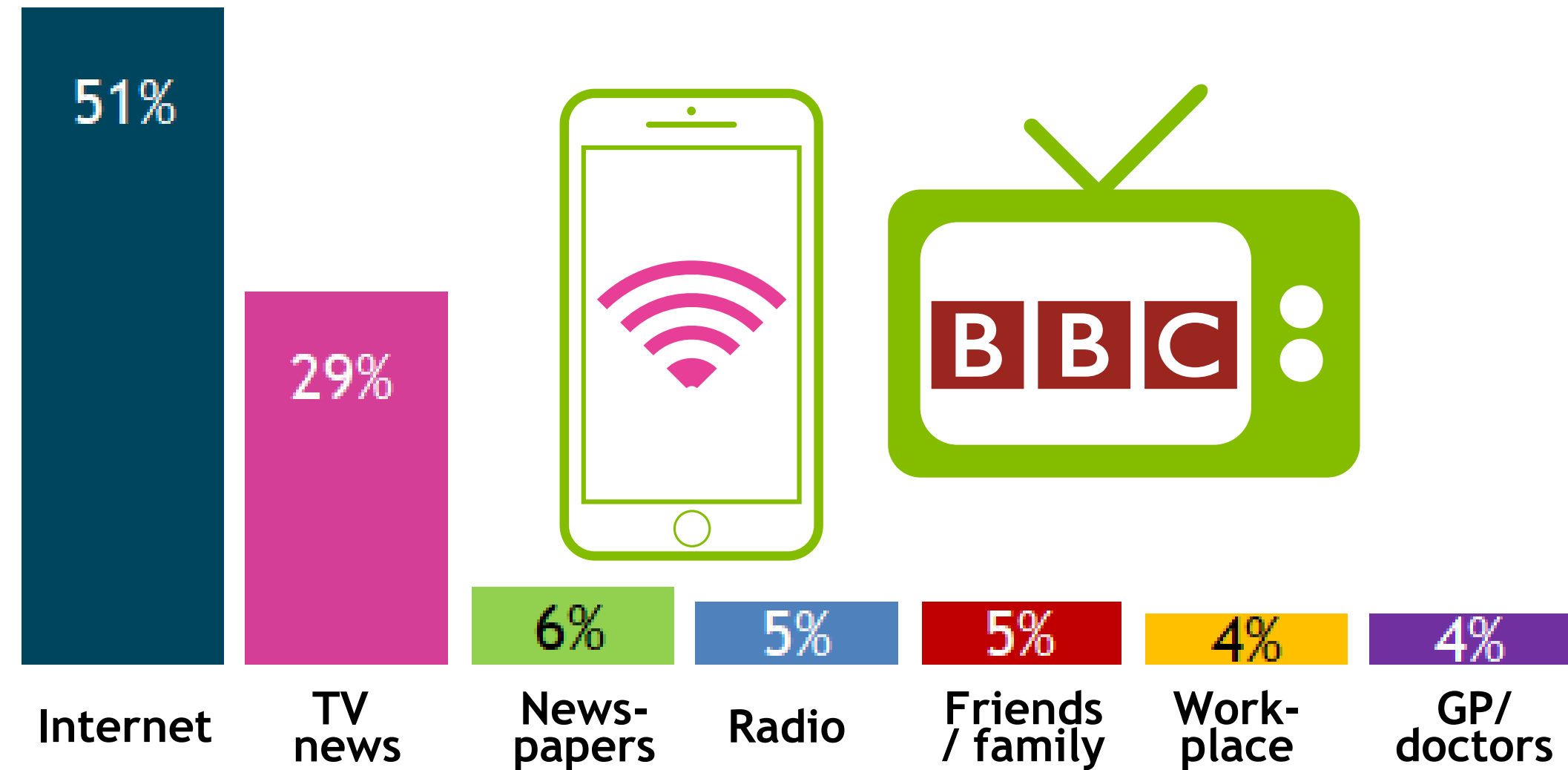
Staying informed during the pandemic

Have you found it easy to find clear and understandable information about what to do to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19 pandemic?



BBC news
on TV and online were
named as a source of
reliable information by
many respondents.

The internet was the most used information source

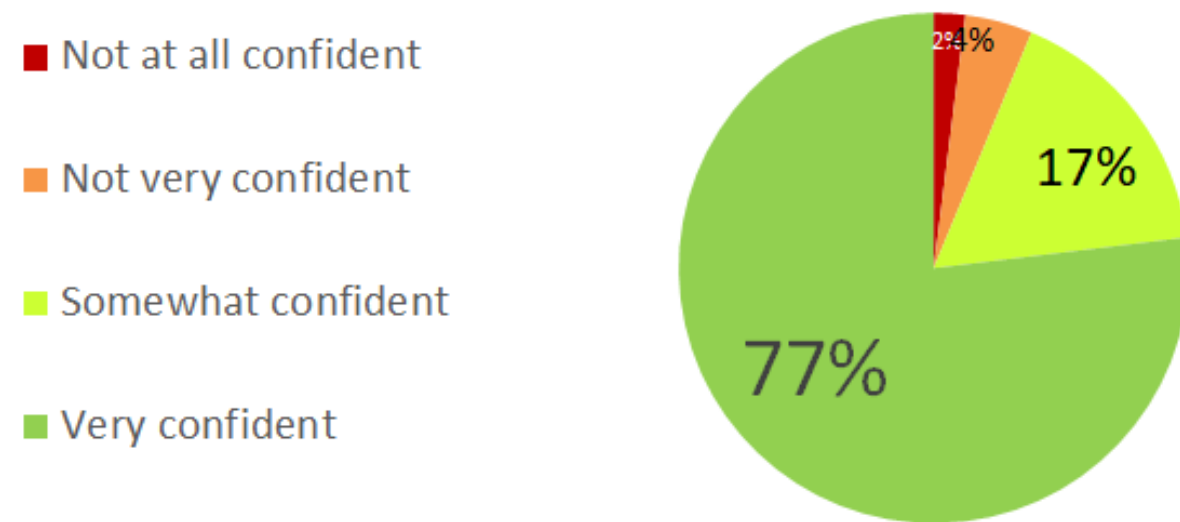


Out of those who
used the internet
to stay informed...

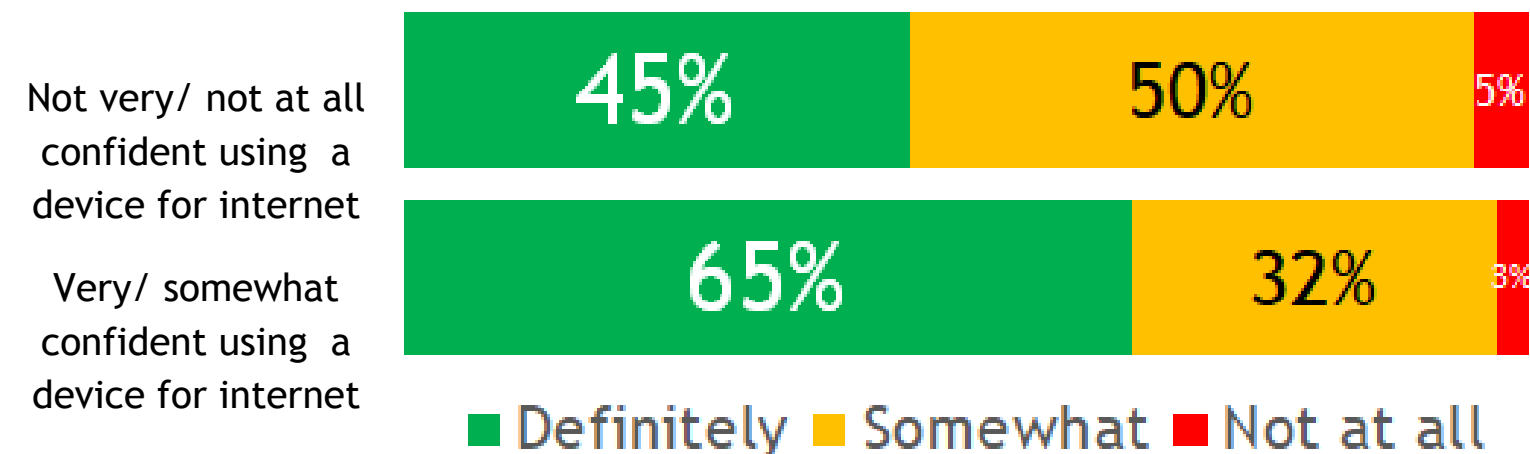


Staying informed during the pandemic

Most survey respondents felt confident accessing the internet on computers or smartphones.



Those who did not find it harder to stay informed about keeping themselves and others safe than those who did



People with lower levels of IT literacy relied on TV news and word of mouth to keep themselves informed.

While most respondents felt that a sufficient amount of information was available, some reported having difficulties understanding best practices because the information was **contradictory, unclear or not practical enough.**

“There is some confusion about how long you should self-isolate with symptoms- is it 7 days or 14 days.? I'm disappointed at the lack of clarity.

I think the advice on what people should do about work if they can't work from home has been unclear.

You hear masks are good then you hear they're not. It's the same with all information, it's hard to know what is fact.

Sources contradict each other (WHO vs NHS), so you are left guessing who is right.

When my sister got sick it was when they were just stopping testing people so the advice was not clear about what you should do if you had been in contact with someone who you suspected but did not know had the virus.

A small number of respondents felt that an excessive amount of pandemic-related information had negative effects on their mental wellbeing.

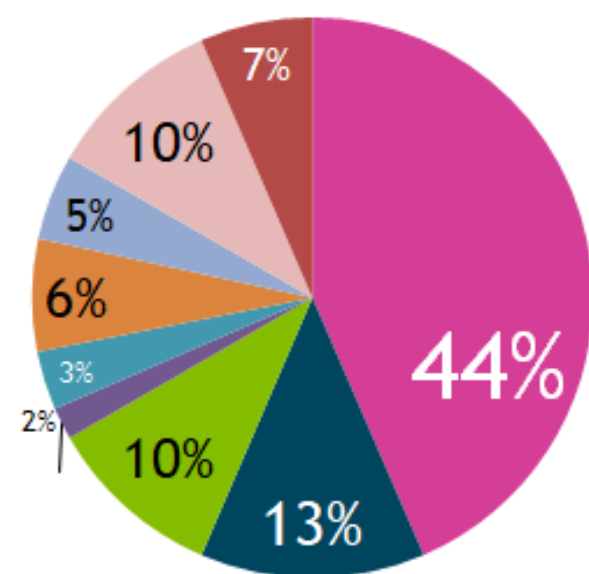
“I try to avoid reading other news articles speculating about the pandemic as these make me anxious and often have conflicting advice.

I watch TV, I'm well informed but it makes me worried and depressed

Work and finances during the pandemic

Working life

Respondents' employment status



- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Self-employed sole trader
- Business owner
- Unemployed and looking
- Unemployed and unable to work
- Home-maker/ stay at home parent
- Retired
- Student

77%

of survey respondents who were in work worked from home.



A few of those who did find it challenging, particularly those with children or caring responsibilities, and those experiencing low moods.

I am still working from home, my working/leisure time has blurred so I am looking at work at all hrs even at weekends. Zoom meetings are exhausting. I've had to take days out already to try to centre myself. It's not been great for my mental/emotional health. I'm a very social person.

Low moods. Lots to do at work but feeling like I can't be bothered. A lot of things seem pointless and I'm wishing away the days.

I feel less productive- I need to work from home while homeschooling my children.

22%

of survey respondents who were in work said their workload increased.



As we are working in emergency conditions with many staff unable to work, we are working at an accelerated pace.

11%

of survey respondents who worked outside of their homes felt unsafe at work or travelling to work.



I am a teacher. School is open in a voluntary basis for staff. The kids were impossible to keep properly socially distanced. Because I have easily get chest infections I have taken myself off the rota after seeing how hard it was to keep pupils away from one another and distanced from me

Work and finances during the pandemic

Impact on work



Closures and job losses

2% of those economically active were dismissed from their jobs.

20% said their workplace closed temporarily. **37%** of them receive no pay during this time.

8% said their hours and pay were cut.

74% of self-employed people and business owners lost income or clients.

I expect my job, which is with a start-up and I expected to be unstable anyway, will not exist once the furlough scheme ends.

As a permanent supply teacher there is no work available right now but i am still receiving some of my wages from the government scheme

Feeling like I play an important part in keeping the company afloat is motivating but also stressful. I work at a fast pace for an average of 50 hours a week. I've had a pay cut too but my rent is still the same (usual high London price) so I feel a bit annoyed at that.



Time off for isolation.

6% of those in work missed work to shield or self-isolate.

15% of them received no sick pay.

I am about to finish work having been laid off from a contract. I was ill and had to self isolate for the last two weeks - I've been very lonely as I live on my own. Now I'm worried about whether I am going to be paid my final wages as it is late arriving. I feel very stressed and anxious.

Unemployed people and freelancers struggle with finding work

If I could start my freelance work then at least I could contribute towards my mortgage which my children currently covering.

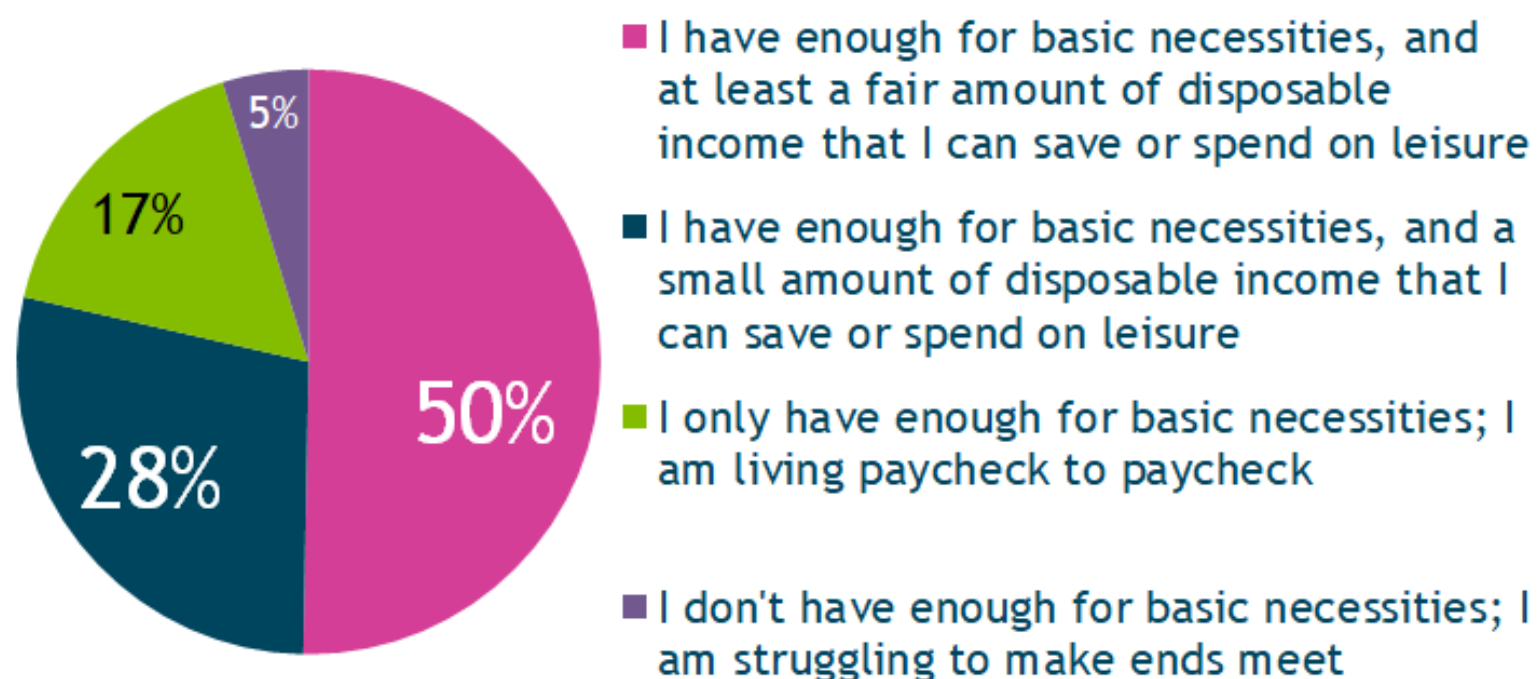
As an artist I rely on showing work and selling it. There have been no shows and no-one buys art in a recession.



Work and finances during the pandemic

Money matters

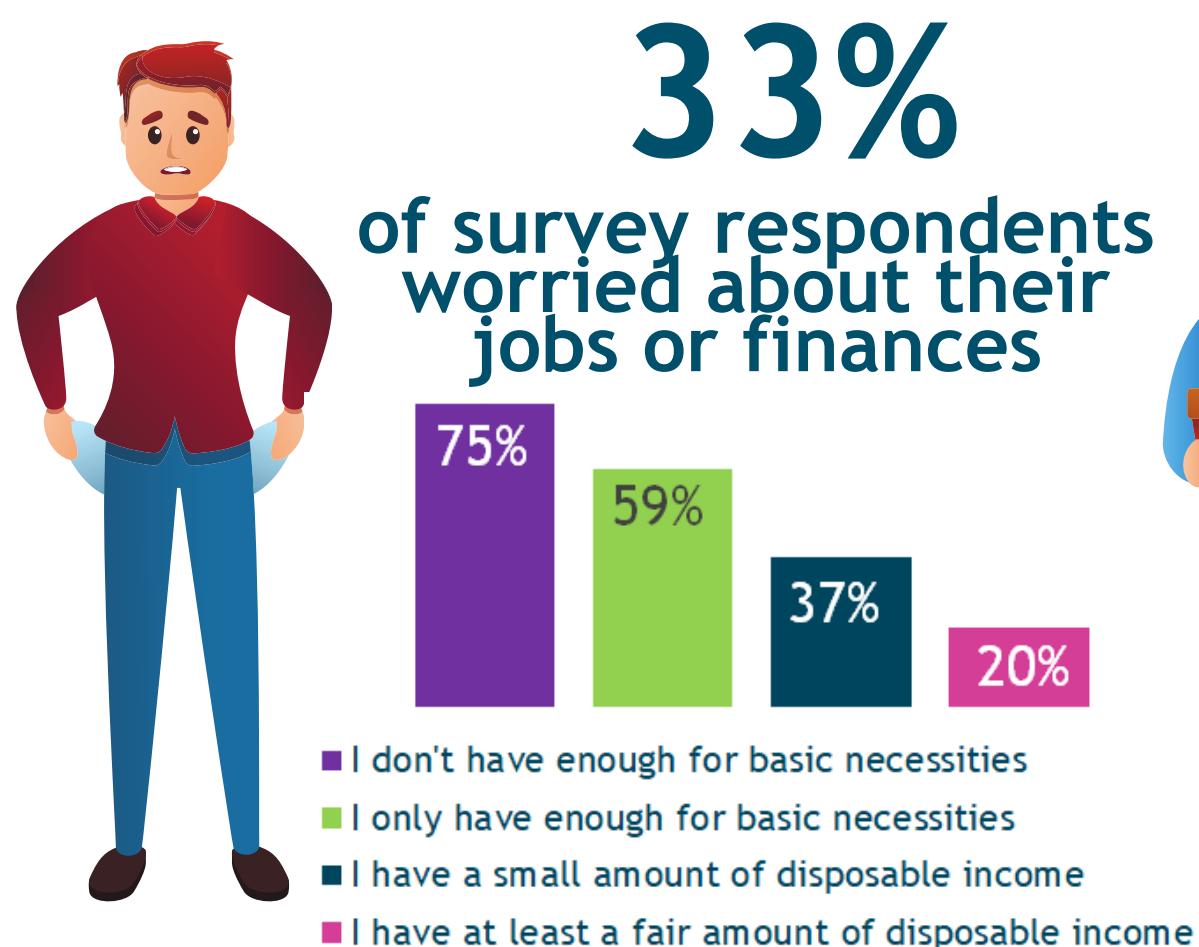
Respondents' financial situation



Single parents, jobseekers and those unable to work were particularly vulnerable.

I'm mobility impaired, but I'm also an asylum seeker, so I'm not on the government's list of vulnerable people, so I don't get the access that all the other "vulnerable people" get [leaving me dependent on friends for help]

I was working until I got furloughed. I need better financial support- the 80% is not enough for me as single mum; I'm worried about rent, council tax. A council tax rebate would be very helpful.



My husband, the family's only breadwinner, has been off work for 2 weeks. He got his paycheck now, but we don't know what will happen next month or whether his employer will apply to the Government scheme.

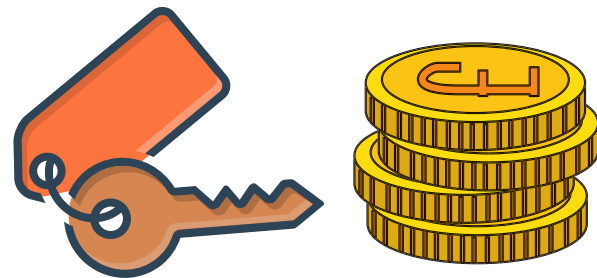
I'm looking for jobs; I was on a shortlist but the job was withdrawn in the pandemic. It's hard to find jobs and in the meantime I struggle to make ends meet.

Jobseekers, freelancers and home-makers depending on a family member's income were the most worried about it

Pensioners were the least worried.

Work and finances during the pandemic

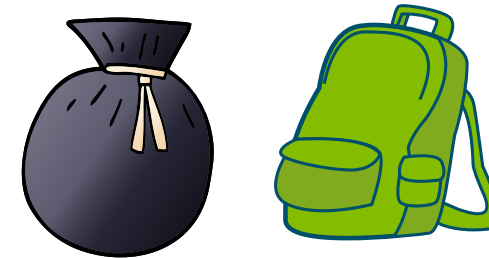
Housing and homelessness



Tower Hamlets is a high cost of living area, in large part due to high housing costs. Local people who became worse-off because of the pandemic worried about affording housing.

“My partner became unable to work because of his illness. I'm concerned about paying an already extortionate rent when my partner can no longer work -combined with piecemeal and ineffective slow benefits system

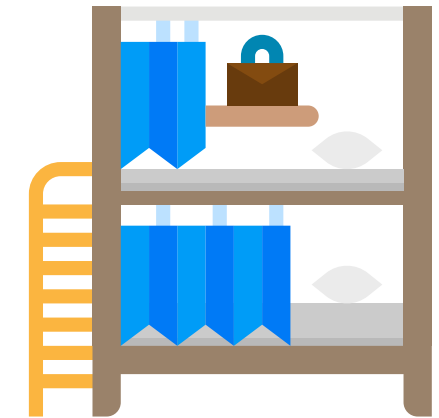
Renters are insufficiently supported in this pandemic, particularly in London where rents are unusually high. If my income - the only one in my family - were to be interrupted, my family would be thrown deep into debt within a short time, regardless of the wage guarantee made by the government, because the rent burden is very high in comparison. ”



The economic impact of the pandemic on those already in a precarious economic situation increases the risk of homelessness. In turn, homeless people are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and other poor health outcomes.

“We have someone sleeping on our communal stairs in our block. I spoke to him and hes homeless with nowhere to go. He has been sleeping in other blocks too. He's been moved on from our building now but I will think about calling someone tomorrow as I know there is help with esp. with Covid-19 amongst us.

I'm part of a student group. We're trying to raise help for our fellow student. She is self isolating. She doesn't have money for food. There is a big bunch of students being forced into homelessness by their accommodation providers during lock down. ”



Homeless shelters are dealing with high demand in difficult circumstances.

“St Mungo's is overwhelmed at present so if any of you can volunteer your time to them I and sure they would not refuse any acts of kindness.

Homeless people are feeling the same fears as the rest of us. Many are adhering to social distancing measures and wearing face masks. A lot have expressed their fear for family members they can't see which has made them more reflective about life. On top of all this, due to services closing or having limited availability, many are unable to see a friendly face and are feeling more isolated than ever. One client said it was very lonely outside as people had stopped smiling. ”

Community involvement during the pandemic



26%
of survey respondents
joined an online local
Covid-19 support group.



People aged **25 to 49** were the most likely to join these groups.

Non-British White people and those of **mixed ethnicity** were the most likely to join; **Bangladeshi and other Asian** people were less likely to do so.



13%
asked a friend,
family member or
acquaintance for
help with shopping
or errands.

4%
asked someone
from a support
group for help
with shopping
or errands.

Older people and **Black people** were more likely to ask friends or family to help with errands; **parents** of children under 18 and **people aged under 50 with a long-term condition** were more likely to resort to the online support groups for help.

21%
helped a friend,
family member or
acquaintance with
shopping or
errands.

10%
helped someone
from a support
group with
shopping or
errands.

Bangladeshi young people aged 18 to 24 were the most likely to help friends or family members with errands; **White British people aged 25 to 49** were more likely to do so for members of online support groups.

Community involvement during the pandemic



3%

asked for information or advice on local online support groups.

11%

gave info or advice on local online support groups.

3%

contacted a local or national charity to ask for advice or information.

3%

contacted a local or national charity to ask for practical or material help.

8%

volunteered for a local or national charity to help the COVID-19 crisis response.

24%

donated money or goods to a local or national charity to help the COVID-19 crisis response.



Access to food



has been an important point of focus for community grassroots; including organising to support local food banks with donations of money, goods and volunteering; and organising on a local level (for example, in estates) to deliver hot meals to elderly and vulnerable residents.

Some of the local people who were shielding due to illness, but were not materially deprived and could buy groceries for themselves (online or with help from friends/ support groups) donated their Government-delivered parcels to food banks.

“We received a food parcel from the government today because my girlfriend is on their records as vulnerable for health reasons. We are shielding, but are also doing ok for food at the moment and are not in great need of the supplies. We have tried to cancel the delivery, but no success so far. We're going to offer it to someone who needs it more than we do or donate it to St Dunstan's Food Bank.”

There's a very fragile old Italian man who lives in [our block of flats in the estate]. Maybe those of you who are distributing hot meals in the estate before Ramadan could knock for him, I believe most of you might know him.

The longer lockdown lasts, the more we are likely to see families struggle through no fault of their own. I would like to be able to respond as quickly as we have to these people. If you do have any excess food/household items, please put aside [so you can help someone in need].