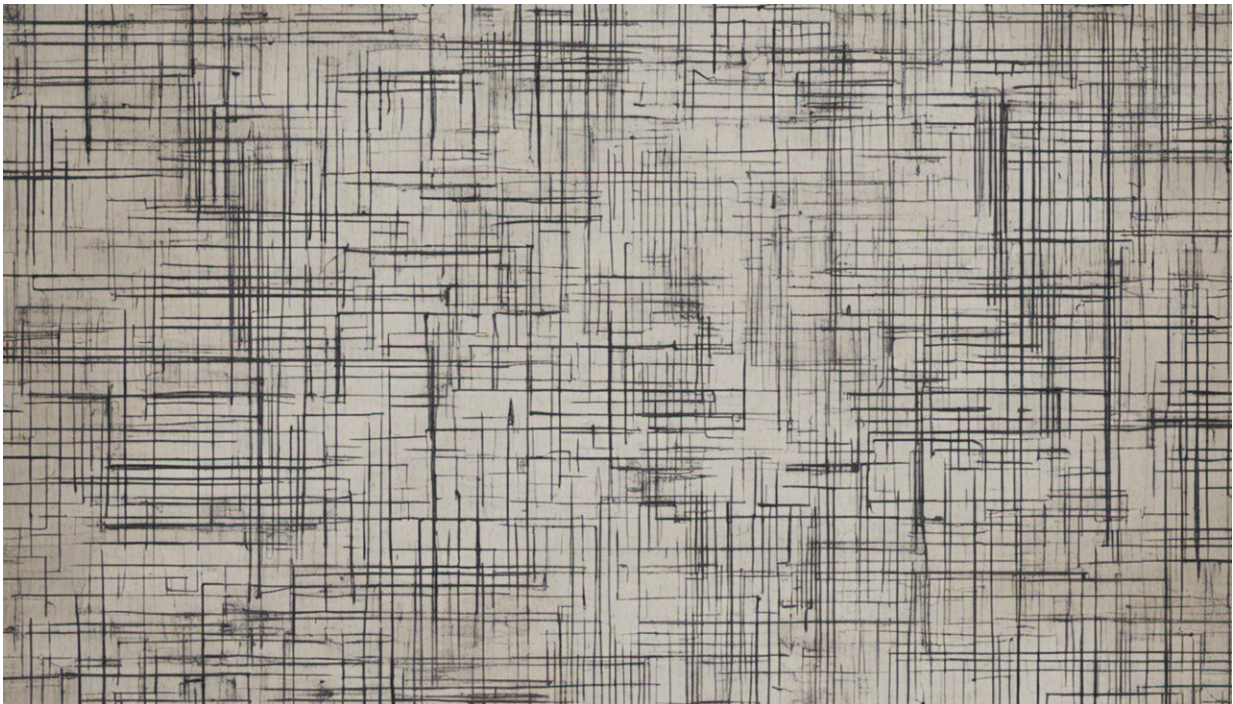


PPE and contactless delivery: Drug dealers reveal how they are adapting to coronavirus

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

While the COVID-19 lockdown might have brought most parts of the economy to a halt, it seems to have had little affect on drug dealers. They have even found opportunity in the situation. They wear personal protective equipment (PPE) to avoid infection, finding a neat way to cover their faces to avoid police surveillance in the process.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not diminished the supply of and demand for [illicit drugs](#) in the UK—particularly cannabis and cocaine. And while it might be difficult to see the attraction of using stimulants and [party drugs](#) like MDMA and cocaine in the confines of your own home during lockdown, users seem to be taking full advantage of the extra time on their hands. One 47-year-old told us: "I've been using sniff regularly for most of my [adult life](#) so the lockdown hasn't changed anything for me. To be honest, I probably been doing more than usual as I've got more time on my hands and I'm not spending as much on other shit. Anyway, it makes me feel good and there's not much around at the moment to make anyone feel good."

In fact, both drug users and dealers reported that sales and use had actually increased during COVID-19. One dealer, aged 40, said: "It just goes with having a drink for a lot of people. People are at home bored and that, getting mortal and sniffing passes the time. I've also got a few Cracky Chans [crack users] and they get through it the same."

The large number of domestic cultivators has meant the supply of cannabis has seen no disruption. And despite initial worries by some dealers that their supply from overseas might dry up, which has been documented in relation to some other substances (for example, synthetic cannabinoids), there does not appear to be a shortage of heroin or cocaine, unlike other more mundane consumer goods like paracetamol, pasta and toilet paper).

Initially the drug users we spoke to were panic stockpiling drugs, and although this seems to have abated, [drug dealers](#) and users alike seemed genuinely surprised that drugs had been easier to buy than many (legal) everyday products.



Credit: Dominika Roseclay from Pexels

Masking up

Drug dealers have been heeding government advice and taking the necessary precautions to protect themselves and their customers against COVID-19. Dealers have been wearing masks, gloves and protective eyewear, alongside a hood to conceal their identity as they continue to run their businesses during lockdown: "The [police] know most of us round here so covering your face has meant you have less chance of being pinched even if they see you, you can get away without um recognising you and turning up at your flat. Everyone I know is wearing them."

Talking about his delivery process, a user told us: "There's no physical

contact whatsoever. He calls me when he's outside, I go down and he opens the boot, I put the money in one box and take my gear from the other. We have a little chat and that's it, he's gone. I took the piss with him at first as I thought it was over the top but now it's just normal."

Others told us about the changes they've made when actually taking drugs: "I'll tell you one thing mate, I wouldn't be snorting with a note... could be hoovering corona straight up your shnoz [nose]. Use a straw, me, then hoy [throw] it straight out. Best way."

Dealers use disinfectant and hand sanitizer and try as much as possible to cover their meetings with customers as "essential travel" or even combine them with genuinely essential travel: "Mainly now when I'm going to go to the shops anyway. I'll arrange to meet people there. When it first kicked off I would walk the dog and get them to meet me on route but it was ... dead sus so I just bite the bullet and drive. Sometimes I go check on me mam and dad as they are meant be self-isolating."

Timing was key for another: "I'm always dead careful anyway, [since COVID-19] ... I meet people at the likes of Tesco car park, Aldi or somewhere, shopping for essentials you know (laughs). I like to do it at busy times, teatime or morning going to graft time ... I always have hand sanitizer in the car, use it loads. I wear gloves as well but I always have done if passing something over, don't want forensics on the bags just in case."

Although drugs are still considered the preserve of young people, our research shows they play an equally important part in the lives of older, middle-aged adults. Most of the dealers we spoke to make a living entirely from drug supply and had a [nice but not extravagant lifestyle](#), using the money to buy "life's little luxuries" without getting themselves further into debt.

Despite these unprecedented times, a state of national lockdown and speculation that things will never be the same again, [drug use](#) and [drug dealing](#) seem to remain business as usual.

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