

Three in ten say they are feeling lonelier now than before the pandemic

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New research by Ipsos UK and the Policy Institute at King's College London finds that 3 in 10 UK adults (31%) say they are feeling lonelier now than before the pandemic (58% report no change). Alongside this,

nearly half think they see friends and family less (46%) and leave the house less (45%) than before the pandemic began. Four in ten 16–34 year olds (39%) say they feel more lonely than before the pandemic started about two years ago.

The new study, the latest in a series that has tracked opinion since April 2020, does find though that across many of these aspects of people's lives, a large proportion (usually slightly more or less than half) say there has been no change now compared with before the pandemic. Participants were also asked to report all changes—whether or not they felt they had been caused by the pandemic.

A third of Brits believe that their physical (32%) and mental (33%) health has got worse (half in each case say it is about the same). The youngest (16–34) are most likely to feel that their mental health has deteriorated during the pandemic, with 42% saying it had, though one in four (23%) said that it had improved. Women are also more likely than men to feel their mental health is now worse (by 38% to 28%).

About a third (36%) think they have put on weight compared with before the pandemic—although almost as many (30%) say they are exercising more.

50% of Britons say they are spending more time looking at screens than before the pandemic. And just over two in five of those aged 16–75 (46%) say they check [social media](#) at least once a day for news about the pandemic including 7% saying they check hourly (though this is down from 56% checking social media daily for information about the coronavirus at the start of the first lockdown in April 2020). Overall, a quarter (27%) say their ability to concentrate is worse than before the pandemic (58% say no change), rising to 38% of younger people (though 24% of 16–34s also say this has improved).

When it comes to sleep, overall around a third (32%) say the overall quality of their sleep has got worse (53% no change). The most common changes in people's sleeping patterns are more disturbed sleep (25%) or sleeping fewer hours (20%).

The state of the pandemic

- One in six UK adults aged 16–75 (17%) feel that things are already "back to normal" while over a third (37%) believe that it will be at some point in the next year, but nearly one in ten (9%) believe that things will never go back to normal.
- 58% believe the pandemic isn't completely over. That rises to 78% of those aged over 55, but those aged 16–34 are more divided (39% believe it isn't over, compared to 35% who believe it is)
- Nearly half (48%) would support bringing back previous restrictions if there was a new vaccine resistant variant, though this falls to 38% supporting new restrictions not seen before, and only 34% for another national lockdown.
- - Opposition tends to be higher among the young: 45% of 16–34s oppose a new national lockdown and 38% oppose introducing new restrictions or reintroducing previous restrictions which have now been lifted
 - Those aged 55+ are more likely to support measures being introduced if there was a new vaccine resistant variant: 45% would support a new national lockdown, 48% would support introducing new restrictions not previously used and 60% reintroducing previously used measures

Government handling of the pandemic

The public are more positive about the UK [government](#)'s handling of the pandemic now than at earlier points in the pandemic. 54% of those aged 16–75 believe that the UK government's response to the pandemic has been confused and inconsistent, but that has declined since 2020 and particularly fallen since the second lockdown in November 2020 when two-thirds (68%) said that was the case.

On the other hand 38% believe that the government has responded well to changing scientific advice (up from 27% in November 2020), while 28% say they have not. And when comparing our government to others, 42% of 16–75 year-olds say the UK government has responded well to the pandemic compared to other countries (up from 28% in July 2020), with 27% disagreeing.

On balance, UK adults think that advice from scientists and experts has been good during the pandemic and that government has used it effectively. Only one in five (21%) believe that scientists and medical experts have given the government poor advice during the pandemic while 46% disagree. Four in ten (43%) believe that the UK government has made good use of that advice while 28% do not.

Perceptions of the NHS

A majority believe that a range of the NHS services have got worse since before the pandemic began, but they also tend to think that this is at least partly because of the pandemic.

Britons believe that the following services have got worse since before the pandemic began:

- Waiting times for routine services for diagnostic tests or operations—68%
- Waiting times for GP appointments—67%
- The ability of the NHS to provide a good service to patients—52%
- The ability of social care services to provide a good service to their users—52%
- And one in six (59%) believe that the wellbeing of NHS staff has got worse since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

But amongst those who think things have got worse, half or more tend to believe that this is at least mostly because of the pandemic rather than other reasons:

- Waiting times for routine services for [diagnostic tests](#) or operations—62% of those who think things have got worse say this is at least mostly due to the pandemic
- Waiting times for GP appointments—54%
- The ability of the NHS to provide a good service to patients—53%
- The ability of social care services to provide a good service to their users—49%
- The well-being of NHS staff—65%

Gideon Skinner, research director at Ipsos said: "These findings, marking the two-year anniversary of the first national lockdown, are further evidence of how over that time life in the UK has changed for many people, affecting a range of aspects of our physical and mental health. Although we shouldn't overestimate this (more people think there has been no impact, and some of these changes may have happened naturally without the pandemic), it is notable that it is often younger generations who feel harder hit. This all suggests that most Britons are right to feel that the after-effects of the coronavirus are not over yet."

Professor Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Institute at King's College London, said: "The effects of the pandemic and the measures to control it are still keenly felt by significant proportions of the UK population—with a third of us saying we're lonelier and sleeping less well, nearly half of us seeing our friends less and leaving home less, and half spending more time on our screens. It's no surprise then that a third of us feel our mental or physical health is worse. And, as with so much in the pandemic, some groups are feeling the effects more, with the young and women more likely to experience many of these negative impacts. We're also deeply worried about the impact on the NHS, particularly waiting times and how the pandemic has affected the wellbeing of NHS staff.

There is some good news for the UK government, however. There has been a theme throughout the pandemic that large proportions of the public were supportive of more restrictive measures—with the lowest ratings of the government seen in late 2020, when people felt things were opening up too quickly. But now ratings are approaching the most positive we've seen since the start of the [pandemic](#), despite all restrictions being lifted, including the highest ratings of the UK government compared with other countries. "

Ipsos interviewed a sample of 1,229 adults aged 16+ in the United Kingdom using its online i:omnibus between 4–7 March 2022. Certain questions are based on those aged 16–75 (1,129) for trend comparisons. Data has been weighted to the known offline population proportions for age within gender, government office region, working status, social grade and education. All polls are subject to a wide range of potential sources of error.

More information: COVID Anniversary Survey 2022:
[www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute ... sary-survey-2022.pdf](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute...sary-survey-2022.pdf)

Provided by King's College London

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