

Less than half of people in England understand current lockdown rules

3 August 2020, by Jake Hawkes



Credit: [Free-Photos Source: Pixabay](#) (CC.2.0) *Taken pre-lockdown in 2016

Under half (45%) of people in England report having a "broad understanding" of the current lockdown rules, compared to 90% across the UK during the strict lockdown period, finds UCL's [COVID-19 Social Study](#).

Levels in Scotland and Wales have also fallen but are higher than those in England, with reported levels of understanding at 75% and 61% respectively. Complete understanding has fallen even further, with only 14% of adults in England reporting understanding the rules completely as lockdown eased, compared to 18% in Wales and 27% in Scotland.

Launched in the week before lockdown started, this [ongoing study](#) is funded by the Nuffield Foundation with additional support from Wellcome and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). It is the UK's largest study into how adults are feeling about the lockdown, government advice and overall wellbeing and mental health with over 70,000 participants who have been followed across the last 19 weeks.

Access to healthcare has also fallen during the lockdown, with one in 10 people across the UK reporting being unable to see or speak with a GP about their [physical health](#), one in 20 unable to speak to a professional about their mental health, and one in five not telling a GP about symptoms of an illness when they usually would have done (even when appointments to see GPs were available). Groups who faced the most barriers included younger adults, women, individuals from BAME backgrounds, and people with physical and mental health conditions.

People with a diagnosed mental health condition were significantly more likely to have not spoken to a mental health professional when they usually would have done, with a fifth reported not being able to access professional mental health support during lockdown.

Lead author, Dr. Daisy Fancourt (UCL Epidemiology & Health Care) said: "Our study shows that as lockdown measures have eased at different rates in each nation of the UK, levels of understanding around what is and isn't permissible have dropped, especially amongst younger adults. This could possibly reflect difficulties in applying the rules to more complex life scenarios amongst younger adults, or may be reflective of the different amounts of time spent following the news on COVID-19 amongst different age groups. The general drop-off in understanding could be due to unclear messaging from the government, or a reduction in interest and engagement from people, especially with the cessation of the daily Downing Street [coronavirus](#) briefing in late June."

Depression and anxiety levels, life satisfaction, and happiness have all shown improvements across every socio-demographic subgroup examined, and loneliness levels have also decreased further, showing the first clear pattern of decrease in 19 weeks. However there has been little change in people reporting major or minor stress due to

catching COVID-19, unemployment, finance, or getting food.

Cheryl Lloyd, education program head at the Nuffield Foundation said: "With concerns growing over a second wave of COVID-19 it is concerning that many people in England report not understanding the current government guidance. As another Nuffield-funded study by the Reuters Institute has shown, people are less likely to access news about COVID-19 on a daily basis now that [lockdown](#) has eased. With the rules changing regularly, this may be a factor in the public not understanding the government guidance."

The study team has also received support from Wellcome to launch an international network of longitudinal studies called the COVID-MINDS Network. Through the network, dozens of scientists and clinicians are coming together internationally to collate results from mental health studies running in countries around the world and compare findings. The initiative will support launching new mental [health](#) studies in other countries and show whether actions taken in specific countries are helping to protect [mental health](#).

Provided by University College London

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