

Report 10: Public Response to UK Government Recommendations on COVID-19: Population Survey, 17-18 March 2020

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Summary

On Monday 16th March 2020 the UK government announced new actions to control COVID-19. These recommendations directly affected the entire UK population, and included the following: stop non-essential contact with others; stop all unnecessary travel; start working from home where possible; avoid pubs, clubs, theatres and other such social venues; and to isolate at home for 14 days if anyone in the household has a high temperature or a new and continuous cough.

To capture public sentiment towards these recommendations, a YouGov survey was commissioned by the Patient Experience Research Centre (PERC), Imperial College London. The survey was completed by 2,108 UK adults between the dates of 17th – 18th March 2020. The survey results show the following:

- 77% reported being **worried** about the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK.
- 48% of adults who have not tested positive for COVID-19 believe it is **likely they will be infected** at some point in the future.

- 93% of adults reported personally taking at least one measure to protect themselves from COVID-19 infection, including:
 - 83% washed their hands more frequently;
 - 52% avoided crowded areas;
 - 50% avoided social events;
 - 36% avoided public transport;
 - 31% avoided going out;
 - 11% avoided going to work;
 - 28% avoided travel to areas outside the UK.
- There is high reported ability and willingness to self-isolate for 7 days* if advised to do so by a health professional (88%).
- However only 44% reported being able to work from home. This was higher among managerial and professional workers (60%) than manual, semi-skilled, and casual workers (19%)^, reflecting less flexible job roles for manual and lower grade workers.
- 71% reported changing behaviour **in response to government guidance. The figure (53%) was lower for young adults (18-24 year-olds).**
- Hand washing (63%), avoiding persons with symptoms (61%), and covering your sneeze (53%) were more likely to be perceived as 'very effective' measures to prevent COVID-19 spread than common social distancing measures (avoiding going out (31%), to work (23%), to shops (16%) or to schools (19%)).

SUGGESTED CITATION

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1. Survey Design and Conduct

- Total sample size was 2108 adults (aged 18+)
- The survey was undertaken between 17th - 18th March 2020
- The survey was carried out online
- The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+)

Methodology: This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 800,000+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample. The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. (The sample definition could be "UK adult population" or a subset such as "UK adult females"). Invitations to surveys don not expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

*based on the govt recommendations up to 16 March

^Job categories were coded as Social Grade: ABC1: Higher managerial, administrative or professional / Intermediate managerial, administrative or professional / Supervisory or clerical and junior managerial, administrative or professional

C2DE: Skilled manual workers / Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers / State pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

2. Perceived Risk and Consequences of COVID-19 Infection

- 77% reported being **worried** about the COVID-19 outbreak in the UK.
 - Women (83%) more worried than men (71%).
 - Similar across age groups (74–88%), social grade (75-79%), region (76-83%), and employment (72-81%).
- 48% of adults believe it is **likely they will be infected** at some point in the future.
 - Similar between women (47%) and men (48%).
 - Age 18-54 years much more likely to report expecting to be infected (61%) than age 65+ (23%).
 - Adults in **London** (53%) and **Scotland** (54%) were most likely to report expecting to be infected.
- **Perceived severity** of COVID-19 infection for those who have not tested positive for COVID-19:
 - 57% believed COVID-19 infection would be moderate (self-care; rest in bed).
 - 14% believed it would be severe requiring hospitalization.
 - 5% believed life-threatening.
 - 19% believed mild or no symptoms i.e. go about daily tasks normally.
 - Perceived likelihood of severe (6-25%) or life-threatening (2-16%) infection similar by age.
 - Older adults much more likely to perceive risk as life threatening or severe (Figure 1).

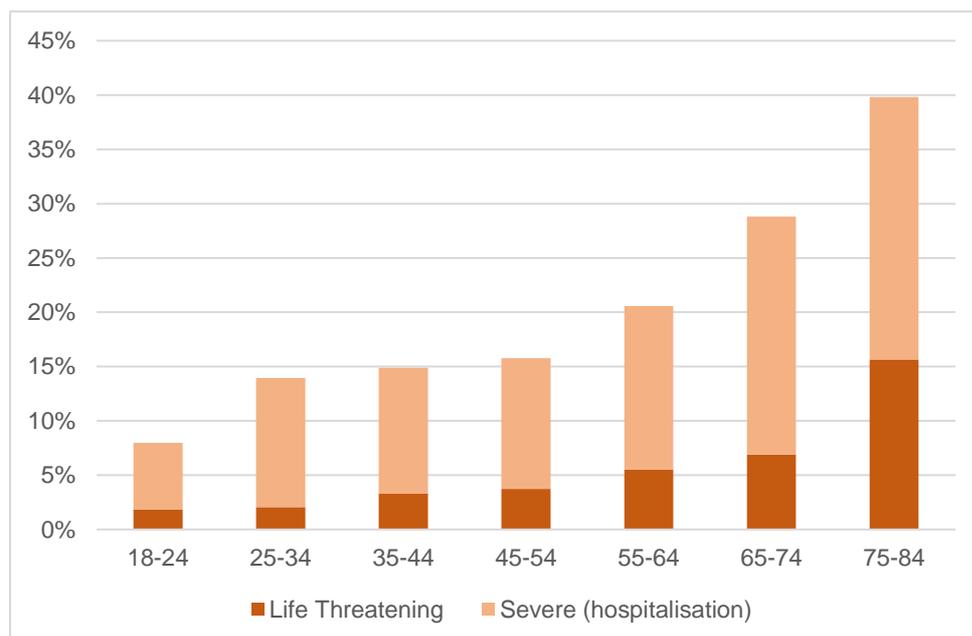


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who expect COVID-19 infection to be life threatening or severe if they were infected.

3. Sources of Information about COVID-19

- People are currently obtaining information from the following sources:
 - Television: 71%
 - Official websites (NHS, PHE, WHO): 59%
 - Newspapers: 44%
 - Radio: 39%
 - Social media: 35%
 - Family/friends: 32%
 - Work/school/college: 30%
- Similar by gender
- Older adults (over 85s): more report television (87%)
- Younger adults (18-24 year-olds): more report social media (61%) and family & friends (51%).
- Only 2% reported getting no information about COVID-19.

4. Personal Response to COVID-19

- 93% of adults reported taking at least one measure to protect themselves from COVID-19 infection.
- 83% of adults washed their hands more frequently (Figure 2).

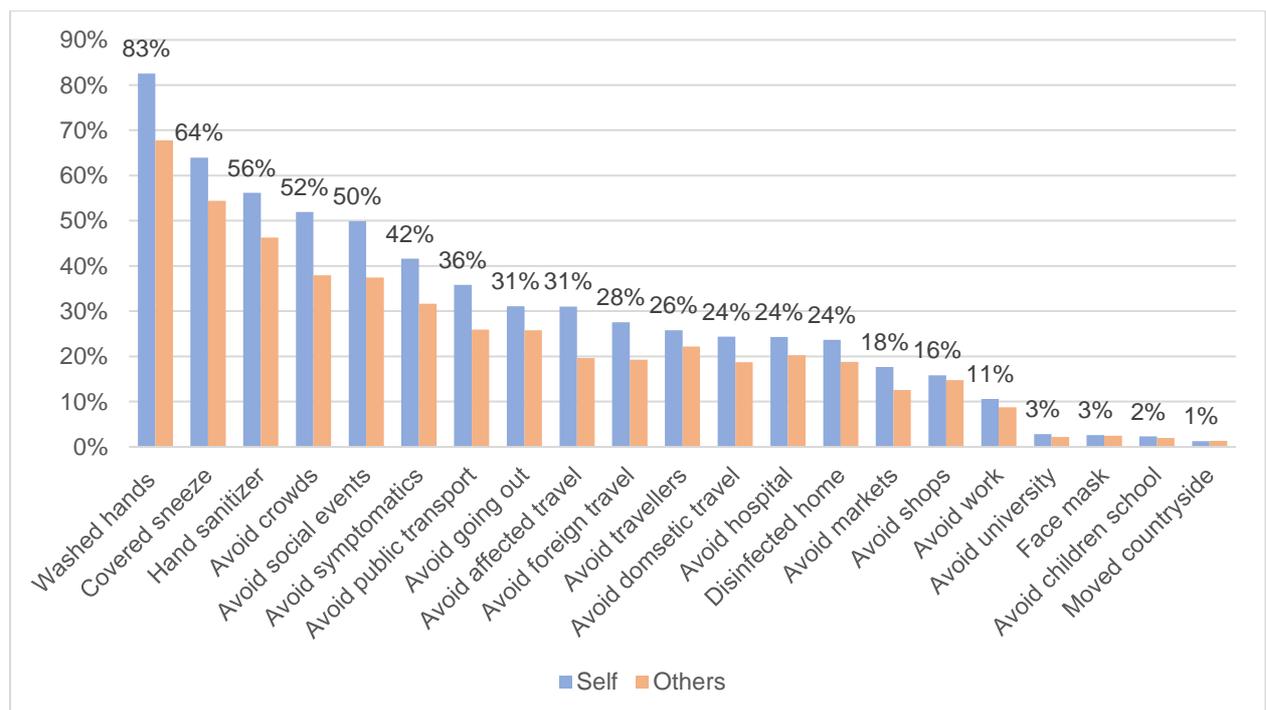


Figure 2. Percentage of respondents taking measures to protect themselves and others from COVID-19

- 71% of all respondents reported changing behaviour **in response to government guidance**.
- Respondents also changed behaviour in response to:
 - 54% cited news coverage
 - 53% cited growing number of infections in the UK
 - 43% cited outcomes in other countries
 - Young adults (18-24 year-olds) were **less likely to cite government guidance (53%) or news coverage (47%)** for prompting behaviour change.
- Hand washing (63%), avoiding persons with symptoms (61%), and covering your sneeze (53%) were more likely to be perceived as ‘very effective’ measures to prevent COVID-19 spread than common social distancing measures (avoiding going out (31%), to work (23%), to shops (16%) or to schools (19%)) (Figure 3).

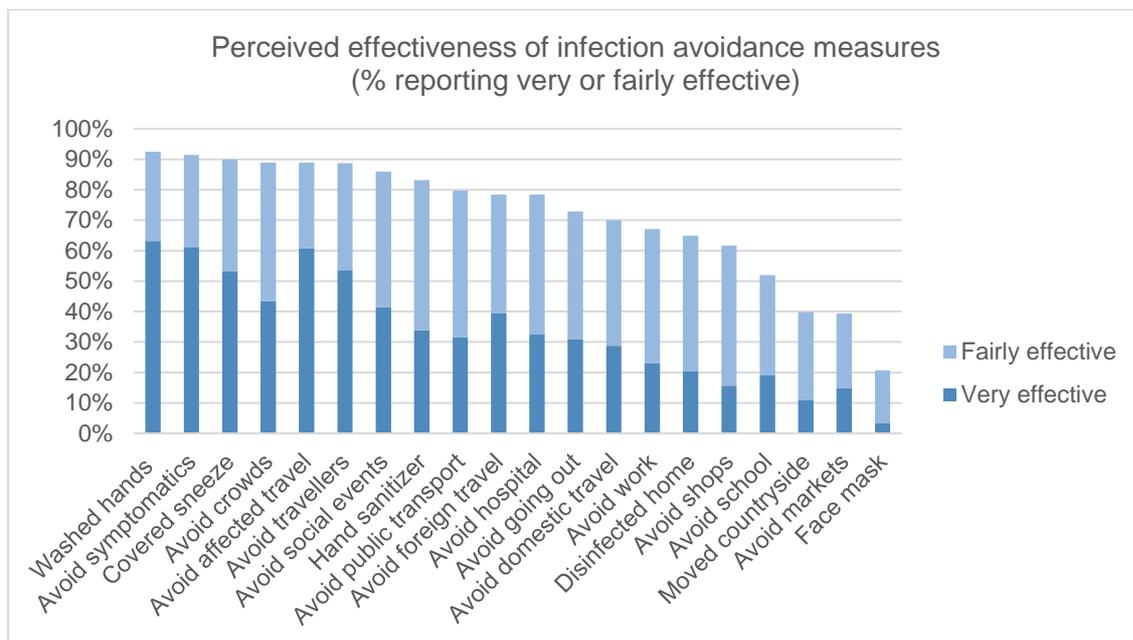


Figure 3. Perceived effectiveness of infection avoidance measures (% reporting very or fairly effective)

5. Self-isolation

- Respondents reported both high ability and high willingness to self-isolate for 7 days if advised to do so by a health professional.
- 87% of adults reported they would be **able** to self-isolate.
 - Similar by gender: 86% of men and 88% of women.
 - Similar across ages: between 85–91% across all age groups.
- 88% of adults reported they would be **willing** to self-isolate.
 - Similar by gender: 86% of men 89% of women.
 - **Lower** (79%) among 18-24 year-olds, 88–90% among all age groups 25+ years.

- 57% of adults reported they had taken **some measures to prepare for potential self-isolation**.
 - 39% stocked up on food (highest reported measure), 27% stocked up on toiletries, 23% stocked up on over-the counter medicines, 14% stocked up on prescription medicines.
 - 17% took measures to establish remote-working capabilities; this was higher (30%) among all working adults.
 - 63% of women were more likely to report measures to prepare for potential self-isolation than men (50%).
Those aged 25–44 (62%) or 75+ (67%) were most likely to report measures to prepare for self-isolation.

- Potential problems posed by self-isolation were (decreasing percent reported):
 - Separating from others in household: 45%
 - Getting supplies: 41%
 - Negatively affect mental health: 37%
 - Negatively affect social life: 24%
 - Loss of income: 22%
 - Finding someone to cover caring responsibilities: 12%
 - These were **relatively similar** between sexes, including finding cover for caring responsibilities and loss of income.
 - Younger adults (18-34 year-olds) were more likely to report negative mental health affects (53%), difficulty getting supplies (47%) and affecting social life (36%) as concerns.

6. References

Kwok KO, Li KK, Chan HH et al. Community responses during the early phase of the COVID-19 epidemic in Hong Kong: risk perception, information exposure and preventive measures medRxiv 2020.02.26.20028217