

Statistical bulletin

# Coronavirus and self-isolation after being in contact with a positive case in England: 4 to 8 May 2021

Behaviour of individuals required to self-isolate after being in contact with a positive case of COVID-19, from the COVID Test and Trace Contacts Insights Survey. Includes information on the impact of self-isolation on well-being and finances. Experimental Statistics.

Contact:  
Lynsey Brown  
publicservicesanalysis@ons.gov.  
uk  
+44 (0)1633 456736

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# 1 . Main points

- Data collected from 4 to 8 May 2021 show that the majority (93%) of those who had contact with a positive coronavirus (COVID-19) case fully adhered to the self-isolation requirements throughout their 10-day isolation period.
- Compliance with self-isolation guidance for the full isolation period was statistically significantly higher among those who developed symptoms of COVID-19 (97%), compared with those who did not (92%).
- Most people (97%) reported having no contact with non-household members across their full period of isolation.
- Of those who reported non-adherent behaviour, 87% left their house at least once during the isolation period for a non-permitted reason.
- Approximately one-third (34%) of all respondents reported that self-isolation had a negative effect on their well-being and mental health, and 25% reported having lost income because of self-isolation.
- The results of this survey show no significant difference in understanding of, or full adherence to, the self-isolation guidance when compared with the results of the previous two surveys (1 to 10 April 2021 and 19 to 24 April 2021).

The statistics presented are Experimental Statistics, so care needs to be taken when interpreting them. It is worth noting this survey has a relatively small sample size of 918.

## Statistician's comment

“It’s reassuring to see the vast majority of people told they’ve been in contact with someone with COVID-19 stick to the self-isolation guidance designed to protect others and stop the spread of the virus.

“However, it is apparent that isolation can have a negative impact on a person’s well-being as well as potentially have an impact on income for some.

“We will continue to monitor people’s adherence to self-isolation and the impact it can have on them.”

Tim Gibbs, Public Services Analysis team, Office for National Statistics.

Follow the Public Services Analysis team on Twitter: [@HughStick](https://twitter.com/HughStick)

## 2 . Indicators of behaviour and experience during self-isolation

Since December 2020, there has been a [legal duty](#) in England to self-isolate for 10 days if you have received a positive test result, if you live in the same household as a person who has symptoms of the coronavirus (COVID-19), or if you have been in close contact with, but do not live with, a person who has tested positive for COVID-19.

The data presented in this bulletin were collected from individuals (“contacts”) who had been identified as having been in contact with someone who had tested positive for COVID-19. The data were collected at the point when this population had recently reached (or were near to) the end of their self-isolation period.

More information on identifying this group of people, self-isolation and collecting the data can be found in the [Glossary](#) and [Measuring the data](#) sections.

The majority (93%) of respondents during 4 to 8 May 2021 reported fully adhering to requirements throughout the whole self-isolation period, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Indicators of behaviour and experience during self-isolation of those who were in contact with a positive case of coronavirus (COVID-19)  
England, 2021

	1 to 10 April	19 to 24 April	4 to 8 May
<b>Percentage reporting full adherence to the requirements for their full isolation period or until the point of the survey</b>	90%	92%	93%
<b>Percentage reporting no contact with non-household members for their full isolation period or until the point of the survey</b>	94%	95%	97% <sup>1</sup>
<b>Percentage who fully understood the self-isolation requirements</b>	71%	74%	72%
<b>Percentage who developed COVID-19 symptoms</b>	30%	26%	21% <sup>2</sup>
<b>Percentage who agreed that 'it was easy for me to self-isolate'</b>	75%	80%	79%
<b>Percentage reporting self-isolation had a negative effect on their well-being and mental health</b>	32%	32%	34%
<b>Percentage reporting having lost income due to self-isolation</b>	27%	29%	25%
<b>Percentage who downloaded the NHS Test and Trace app</b>	50%	45%	51%
<b>Of those who did not adhere to the requirements, percentage leaving the house for a non-permitted reason</b>	78%	65%	87% <sup>3</sup>
<b>Of those who did not adhere to the requirements, percentage who had one or more visitors to their home (excluding visits for personal care)</b>	33%	40%	15% <sup>*</sup>
<b>Of those who had applied and received the NHS Test and Trace Support payment, percentage who had no contact with non-household members within 24 hours of receiving a notification to self-isolate</b>	96% <sup>*</sup>	97% <sup>*</sup>	95% <sup>*</sup>

Source: Source: Office for National Statistics – COVID Test and Trace Contacts Insights Survey

#### Notes

1. This percentage was statistically significantly higher during 4 to 8 May 2021 compared with 1 to 10 April 2021.
2. This percentage was statistically significantly lower during 4 to 8 May 2021 compared with 1 to 10 April 2021 and 19 to 24 April 2021.
3. This percentage was statistically significantly higher during 4 to 8 May 2021 compared with 19 to 24 April 2021.
4. This percentage was statistically significantly lower during 4 to 8 May 2021 compared with 19 to 24 April 2021.
5. If not specified, percentages are based on everyone who was in contact with a positive case.
6. Some percentages in this table are based on sample counts of fewer than 30 respondents and should be treated with caution. These categories are marked with an asterisk (\*).

### 3 . Adherence to self-isolation requirements

Despite the easing of certain lockdown restrictions on 12 April 2021, the proportion of those who had contact with a positive coronavirus (COVID-19) case and did not adhere to self-isolation requirements throughout their 10-day isolation period reduced to 7% between 4 and 8 May 2021, compared with 10% between 1 and 10 April 2021. This finding is [statistically significant](#).

In the first 24 hours after being notified to start self-isolating, the percentage who did adhere to the isolation requirements was 97%. It was then 95% during the period after the first 24 hours until the end of self-isolation.

Those who developed COVID-19 symptoms were significantly more likely to adhere to guidance (97%) compared with those who did not develop symptoms (92%).

Of all respondents, 4% experienced difficulties while self-isolating or with getting a COVID-19 test. Of those who were employed, 7% reported that their employer did not know they were required to self-isolate; 20% of those who were working prior to self-isolation were not paid during isolation.

Figure 1 shows that those who did not adhere to self-isolation guidance were less likely than those who did adhere to agree that:

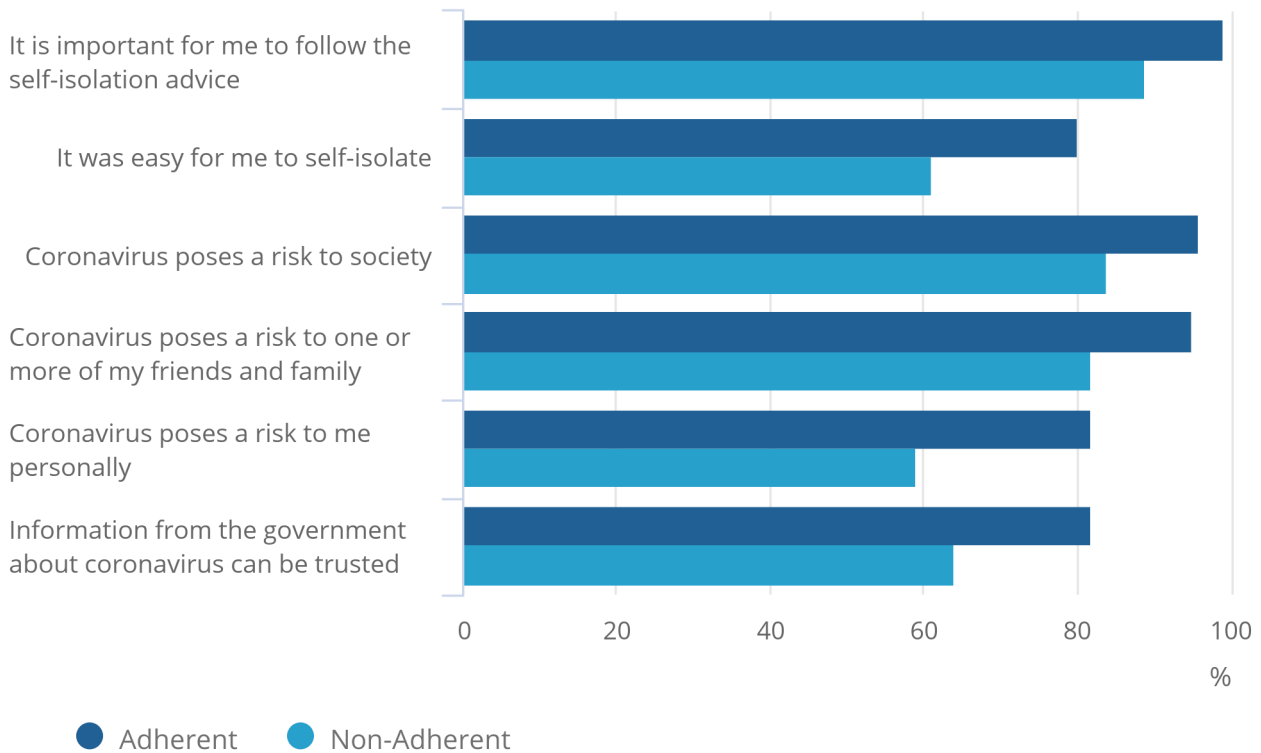
- it was important to follow self-isolation advice
- it was easy for them to self-isolate
- coronavirus posed a risk to society, their friends and family, or themselves
- information from the government about coronavirus could be trusted

**Figure 1: Around 6 in 10 of those who were not adherent to self-isolation guidance agreed that coronavirus poses a risk to them personally, compared with around 8 in 10 who were adherent**

Percentage of all respondents who agree with the following statements, England, 4 to 8 May 2021

Figure 1: Around 6 in 10 of those who were not adherent to self-isolation guidance agreed that coronavirus poses a risk to them personally, compared with around 8 in 10 who were adherent

Percentage of all respondents who agree with the following statements, England, 4 to 8 May 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – COVID Test and Trace Contacts Insights Survey

Notes:

1. Those whose adherence was unknown are not shown because of low sample counts.

**More about coronavirus**

- Find the latest on [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK](#).
- [Explore the latest coronavirus data](#) from the ONS and other sources.
- All ONS analysis, summarised in our [coronavirus roundup](#).
- View [all coronavirus data](#).
- Find out how we are [working safely in our studies and surveys](#).

## 4 . Contact with non-household members

The majority (97%) of those required to self-isolate reported having no contact with non-household members throughout the whole self-isolation period. This had significantly increased since the data collection period between 1 and 10 April 2021, which was prior to easing of restrictions.

The proportion of respondents who did not have contact with a non-household member was similar in the first 24 hours of self-isolation (97%) compared with the rest of the isolation period (99%). Of those who had contact with a non-household member at least once, more than half (56%) met two to five non-household members at any one time. (Please note that the latter estimate is based on a sample of fewer than 30.)

## 5 . Understanding of self-isolation requirements

Respondents were asked about their interpretation of the requirements for self-isolation to determine how well they understood them. Around three-quarters (72%) fully understood the requirements, compared with around one-quarter (27%) who either misunderstood or were unsure. This was similar across all age groups.

In the first 24 hours of self-isolation the proportion of those who understood the guidance completely and adhered to it was similar to those who misunderstood or were unsure of the guidance (98% and 94% respectively). Across the whole period of self-isolation those who understood the guidance were significantly more likely to adhere to it (95%) compared with those who misunderstood or were unsure of the guidance (86%).

## 6 . Data on self-isolation after contact with a positive case

[Coronavirus and self-isolation after being in contact with a positive case in England](#)

Dataset | Released 26 May 2021

Behaviour of individuals required to self-isolate after being in contact with a positive case of COVID-19, from the COVID Test and Trace Contacts Insights Survey. Includes information on the impact of self-isolation on well-being and finances. Experimental Statistics.

## 7 . Glossary

### Self-isolation

Self-isolation refers to not leaving your home because you have been informed by NHS Test and Trace that you are a contact of a person who has had a positive test result for the coronavirus (COVID-19). You must stay at home and complete 10 full days of isolation. It is a legal requirement to self-isolate if you have been notified to by the NHS Test and Trace service. Your isolation period includes the date of your last contact with them and the next 10 full days. If you develop symptoms, stay at home and arrange to have a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for COVID-19. In addition to staying home, if you are self-isolating you should not receive visitors, unless the purpose of the visit is to provide essential care.

For further information please see NHS guidance [When to self-isolate and what to do](#).

## Lockdown

On 5 January 2021, the UK government announced a further national lockdown for [England](#). On 22 February 2021, the UK government published a four-step [roadmap](#) to ease lockdown restrictions in England. Step 2 of the roadmap (which allowed the re-opening of more businesses and activities) was implemented on 12 April 2021, before data in this survey were collected. Step 3 (which eased limits on social contact and allowed further re-opening of businesses and activities) was implemented on 17 May 2021, which was after the data in this survey were collected.

## 8 . Measuring the data

### Survey information

The latest quality and methodology information on data from the COVID Test and Trace Contacts Insights Survey can be found in [Coronavirus and self-isolation after being in contact with a positive case in England methodology](#).

### Estimates for this survey

The data were collected between 4 and 8 May 2021. The sample consisted of 918 adults and was stratified to be representative of the age, sex and regional distribution of the “contacts” population.

Percentages in this report are based on weighted counts that are representative of the population of adults (aged 18 years or over) notified as being in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 between 5 April and 3 May 2021 and are adjusted to address age, sex and regional bias in responses.

Of those potential respondents who were successfully contacted by an interviewer, the response rate was 52%. When including cases where contact was attempted but not made, the response rate was 17%. As with all surveys, these estimates have an associated margin of error.

Respondents were randomly sampled through the Contact Tracing and Advice Service (CTAS) database, held by NHS Test and Trace. The majority (99%) of respondents were interviewed within four days of the end of their self-isolation period, in order to minimise recall bias. The longest time between the end of self-isolation and interview was five days.

## 9 . Strengths and limitations

Information on the strengths and limitations of this survey are available in [Coronavirus and self-isolation after being in contact with a positive case in England methodology](#).



## 10 . Related links

### [Coronavirus and self-isolation after being in contact with a positive case in England methodology](#)

Methodology article | Released 14 May 2021

Latest quality and methodology information on data from the COVID Test and Trace Contacts Insights Survey and its use to examine the adherence to self-isolation guidelines. Experimental statistics.

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Guidance for contacts](#)

Webpage | Updated 26 April 2021

Guidance for contacts of people with possible or confirmed coronavirus COVID-19 infection who do not live with the person.

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest data and analysis](#)

Webpage | Updated as and when data become available

Latest data and analysis on the coronavirus (COVID-19) in the UK and its effect on the economy and society.

### [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) roundup](#)

Blog | Updated as and when data become available

Catch up on the latest data and analysis related to the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on our economy and society.

### [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain](#)

Bulletin | Weekly

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain.

### [Coronavirus and self-isolation after testing positive in England: 12 April to 16 April 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 4 May 2021

Behaviour of individuals required to self-isolate after testing positive for COVID-19, from the COVID Test and Trace Cases Insights Survey. Includes information on the impact of self-isolation on well-being and finances. Experimental Statistics.