

Article

Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: March 2020 to December 2021

Analysis of the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people in Great Britain during periods throughout the pandemic from March 2020 to December 2021. Based on estimates from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey.

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1 . Main points

In December 2021:

- Fewer disabled people reported being very or somewhat worried about the effect that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was having on their life (72%) than at earlier points in the pandemic (91% in March 2020, 78% in February 2021); but the latest estimates were higher than during the period of restrictions easing in 2021 (62% in May 2021, 59% in June 2021).
- Disabled people continued to have on average poorer well-being ratings than non-disabled people across all four well-being measures (life satisfaction, feeling that things done in life are worthwhile, happiness and anxiety).
- Feeling stressed or anxious (79%), making their mental health worse (50%) and feeling like a burden on others (23%) were the well-being concerns disabled people more frequently reported than non-disabled people (68%, 31% and 7% respectively).
- Around twice as many disabled people (40%) reported feeling lonely (often, always, or some of the time) than non-disabled people (18%).
- A larger proportion of disabled people reported they thought life would never return to normal (18%) compared with non-disabled people (11%).
- Around three-quarters of disabled people (74%) reported that their cost of living had increased in the last month; higher than non-disabled people (64%).

Estimates for December 2021 are based on data collected between 15 December 2021 and 3 January 2022, during which new measures against the Omicron variant were introduced. The latest information and guidance in England, Wales, and Scotland can be found on the [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk) website.

2 . Concerns about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

At the beginning of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020, around 9 in 10 disabled people (91%) and 8 in 10 non-disabled people (82%) reported being very or somewhat worried about the effect that COVID-19 was having on their life. Levels of worry have fallen since this period, although disabled people remain more likely to report being worried.

Throughout periods of restrictions easing in 2021, in line with the [roadmap out of lockdown](#) for England, the proportion of disabled people reporting being worried about COVID-19 fell from 78% (in February 2021) to 63% (in August 2021). Similar falls were seen for non-disabled people, from 69% to 46%.

In December 2021, shortly after [Plan B measures](#) were implemented, levels of worry increased again. Around three-quarters (72%) of disabled people said they were worried about the effect that COVID-19 was having on their life. This proportion was smaller among non-disabled people (64%) (Figure 1). For more information on time periods referred to in this release, see [Data sources and quality](#).

To define disability, we refer to the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised "core" definition](#). Further information can be found in the [Glossary](#).

Figure 1: Disabled people consistently report higher levels of worry about coronavirus (COVID-19) than non-disabled people

Proportion reporting being "very or somewhat worried" about the effect of the coronavirus pandemic on their life, Great Britain, March 2020 to December 2021

Notes:

1. Question: "How worried or unworried are you about the effect that Coronavirus (COVID-19) is having on your life right now?".
2. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.
3. Coronavirus measures referenced in annotations refer to those in England only, although the chart presents Great Britain estimates. Similar measures were used in Scotland and Wales.

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Disabled people have also been more likely to report feeling very uncomfortable or uncomfortable leaving their home because of the pandemic. In December 2021, 45% of disabled people reported feeling uncomfortable compared with 24% of non-disabled people.

When asked about their personal risk of catching COVID-19, 50% thought they were very high risk or high risk, compared with 30% of non-disabled people.

Disabled people also reported being more concerned about new variants of COVID-19 than non-disabled people (76% compared with 65%) (Figure 2).

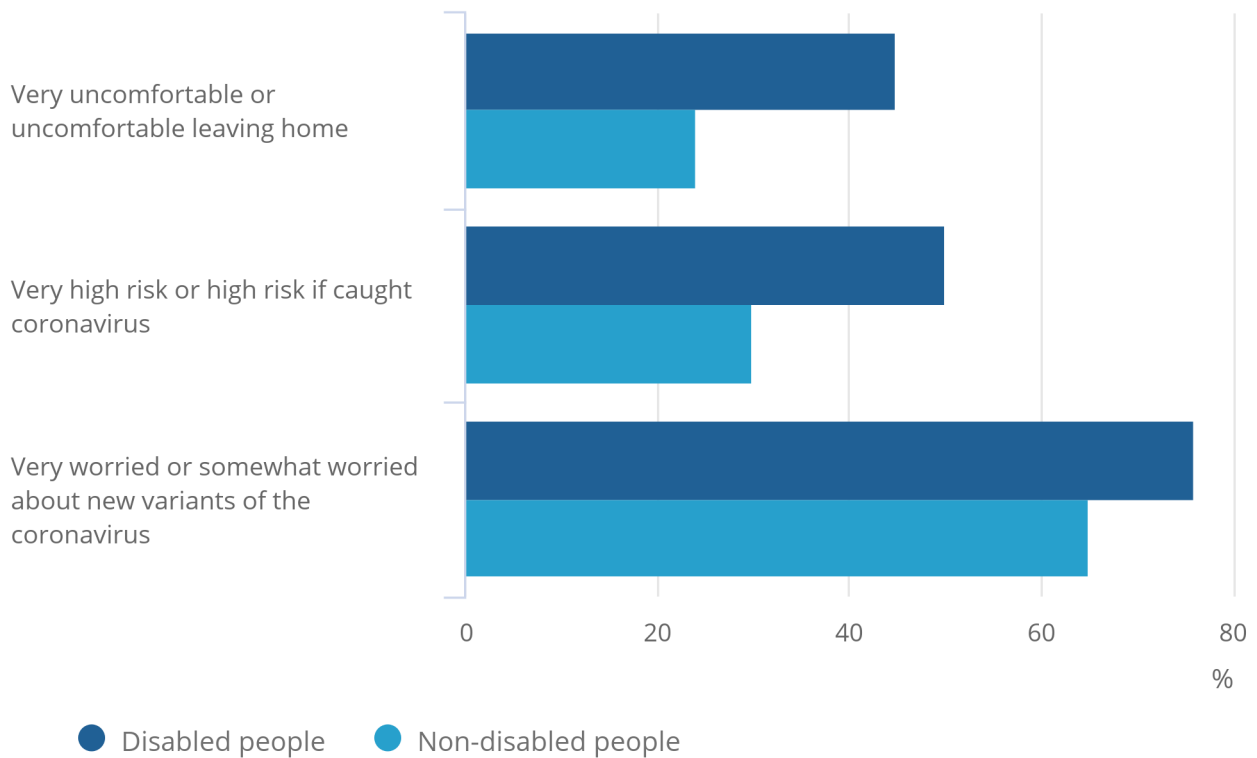
These differences have remained consistent over time.

Figure 2: Disabled people were more likely to feel uncomfortable leaving their home because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic than non-disabled people

Great Britain, December 2021

Figure 2: Disabled people were more likely to feel uncomfortable leaving their home because of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic than non-disabled people

Great Britain, December 2021



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Questions: “At this time, how comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel about leaving your home due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?”, “How much of a personal risk do you think catching the coronavirus (COVID-19) is to you?” and “How worried or unworried are you about new variants of the coronavirus (COVID-19)?”
2. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.

3 . Impact on everyday life

In December 2021, disabled people indicated that coronavirus (COVID-19) had affected their life more than non-disabled people in two areas in particular. These areas are access to healthcare and treatment for non-coronavirus related issues (58% for disabled people, compared with 31% for non-disabled people) and well-being (55% compared with 35%).

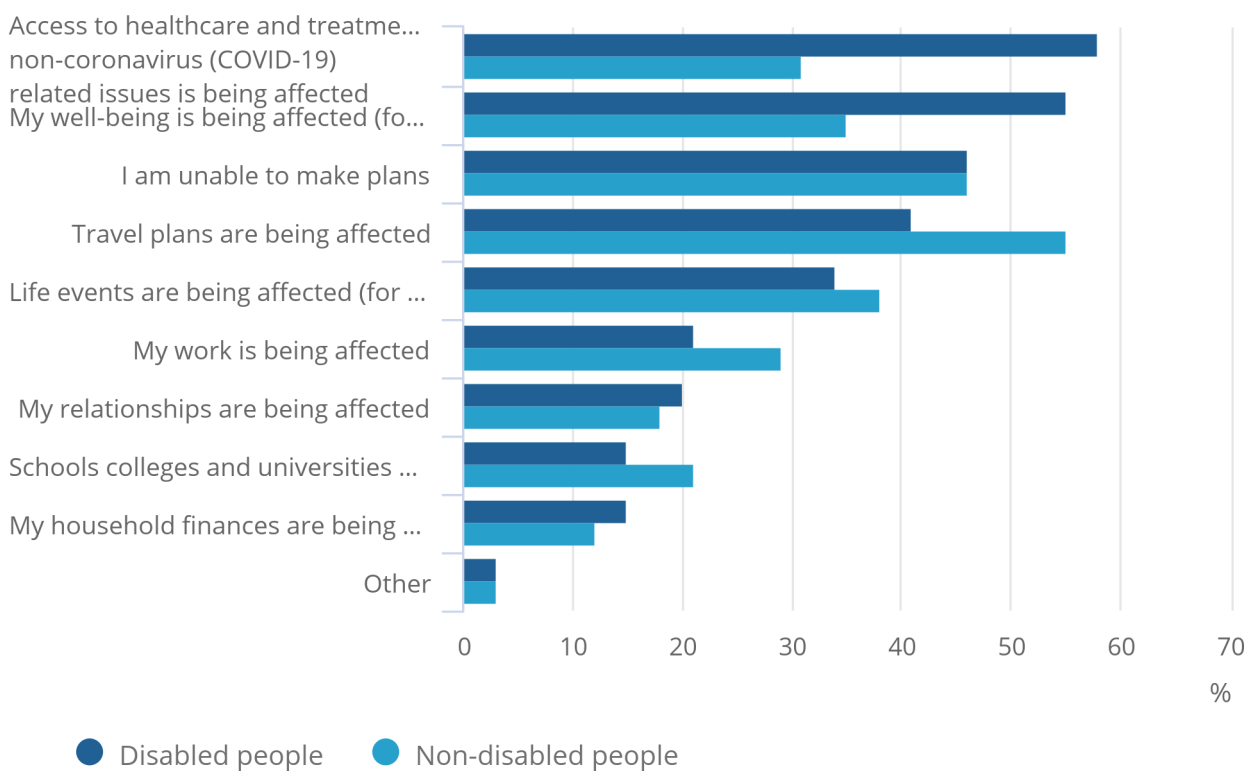
In contrast, non-disabled people more often indicated coronavirus had affected their life than disabled people in the following areas:

- travel plans (55% for non-disabled people, compared with 41% for disabled people)
- work (29% compared with 21%)
- schools, colleges and universities (21% compared with 15%) (Figure 3)

These differences have remained consistent over time.

Figure 3: Disabled people were twice as likely to report their access to healthcare and treatment for non-coronavirus related issues had been affected

Figure 3: Disabled people were twice as likely to report their access to healthcare and treatment for non-coronavirus related issues had been affected



Source: Office for National Statistics – Opinions and Lifestyle Survey

Notes:

1. Question: “In which ways is the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic affecting your life?”
2. Respondents were able to select more than one option.
3. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.

4 . Well-being and loneliness

At the beginning of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in March 2020, almost 7 in 10 disabled people (68%) reported that their well-being was affected. This proportion was lower for non-disabled people (48%). Since then, these proportions have fallen.

Throughout periods of restrictions easing in 2021, the proportion of disabled people reporting their well-being was affected by COVID-19 fell from 66% (in February 2021) to 55% (in August 2021). The proportion of non-disabled people reporting their well-being was affected also fell, from 51% to 32%.

In December 2021, these figures remained similar to August 2021 for both disabled and non-disabled people (55% and 35% respectively).

When asked how their well-being has been affected, disabled people were more likely to report:

- feeling stressed or anxious (79% compared with 68% for non-disabled people)
- worse mental health (50% compared with 31%)
- feeling like a burden on others (23% compared with 7%)

Well-being ratings

On average, [disabled people usually report lower ratings on all four well-being measures compared with non-disabled people](#). This remained the case throughout different stages of the pandemic (Figure 4).

In December 2021, disabled people on average:

- had lower life satisfaction (6.3 compared with 7.3 for non-disabled people)
- felt that things in their life were less worthwhile (6.6 compared with 7.6)
- felt less happy (6.2 compared with 7.4)
- were more anxious (5.1 compared with 3.7)

Figure 4: Disabled people consistently had poorer ratings on measures of personal well-being than non-disabled people

Great Britain, March 2020 to December 2021

Notes:

1. Questions: "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?", "Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?", "Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?" and "Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?".
2. These questions are answered on a scale from 0 ("not at all") to 10 ("completely").
3. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.
4. Pre-pandemic refers to data from year ending June 2019 from the Annual Population Survey. Data are based on adults aged 16 to 64 years.
5. Coronavirus (COVID-19) measures referenced in annotations refer to those in England only, although the chart presents Great Britain estimates. Please note that similar measures were used in Wales and Scotland.

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In December 2021, disabled people were also over four times more likely to experience some form of depression than non-disabled people (37% compared with 9%). Rates for both groups were higher than those observed before the coronavirus pandemic (27% and 4% respectively). Information on the definition of depression used can be found in the [Glossary](#). Previous estimates of people experiencing some form of depression by disability status were published in [August 2020](#), [December 2020](#), [May 2021](#) and [October 2021](#).

Loneliness

Since the start of the pandemic, disabled people have also been around twice as likely to report feeling lonely often, always or some of the time compared with non-disabled people (Figure 5).

Levels of loneliness for both disabled people (43%) and non-disabled people (21%) appeared to peak in February 2021 before gradually falling throughout periods of restrictions easing in 2021.

The proportion of disabled people reporting feeling lonely in December 2021 (40%) was similar to February 2021, while the proportion of non-disabled people reporting feeling lonely had fallen (18%).

Figure 5: Disabled people have consistently reported feeling lonely “often, always or some of the time” more than non-disabled people

Proportion reporting feeling lonely "often, always or some of the time", Great Britain, March 2020 to December 2021

Notes:

1. Question: "How often do you feel lonely?".
2. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.
3. Coronavirus (COVID-19) measures referenced in annotations refer to those in England only, although the chart presents Great Britain estimates. Please note that similar measures were used in Wales and Scotland.

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Disabled people also more frequently reported feeling lonely prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Information on well-being and loneliness before the pandemic is included in [Disability, well-being and loneliness, UK: 2019](#).

5 . Perceptions of the future

Since the start of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, disabled people have tended to be less optimistic than non-disabled people about life returning to normal (Figure 6).

In March 2020, a lower proportion of disabled people than non-disabled people reported that they thought that life would return to normal in less than a year (67% and 77% respectively). This trend has remained consistent throughout the pandemic, although the proportions have fallen. In December 2021, these figures had fallen to 12% and 18% respectively.

In contrast, the proportion of disabled people reporting that life will never return to normal has consistently been higher than non-disabled people. In May 2020, 8% of disabled people reported this, compared with 2% of non-disabled people. These proportions have steadily increased throughout 2021, to 18% and 11% respectively in December 2021.

Figure 6: Disabled people are less optimistic than non-disabled people about when their life might return to normal

Great Britain, March 2020 to December 2021

Notes:

1. Question: "How long do you think it will be before your life returns to normal?".
2. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.
3. Data for "Never" are only available from May 2020 onwards.
4. Not all response options are shown on this chart.
5. Coronavirus (COVID-19) measures referenced in annotations refer to those in England only, although the chart presents Great Britain estimates. Please note that similar measures were used in Wales and Scotland.

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6 . Cost of living

When asked about how their life had been affected by coronavirus (COVID-19), 15% of disabled people reported that their household finances were affected in December 2021. A similar proportion of non-disabled people (12%) reported this. Disabled and non-disabled people have generally reported being similarly affected since March 2020.

In December 2021, around three-quarters of disabled people (74%) reported that their cost of living had increased in the last month. This was higher than non-disabled people (64%).

When asked the reasons for this increase, disabled people most commonly reported that this was because of:

- price of food shopping (88%)
- gas or electricity bills (84%)
- price of fuel (67%)

These were also the most reported reasons for non-disabled people.

When considering their future ability to save money, disabled people have been less likely than non-disabled people to report that they would be able to save any money throughout the pandemic (Figure 7).

In March 2020, 32% of disabled people reported that they would be able to save money in the next 12 months, compared with 45% of non-disabled people. Proportions for both groups fell slightly in May 2020 (to 24% and 37% respectively), before increasing in February 2021 (to 39% and 54%).

In December 2021, disabled people remained less likely to report that they would be able to save money than non-disabled people (36% compared with 51%).

Figure 7: Disabled people remain less likely to report being able to save any money in the next 12 months

Proportion reporting "yes" to being able to save money in the next 12 months, Great Britain, March 2020 to December 2021

Notes:

1. Question: "In view of the general economic situation, do you think you will be able to save any money in the next 12 months?"
2. Base: Disabled or non-disabled people aged 16 years and over.
3. Coronavirus (COVID-19) measures referenced in annotations refer to those in England only, although the chart presents Great Britain estimates. Please note that similar measures were used in Wales and Scotland.

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In December 2021, disabled people also reported being less likely to be able to afford to pay an unexpected, but necessary, expense of £850 than non-disabled people (56% compared with 67%). Disabled people have consistently reported being less likely to afford such an expense since the start of the pandemic, although proportions for both groups have increased over this time (from 45% and 58%, respectively, in September 2020).

7 . Social impacts on disabled people data

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: March 2020 to December 2021](#)

Dataset | Released 2 February 2022

Estimates from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people in Great Britain. Analysis based on periods throughout the pandemic, from March 2020 to December 2021.

8 . Glossary

Depressive symptoms

Respondents were asked the following questions from the eight-item [Patient Health Questionnaire \(PHQ-8\)](#).

- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by having trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling tired or having little energy?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by having a poor appetite or overeating?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by feeling negative about yourself or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by having trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television?
- Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed; or being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual?

These questions had four response options ranging from 0 (Not at all) to 3 (Nearly every day). A "depression score" was then derived by summing all responses chosen, resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 24. The higher the score, the greater the severity of depressive symptoms.

A person's PHQ-8 score sits in one of two categories:

- no or mild symptoms -- this refers to a depression (PHQ-8) score of between 0 and 9 (inclusive)
- moderate to severe symptoms -- this refers to a depression (PHQ-8) score of between 10 and 24 (inclusive)

Disability status

To define disability in this publication, we refer to the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\) harmonised "core" definition](#). This identifies someone "disabled" as a person who has a physical or mental health condition or illness that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more and that reduces their ability to carry-out day-to-day activities. As such, this group will include those with mental health conditions such as depression. The GSS harmonised questions are asked of the respondent in the survey, meaning that disability status is self-reported. This definition of disability is consistent with the [Equality Act 2010](#).

Personal well-being

Personal well-being measures ask people to evaluate, on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely", how satisfied they are with their life overall, whether they feel the things they do in life are worthwhile, and their happiness and anxiety yesterday. Higher numbers equate to poorer well-being when considering the anxiety measure.

9 . Data sources and quality

This release contains data from a module being undertaken through the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on British society.

This release provides an update to [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain: February 2021](#) and compares how the social impacts on disabled people have changed throughout the pandemic. Estimates presented in this release may differ from those previously published because of methodological improvements.

A summary of results is presented, with further data including confidence intervals for the estimates contained in the [accompanying data tables](#). Where comparisons between groups or time periods are presented, 95% confidence intervals should be used to assess the [statistical significance](#) of the differences.

Background information on the OPN can be found in the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

Sampling and weighting

The analysis throughout this report is based on people aged 16 years and over in Great Britain. People were randomly selected from those that had previously completed the Labour Market Survey (LMS), Annual Population Survey (APS), European Health Interview Survey (EHIS) or OPN.

Where possible, we have pooled waves of data together to increase sample sizes and to smooth out fluctuations in data.

Throughout this bulletin:

- March 2020 refers to data collected between 27 March and 6 April 2020, shortly after lockdown restrictions were introduced by the UK Government at the end of March 2020
- April 2020 refers to data collected between 3 and 13 April 2020, shortly after lockdown restrictions were introduced by the UK Government at the end of March 2020
- May 2020 refers to data collected between 14 and 24 May 2020, a period in which some easing of initial lockdown restrictions began
- July 2020 refers to data collected between 8 and 19 July 2020, a period when initial lockdown restrictions were generally being eased further
- September 2020 refers to data collected between 24 September and 4 October 2020, a period where new rules had been introduced about socialising and local lockdowns
- February 2021 refers to data collected between 3 and 28 February 2021, a period in which "stay at home" lockdown rules were again applied across Great Britain and the [roadmap out of lockdown](#) for England was published as was a [strategic framework](#) for easing restrictions in Scotland (23 February) and [updated guidance](#) was provided in Wales (19 February).
- May 2021 refers to data collected between 21 April and 16 May 2021, shortly after [step 2 of the roadmap](#) was implemented in England
- June 2021 refers to data collected between 26 May and 20 June 2021, shortly after [step 3 of the roadmap](#) was implemented in England
- August 2021 refers to data collected between 21 July and 15 August 2021, shortly after [step 4 of the roadmap](#) was implemented in England
- December 2021 refers to data collected between 15 December 2021 and 3 January 2022, shortly after [Plan B measures](#) were implemented in England

Survey weights were applied to make estimates at each time point representative of the population.

Some survey questions asked for people's responses in reference to "the past seven days". These results have been presented as representing people's views during the month specified, even though attitudes may have changed slightly between the dates included.

Further information on the survey design and quality can be found in the [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey QMI](#).

10 . Related links

[Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 21 January 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 21 January 2022

Indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey covering the period 6 to 16 January 2022, to understand the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on people, households and communities in Great Britain.

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

Web page | Updated as data become available

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

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) latest insights](#)

Web page | Updated as data become available

An interactive tool to explore the latest data and trends about the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other sources.

[Coronavirus and depression in adults, Great Britain: July to August 2021](#)

Article | Released 1 October 2021

Analysis of the proportion of the adult population of Great Britain experiencing some form of depression in summer 2021, based on the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey. Includes analysis by age, sex and other characteristics and comparisons with early 2021, 2020 and pre-coronavirus estimates.

[Outcomes for disabled people in the UK: 2020](#)

Article | Released 18 February 2021

Outcomes for disabled people across areas of life: education, employment, social participation, housing, well-being, loneliness and crime. Analysis by disability status and by age, sex, impairment type and severity, country and region based on survey data.