

Statistical bulletin

Coronavirus and self-isolation after testing positive in England: 17 to 26 March 2022

Behaviour of individuals advised to self-isolate after testing positive for COVID-19, from the COVID-19 Attitudes Study. Includes information on the impact of self-isolation on well-being and finances. Experimental Statistics.

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Table of contents

1. [Main points](#)
2. [Self-isolation after testing positive data](#)
3. [Glossary](#)
4. [Measuring the data](#)
5. [Strengths and limitations](#)
6. [Related links](#)

1 . Main points

- Respondents in this survey tested positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) after 24 February 2022, when the legal requirement to self-isolate was removed; interviews took place between 17 and 26 March 2022, when self-isolation was advised but not legally required.
- The levels of full compliance for this period (53%) are statistically significantly lower than those reported in early March 2022 (64%) and February 2022 (80%).
- Of those who had self-isolated since testing positive but stopped isolating at the time of the interview, around 40% had isolated for 10 days or more.
- Almost all (98%) respondents agreed that it was important to follow self-isolation advice.
- Of those who did not fully follow the advice, 94% reported leaving the house for a non-compliant reason; the most common reason reported was for outdoor recreation or exercise (40%).
- Almost all (94%) respondents who were in work (full time, part time, or unpaid), or receiving sick pay or unpaid leave from work, reported that their employer was aware they were advised to self-isolate, despite the removal of the legal obligation to inform employers.

The statistics presented are Experimental Statistics, so care needs to be taken when interpreting them. The survey has a relatively small number of respondents (1,286) and the behaviour of respondents during self-isolation is self-reported. The sample used for this survey is different to previous waves, because of recent policy changes. For more information on this, please see [Section 4: Measuring the Data](#).

Statistician's comment

“Today’s data show compliance with self-isolation advice was notably lower compared with levels reported earlier in the year. It is important to note that self-isolation was advised but not legally required during the time of data collection.

“Of those who did not fully follow self-isolation advice, the most common reason for those leaving the house was for outdoor recreation or exercise.”

Tim Gibbs, Head of the Public Services Analysis Team, Office for National Statistics

Follow the Public Services Analysis team on Twitter: [@HughStick](#)

2 . Self-isolation after testing positive data

[Coronavirus and self-isolation after testing positive in England](#)

Dataset | Released 20 April 2022

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

3 . Glossary

Self-isolation

Self-isolation refers to not leaving your home because you have, or might have, coronavirus (COVID-19). As of 24 February 2022, it is no longer a legal requirement to self-isolate if you test positive for COVID-19. Respondents in this survey tested positive after this policy change and were therefore not legally required to self-isolate.

Until 1 April 2022, adults and children who tested positive continued to be advised to stay home and avoid contact with other people for at least five full days, and to follow the guidance until after receiving two negative test results on consecutive days. When self-isolating, people were advised not to have visitors unless the purpose of the visit was to provide essential care. At the time of data collection, the self-isolation period included the day symptoms started (or the day of receiving the positive test result if there were no symptoms) and the next 5 to 10 full days. If symptoms remained after 10 days, people were advised to continue self-isolating until their symptoms were gone.

More information can be found in the [NHS guidance on what to do if you have coronavirus \(COVID-19\) or symptoms of COVID-19](#).

Symptoms

Symptoms that indicate an individual should self-isolate prior to a positive test result are a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or loss of sense of smell or taste.

Symptoms reported by respondents that do not indicate self-isolation if experienced without a high temperature, a new continuous cough, or loss of sense of smell or taste are:

- shortness of breath or trouble breathing
- runny or stuffy nose
- muscle or body aches
- headaches
- sore throat
- fatigue
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- severe stomach pain

From 1 April 2022, [NHS England published an updated list of COVID-19 symptoms](#). They advised that individuals should try to stay at home and avoid contact with other people if they had symptoms of COVID-19; these were a high temperature or not feeling well enough to work or do normal activities. This change happened after the data collection period.

Statistical significance

The term "significant" refers to statistically significant changes or differences. Significance has been determined using the 95% confidence intervals, where instances of non-overlapping confidence intervals between estimates indicate the difference is unlikely to have arisen from random fluctuation. More information is available on our [uncertainty pages](#).

4 . Measuring the data

Estimates for Wave 13

This is the 13th bulletin in this series. The 13th wave of data was collected between 17 and 26 March 2022. The number of respondents was 1,286.

Following the [Prime Minister's announcement that contact tracing would cease from 24 February 2022](#), the data source used for sampling in Wave 13 is different from previous waves. Earlier waves contained data collected as part of the [NHS Test and Trace contract tracing process](#), whereas the database used for Wave 13 contained only information collected at the time of registering a positive test. Respondents were sampled from this database using implicit stratification by region, sex, and age. The characteristics of people taking coronavirus (COVID-19) tests have also likely changed. Since 24 February 2022, close contacts are no longer informed by the contact tracing system that they may be infected; this will likely change test-taking behaviour in different demographic groups.

Respondents were aged 18 years and over, had tested positive for COVID-19 on either 10, 13 or 18 March 2022. The survey was conducted via the telephone and all answers were self-reported.

The majority (91%) of respondents were interviewed between 6 and 10 days after starting their self-isolation. The remaining 9% of respondents were interviewed between 11 and 15 days after starting their self-isolation.

Of the potential respondents who were successfully contacted by an interviewer, the response rate was 77.5%. When including cases where contact was attempted but not made, the response rate was 19.8%.

A low response rate can be expected because the target population may have been unwell with COVID-19, and therefore less likely to participate.

Percentages in this report are based on weighted counts that are representative of the population of adults (aged 18 years and over) who had tested positive for COVID-19 and began their self-isolation period between 15 February and 15 March 2022 (inclusive).

Experimental statistics

The statistics presented are Experimental Statistics, so care needs to be taken when interpreting them. The survey has a relatively small number of respondents (1,286) and the behaviour of respondents during self-isolation is self-reported.

5 . Strengths and limitations

Information on the strengths and limitations of this survey is available in [our Coronavirus and self-isolation after testing positive in England methodology](#).

6 . Related links

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) and self-isolation after testing positive in England methodology](#)

Methodology | Released 4 May 2021

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

[COVID-19: people with COVID-19 and their contacts](#)

Webpage | Last updated 22 March 2022

Guidance from the UK Health Security Agency for people with coronavirus and their contacts.

[COVID-19 Response: Living with COVID-19](#)

Webpage | Last updated 23 February 2022

The government's plan for removing the remaining legal restrictions while protecting people most vulnerable to COVID-19 and maintaining resilience.

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

Webpage | Updated as and when data become available

Latest data and analysis on coronavirus in the UK and its effect on the economy and society.

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

Blog | Updated as and when data become available

A live roundup of the latest data and trends about the coronavirus pandemic from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other sources.

[Coronavirus and self-isolation after being in contact with a positive case in England: 9 to 16 August 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 8 September 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.

[Coronavirus and behaviour of the vaccinated population after being in contact with a positive case in England: 21 to 26 February 2022](#)

Bulletin | Released 14 March 2022

Behaviour of fully vaccinated individuals not required to self-isolate after being in contact with a positive case of COVID-19, from the COVID Test and Trace Contacts Behavioural Insights Survey. Includes analysis of daily rapid lateral flow testing. Experimental Statistics.