

Statistical bulletin

Attitudes towards COVID-19 among passengers arriving into the UK: February 2021 to June 2021

Monthly figures on the attitudes of UK and overseas residents arriving into the UK towards social distancing, mask wearing, and COVID-19 restrictions and the proportion who had been vaccinated, using unweighted results from the International Passenger Survey, February to June 2021 (experimental statistics).

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1 . Main Points

- The number of UK residents arriving back into the UK who have been vaccinated rose between February and June 2021, from 6% to 62%, a trend broadly reflecting the vaccine rollout in the UK over this time period.
- Roughly two-thirds of all UK (66%) and overseas residents (69%) interviewed felt safe with social distancing during their journey in June 2021, which has remained broadly consistent since February 2021.
- Most UK and overseas residents arriving in the UK said the wearing of face coverings made them feel safe during their journey with overseas residents slightly more likely than UK residents to say that wearing face coverings made them feel safe (75% and 69% respectively), although as these are unweighted figures this cannot be called a statistically significant difference.
- The proportion of both UK residents and overseas residents in June 2021 (52% and 64% respectively) who said coronavirus (COVID-19) testing was very important fell from the corresponding figures in May 2021 (64% and 73% respectively).
- Most UK residents arriving in the UK found following overseas COVID-19 restrictions either difficult, or very difficult (80% in June 2021), but conversely most overseas residents said that they understood UK COVID-19 restrictions either quite well, or very well.
- Despite understanding UK COVID-19 restrictions quite well or very well; most overseas residents said between February and June 2021 that they were either not at all confident, or not very confident in accessing information about UK COVID-19 restrictions.

This bulletin contains unweighted data. This means the results are based on the responses of only the people interviewed, and do not account for any differences in the respondent group compared with all people travelling during the period. The results should not be considered indicative of the travelling population as a whole and cannot be compared with weighted data. See [Section 10](#).

2 . Proportion of travellers, arriving in the UK, who had received at least one COVID-19 Vaccination

Older UK residents interviewed arriving into the UK were more likely to have been vaccinated than younger UK residents. Our findings (Figure 1) align with the progress of the vaccine rollout in the UK. UK residents in the older age groups were more likely to have received their vaccine earlier in the period, February to June 2021, than those in the younger age groups. In May and June 2021, as the vaccine rollout was extended and offered to younger age groups, the proportion of UK residents vaccinated in the younger age groups increased, although the proportions remained lower in these age groups compared with older travellers. In June 2021, 62% of UK residents and 62% of overseas residents arriving into the UK had had at least one dose of a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. Of those surveyed, the trend in the vaccination status of overseas residents was similar to the trend for UK residents.

Figure 1: Older UK and overseas residents interviewed, returning to the UK, were more likely to have had a COVID-19 vaccination than younger travellers

UK and overseas residents returning to the UK who had received at least one COVID-19 vaccination by age group and month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

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3 . Attitudes towards social distancing

The majority of UK residents (66%) and overseas residents (69%) interviewed arriving into the UK in June, felt safe because of social distancing during their journey. While there was a rise in the proportion of UK residents who said they felt safe between March and April 2021, proportions remained largely consistent across the period for overseas residents (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Most UK and overseas residents said that social distancing had made them feel safe during their journey back to the UK

UK and overseas residents interviewed categorised by how safe they felt due to social distancing during their journey and by month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

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4 . Attitudes towards wearing of face coverings

Most UK and overseas residents interviewed said that the wearing of face coverings made them feel safe during their journey into the UK. This is a trend that remained stable during the period between February and June 2021. Slightly more overseas residents than UK residents (6 percentage points) said that the wearing of face coverings made them feel safe (75% and 69% in June 2021 respectively) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: The majority of UK and overseas residents interviewed said that the wearing of face coverings made them feel safe during their journey

UK and overseas residents interviewed categorised by how safe they felt due to the wearing of face coverings by month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

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5 . Attitudes towards hand sanitiser availability

The majority of travellers interviewed (72% of UK residents and 71% of overseas residents in June 2021), said that availability of hand sanitiser during their journey made them feel safe. This trend has remained consistent amongst UK residents over the period, while there has been a slight decline, since February, in the proportion of overseas residents who said that the availability of hand sanitiser made them feel safe.

6 . Attitudes towards COVID-19 testing

In June 2021, 52% of UK residents and 64% of overseas residents arriving into the UK thought a coronavirus (COVID-19) test was very important for safety (Figure 4). Amongst both groups there has been a decline in this opinion since February 2021, particularly between May and June 2021. However, the increase in the proportion who said that testing was “quite important”, means that overall COVID-19 testing remains “important” for the majority of travellers.

In June 2021, the proportions of both UK residents and overseas residents who thought COVID-19 testing was very important for safety was less than the proportions of those who said that they felt safe on their journey because of social distancing, the wearing of face coverings, and the availability of hand sanitiser. This is the first month this has occurred.

Figure 4: Most UK and overseas residents interviewed thought COVID-19 testing is very important for safety, however this decreased over time

UK and overseas residents interviewed categorised by how important they think taking a COVID-19 test is for safety by month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

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7 . Understanding and accessibility of UK and overseas COVID-19 restrictions

The majority of UK residents interviewed, found it either difficult (47%) or very difficult (33%) to follow overseas coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions (June 2021); this has remained consistent since February 2021 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Most UK residents interviewed find it difficult or very difficult to follow overseas COVID-19 restrictions

UK residents interviewed categorised by how difficult they found it to follow overseas restrictions by month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

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Conversely, the majority of overseas residents interviewed arriving into the UK said they understood UK COVID-19 restrictions either quite well or very well, a trend that has remained consistent since February 2021 (Figure 6). In June 2021 26% of overseas residents said that they understood UK restrictions quite well, and 69% understood them very well. Very few said they did not understand restrictions very well (2%) or did not understand them at all (0%).

Figure 6: Most overseas residents interviewed understand UK COVID-19 restrictions very well or quite well

Overseas residents interviewed categorised by how well they understood UK COVID-19 restrictions by month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

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Although overseas residents interviewed were more likely to say they understood UK COVID-19 restrictions very well, in June 2021 70% of overseas residents said that they were not at all confident accessing information about the UK's COVID-19 restrictions. This proportion has remained consistently above 65% since February 2021 (Figure 7). In June 2021, 70% said they were not at all confident accessing this information with an additional 26% being not very confident. Only 2% felt somewhat confident or very confident accessing information about the UK's COVID-19 restrictions.

Figure 7: Most overseas residents interviewed are not at all confident or not very confident accessing information about UK COVID-19 restrictions

Overseas residents interviewed categorised by how confident they are accessing information about UK COVID-19 restrictions by month, United Kingdom, February 2021 to June 2021

Download the data

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8 . Attitudes towards COVID-19 among passengers arriving into the United Kingdom data

[International Passenger Survey findings on COVID-19](#)

Dataset | Released 9 August 2021

Monthly figures about attitudes of United Kingdom (UK) and overseas residents arriving into the UK, towards social distancing, mask wearing, hand sanitiser availability and COVID-19 restrictions and the proportion of travellers who have received at least one vaccine dose, using unweighted results from the International Passenger Survey for the period covering February to June 2021 (experimental statistics).

9 . Glossary

Overseas resident

A person who, being permanently resident in a country outside the UK, visits the UK for a period of less than 12 months. UK citizens resident overseas for 12 months or more coming home on leave are included in this category. Visits abroad are visits for a period of less than 12 months by people permanently resident in the UK (who may be of foreign nationality).

Traffic light system

A new traffic light system has been in place since 17 May 2021, banding countries into ["green", "amber" and "red" lists](#). It is important to note that the categorisation of countries has changed throughout the period between February and June 2021 reported in this data, and this should be considered when analysing the results of the data on understanding and accessing information on restrictions.

Vaccine rollout

The rollout of the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine across the UK, phase one of which began in December 2020, with the [full vaccine delivery plan](#) available.

10 . Measuring the data

Methods used to produce these findings

This bulletin uses data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). IPS data is regularly released in the [Travel and Tourism](#) series. The data presented in this bulletin are based on new questions which have been added to the IPS to collect data measuring the attitudes towards and experiences of coronavirus (COVID-19) and associated restrictions, among travellers arriving into the UK. [Detailed information on the IPS methodology is available](#).

All COVID-19 questions were asked of all respondents arriving into the UK with the following exceptions:

The following two questions are only asked to overseas residents:

- "How well do you understand the Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations that will apply to you during your visit to the UK?"
- "How confident are you that you know how to access official information on Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations for the UK?"

The following question is only asked to UK residents:

- "Overall, how easy or difficult did you find it to follow Coronavirus (COVID-19) regulations during your stay overseas?"

Totals shown, and those used to calculate percentages, include all overseas arrivals (international visitors to the UK and UK residents arriving back into the UK). Questions were not asked of travellers leaving the UK. Residents of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man have been counted as overseas residents (as have all Crown dependencies). Sea and tunnel data are excluded as the numbers are too small; because of coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions it wasn't possible to interview on board Dover ferries or the Eurotunnel. Overall, sea and tunnel numbers are much lower than pre-COVID and show a 75% drop in passengers.

Accuracy and reliability of the data used

The sample used for both UK and overseas residents across the study (February to June 2021) totals 17,720. Individual breakdowns by residency and month cannot be supplied because of disclosure control of low counts. Age groupings were based on self-reported data which is not verified.

Around 90% of international traffic into and out of the UK is subject to IPS sampling. COVID-19 questions were not asked if a person under 16 years was sampled unless permission from their parent or guardian was obtained. Due to social distancing guidelines, interviewers must maintain a two meter distance from respondents, which presents challenges in terms of obtaining response. It is much more difficult to present the tablet to the respondent to select a response at this distance.

It is very difficult to predict the numbers of interviews that can be expected to be achieved in the current operating circumstances, where interviews are being conducted under social distancing and passenger flow is likely to be very low. We have attempted to offset the effects of the low numbers of anticipated travellers by reducing sampling intervals (so a higher proportion are selected for interview).

Using unweighted data

In order to provide the timeliest insights, this bulletin contains unweighted data based on the actual numbers of people interviewed, meaning no account is taken of the different numbers of travellers represented by each respondent to the survey. Trends observed in unweighted data over time may be because of changes in the composition of survey respondents, rather than trends for the whole travelling population. Analysis comparing the weighted and unweighted data for February and March 2021 found little difference in trends, suggesting this unweighted data can be considered as broadly indicative.

This also means no confidence intervals are provided and therefore caution must be taken when comparing figures and conclusions drawn from this sample time series, comparison should not be extended to all travellers travelling during this period. Totals should also not be compared with the weighted totals in the Travel and Tourism bulletins.

The following quality caveats associated with using unweighted data should be considered.

The IPS sample is drawn to be representative by quarter and therefore may not be evenly distributed across each month in terms of which traffic is sampled. For example, this could mean that by chance in one month more boats were sampled than other months simply because of shift allocation. A further example could be that one month simply happened to have more weekend shifts than weekday shifts.

Potential differences in mode of transport and the sample sizes between those modes from month to month could cause what look like changes in the data each month. However, it could just be that the composition of the sample has changed from month to month.

Some routes are overrepresented in the data because of the sample design, for example air travel to Heathrow. Potential policy changes that only affect one route or mode of transport could have an unrepresentative effect on the sample shown.

Due to the unweighted data providing smaller samples for each month, comparisons in this bulletin looking for reasons for differences between the months are based on observations in the data and not on statistically significant differences. These are experimental statistics which are being published to involve users and stakeholders at an early stage in assessing their suitability and quality.

Future developments

This release will continue to be updated on a monthly basis; therefore, in September we will publish data up to July 2021. We are looking for feedback on this release from readers to incorporate into future releases. Please use the contact details listed to provide feedback.

11 . Related links

[Overseas Travel and Tourism, provisional: January to March 2021](#)

Article | Released 23 July 2021

Quarterly estimates of visits to the UK by overseas residents, air visits abroad by UK residents and estimates of spending by travellers, using the International Passenger Survey and administrative sources of passenger travel data for the period covering April to December 2020.

[Overseas Travel and Tourism: 2020](#)

Article | Released 24 May 2021

Annual estimates of visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and estimates of spending by travellers, using administrative sources of passenger travel data for the period covering April to December 2020.

[Travelpac: travel to and from the UK](#)

Dataset | Released 24 July 2020

Quarterly data on travel to and from the UK, taken from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). Includes detail on age and sex of travellers, purpose and length of trip, and spending. These data are in a form suitable for small businesses and students.

[Travel trends: 2019](#)

In depth analysis | Released 22 May 2020

Annual estimates of travel and tourism visits to the UK (of less than 12 months' duration) and associated earnings and expenditure between the UK and the rest of the world.

[Overseas travel and tourism, provisional: April to June 2020](#)

In depth analysis | Released 9 November 2020

Visits to the UK by overseas residents, visits abroad by UK residents and estimates of spending by travellers, using administrative sources of passenger travel data.