

Over half of adults worried Covid-19 cases will rise as lockdown eases

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Over half (57%) of adults are concerned that cases of COVID-19 will increase after the current lockdown restrictions are eased, find UCL researchers as part of the COVID-19 Social Study.

Over two fifths (43%) also report being worried that hospitals will be overwhelmed after restrictions are eased. While high, these figures are lower than they were at a similar point in the first lockdown (May 2020), when 78% of people were concerned about an increase in COVID-19 cases, but similar to the 44% concerned about hospitals being overwhelmed after easing took place. Over half (53%) of people are also concerned that adherence to social distancing measures will fall once lockdown easing begins.

Over a third (37%) of people are concerned about a possible economic recession and a third (33%) about increased unemployment levels after lockdown restrictions are lifted. These concerns are more common among adults of working age (ages 18-59: 34%) than those aged 60 and up (30%), who are more likely to be approaching

retirement or already retired. A quarter (26%) of adults under the age of 30 are concerned about pollution increasing once restrictions are lifted.

Launched in the week before lockdown started, the ongoing UCL COVID-19 Social Study is funded by the Nuffield Foundation with additional support from Wellcome and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). It is the UK's largest study into how adults are feeling about the lockdown, government advice and overall wellbeing and [mental health](#) with over 70,000 participants who have been followed across the last 48 weeks.

Lead author, Dr. Elise Paul (UCL Epidemiology & Health Care) said: "Our report shows that in January and up to the time just before the plan for easing of restrictions in England was announced on 22 February, a wide range of concerns remain unresolved for many.

"While news of a vaccine means that the relaxing of restrictions is perceived as less dangerous than it was last year, people are understandably still worried about another spike in COVID-19 cases should lockdown restrictions be eased, as well as the subsequent worry about the ability of hospitals to deal with an influx of new patients should this happen. These worries may well be amplified by the second wave of the virus which occurred after the easing of the first national lockdown.

"Economic concerns are also prevalent among those of working age, who may have been furloughed throughout the pandemic or lost their source of income. The return to 'normality' and removal of the economic safety net put in place by the Government would therefore be a source of significant anxiety.

"The worry among younger adults about the increase in pollution following the removal of lockdown restrictions is also unsurprising. With [climate change](#) seen as an existential threat,

especially among younger people, the increase in emissions which will result from the resumption of commuting and air travel will amplify existing anxieties."

The activities people are missing most during lockdown are broadly the same as they have been throughout the pandemic, with almost two thirds reporting missing meeting up with friends (64%) and family (61%). Over half of adults miss going out for meals, coffee or drinks, and going on holiday, but just 13% report missing going in to the office for work.

Compliance with lockdown rules remains at its highest levels since May 2020, with 96% of people reporting 'majority' compliance with the rules and around 60% reporting 'complete' compliance. This figure has remained consistent since the start of this year.

Cheryl Lloyd, Education Programme Head at the Nuffield Foundation said: "In England, confidence in central government has increased since the beginning of the year as COVID-19 case numbers have decreased and the vaccine roll out has begun. However, these [survey results](#) show that people remain concerned about the prospect of the NHS becoming overwhelmed, economic uncertainty and another increase in COVID-19 cases. As we move towards lockdown lifting, the government should ensure public health messaging is clear and adequate support is in place for those vulnerable to the continued economic, health and social effects of the pandemic."

The study team is also running the COVID-MINDS Network: an international network of over 140 longitudinal mental health from over 70 countries. Through the network, dozens of scientists and clinicians are coming together internationally to collate results from mental health studies running in countries around the world and compare findings. The initiative is supporting the launch of new mental health studies in other countries, to research whether actions taken in specific countries are helping to protect mental [health](#).

Provided by University College London

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