

Statistical bulletin

Attitudes towards COVID-19 among passengers arriving into the UK: February 2021 to July 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 for the period covering February to July 2021 (experimental statistics).

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1 . Main points

- Most UK residents arriving in the UK found following overseas coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions either difficult, or very difficult (84% in July 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 July 2021 that they were either not at all confident, or not very confident in accessing information about UK COVID-19 restrictions.
- The number of UK residents arriving back into the UK who have been vaccinated rose between February to July 2021, from 6% to 78%, a trend broadly reflecting the vaccine rollout in the UK over this time period.
- Roughly two thirds of all UK (64%) and overseas residents (68%) interviewed felt safe with social distancing during their journey in July 2021, which has remained broadly consistent since April 2021 for UK residents, and since February 2021 for overseas residents.
- More than two thirds of both UK and overseas residents arriving in the UK in July 2021 said the wearing of face coverings made them feel safe during their journey.
- The proportion of both UK residents and overseas residents in July 2021 who said COVID-19 testing was very important (53% and 61% respectively) remained consistent with June 2021 (52% and 64% respectively), but had fallen compared with May 2021 (64% and 73% respectively).

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. Therefore, 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

In July 2021, 78% of UK residents and 79% of overseas residents arriving into the UK had had at least the first dose of a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine. This compares with 86% of UK residents reported to have had at least the first dose of their vaccine by 31 July 2021, according to [the UK Coronavirus Dashboard](#), maintained by the UK Government. Older UK residents arriving into the UK continue to be 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. Respondents in the older age groups are more likely to have received their vaccine earlier in the period between February and July 2021. The proportion vaccinated in the younger age groups increased between May and July 2021, as the vaccine rollout was extended and offered to younger age groups in the UK. The trend in the vaccination status of overseas residents was similar to that observed 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 interviewed returning to the UK who had received at least one COVID-19 vaccination, by age group and month, UK, February to July 2021

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3 . Attitudes towards social distancing

The majority of UK residents (64%) and overseas residents (68%) interviewed arriving into the UK in July 2021 said they 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 have remained largely consistent across the period for overseas residents (Figure 2). There was an increase in travellers who answered "don't know" among both UK (9.1%) and overseas (7.1%) residents in July 2021 compared with June 2021 (2.9% and 2.7% respectively). This corresponds with a decrease in all other response categories (except for "neither safe nor unsafe" for UK residents) suggesting travellers were becoming more unsure of how safe or unsafe they felt with social distancing on their journey.

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

UK and overseas residents interviewed categorised by how safe they felt because of social distancing during their journey, by month, UK, February to July 2021

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4 . Attitudes towards wearing of face coverings

At least two-thirds of UK and overseas residents 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 July 2021 (Figure 3). There has been a steady decline between April and July 2021 (74% to 67% respectively) in the proportion of UK residents who said the wearing of face coverings made them feel safe.

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 because of the wearing of face coverings, by month, UK, February to July 2021

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5 . Attitudes towards hand sanitiser availability

The majority of travellers in July 2021 (68% of UK residents and 68% of overseas residents) said the availability of hand sanitiser during their journey made them feel safe (Figure 4). This is a continuation of the decline, seen since February, in the proportion of overseas residents who said the availability of hand sanitiser made them feel safe (75% to 68%). However, the decrease in the proportion of UK residents who felt safe has only been seen between June and July 2021 (72% to 68%).

Figure 4: The majority of UK and overseas residents interviewed said that the availability of hand sanitiser made them feel safe during their journey

UK and overseas residents interviewed categorised by how safe they felt because of the availability of hand sanitiser, by month, UK, February to July 2021

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6 . Attitudes towards COVID-19 testing

In July 2021, 53% of UK residents and 61% of overseas residents arriving into the UK said they thought a coronavirus (COVID-19) test was very important for safety (Figure 5). There has been a decline in this opinion among both groups since February 2021, particularly between May and June 2021. While July continues the downward trend in the proportion of travellers that thought testing was very important for safety, the decline between June and July is smaller than that observed between May and June. However, this decline is balanced by the increase in the proportion who said that testing was "quite important", meaning that overall COVID-19 testing remains "important" for the majority of travellers.

In July 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 was the second consecutive month this has occurred. Prior to this (between February and May 2021), the proportion of people who felt safe on their journey was the lowest for these measures. The change between May and June 2021 was driven by the aforementioned decline in those who felt a COVID-19 test was very important for safety.

Figure 5: Most UK and overseas residents interviewed thought COVID-19 testing was very important for safety, however this has decreased over time

UK and overseas residents interviewed categorised by how important they thought taking a COVID-19 test was for safety, by month, UK, February to July 2021

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

In July, the majority of UK residents arriving back into the UK said that they had found it either difficult (48%) or very difficult (36%) to follow overseas coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions (Figure 6). These figures compare with 43% finding it difficult and 32% finding it very difficult in March 2021, resulting in a steady increase between March and July 2021.

Figure 6: Most UK residents interviewed found 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, UK, February to July 2021

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Conversely, the majority of overseas residents 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 7). In July 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 (1%).

Figure 7: Most overseas residents interviewed understood UK COVID-19 restrictions very well or quite well

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

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Although overseas residents were more likely to say they understood UK COVID-19 restrictions very well, in July 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 8). In July 2021, 26% said they were not very confident accessing this information. Only 2% felt somewhat confident or very confident accessing information about the UK's COVID-19 restrictions.

Figure 8: Most overseas residents interviewed were not at all confident or not very confident accessing information about UK COVID-19 restrictions

Overseas residents interviewed categorised by how confident they were accessing information about UK COVID-19 restrictions, by month, UK, February to July 2021

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

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

Dataset | Released 6 September 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 July 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 [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) traffic light system for travel](#) 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 July 2021 reported in this data, and this should be considered when analysing the results of the data on understanding and accessing information about restrictions.

Vaccine rollout

The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine across the UK, phase one of which began in December 2020, following [the Department of Health and Social Care's full UK COVID-19 vaccines delivery plan](#).

10 . Measuring the data

Methods used to produce these findings

This bulletin uses data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). IPS data are regularly released in the [Travel and Tourism](#) series. The data presented in this bulletin are based on new questions that 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. We have published information on [the International passenger survey methodology](#).

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

The following two questions are only asked to overseas residents:

"How well do you understand the 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 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 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 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-coronavirus and show a 75% drop in passengers.

This release will continue to be updated monthly; therefore, in October we will publish data up to August 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 . Strengths and limitations

The sample used for both UK and overseas residents across the study (February to July 2021) totals 22,896. 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 aged under 16 years was sampled unless permission from their parent or guardian was obtained. Because of social distancing guidelines, interviewers must maintain a two-metre 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 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 article 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.

Because of the unweighted data providing smaller samples for each month, comparisons in this article 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.

12 . Related links

[Attitudes towards COVID-19 among passengers arriving into the United Kingdom: February 2021 to June 2021](#)

Bulletin | Released 9 August 2021

Monthly figures of the attitudes of United Kingdom (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 for the period covering February to June 2021 (experimental statistics).

[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](#)

Article | 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](#)

Bulletin | 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.

