ESRI

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Social Activity Measure
Dec 9th – Dec 16th

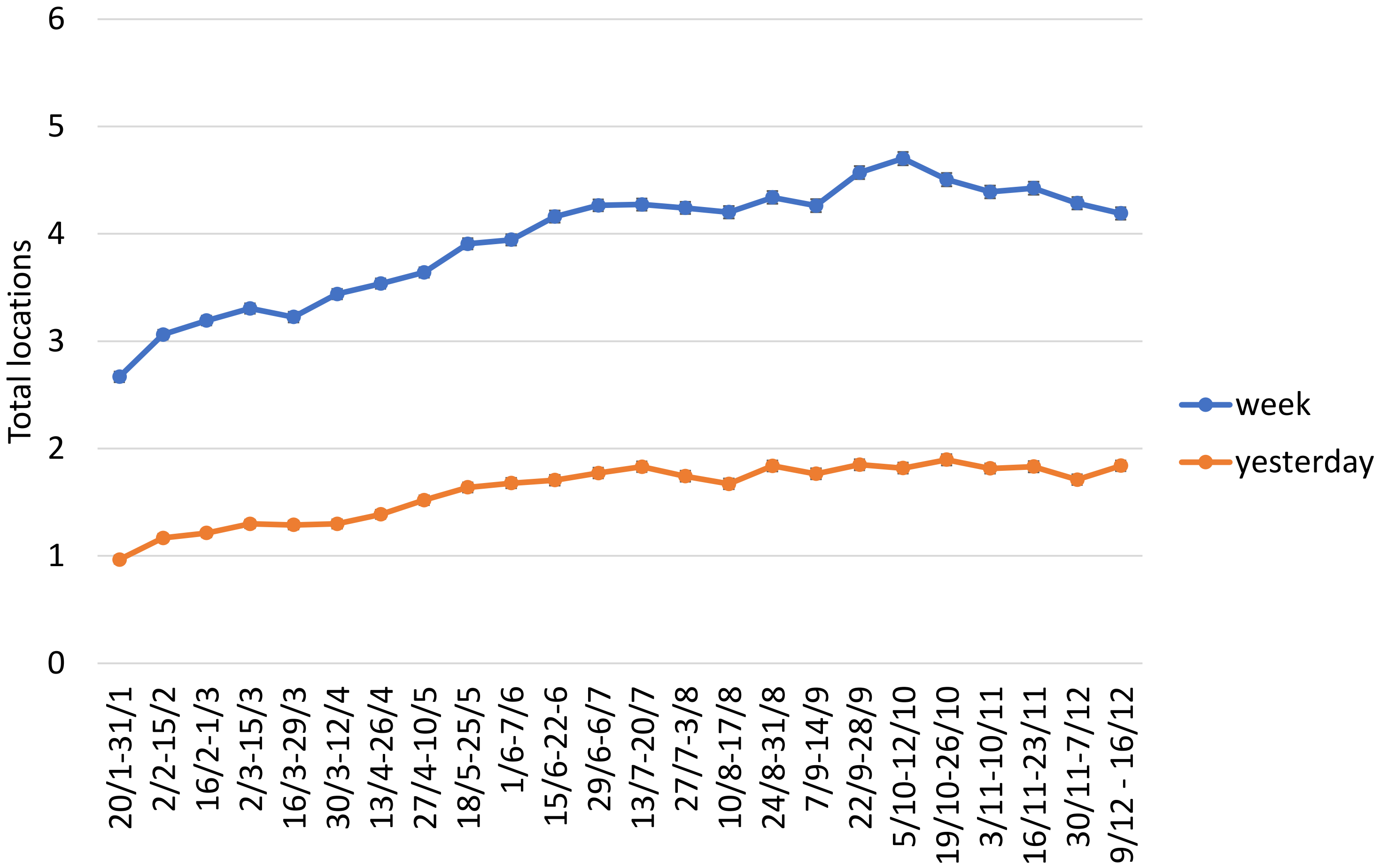
ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Social Activity Measure (SAM) is a behavioural study that records the public response to the risk of COVID-19 infection over time. Designed by the ESRI's Behavioural Research Unit (BRU), SAM is an anonymous, interactive, online study that surveys people about their recent activity. The study offers insight into where and how risks of COVID-19 transmission arise. SAM aims to inform policy regarding the opening of parts of the economy and society, while keeping COVID-19 under control. The survey was updated in October 2021 to include more detailed information on behavioural changes and future plans. The research was designed by the BRU in consultation with the Department of the Taoiseach, which funds the work. The survey is completely anonymous. Where comparisons between survey rounds are highlighted, they are statistically significant.

TIMING

This slide deck presents results from a nationally representative sample of 1,000 people aged 18 and over who participated in the study between December 9th and 16th. Data were collected during a period when the news was dominated by predictions of a rapid wave of infections caused by the Omicron variant and the likelihood that these predictions would lead to tighter public health restrictions for the Christmas period. A set of tighter restrictions was announced the day following the completion of data collection, including curtailing the opening hours of pubs and restaurants to no later than 8pm.

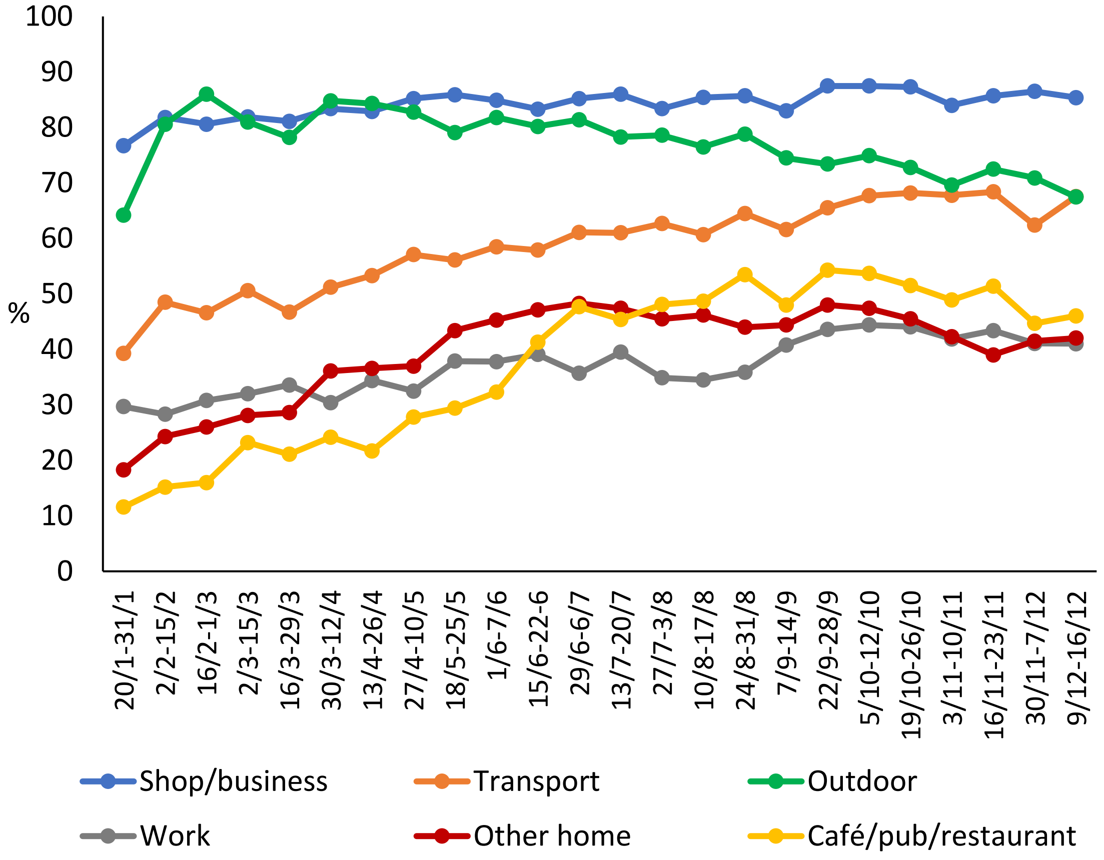
Total locations visited

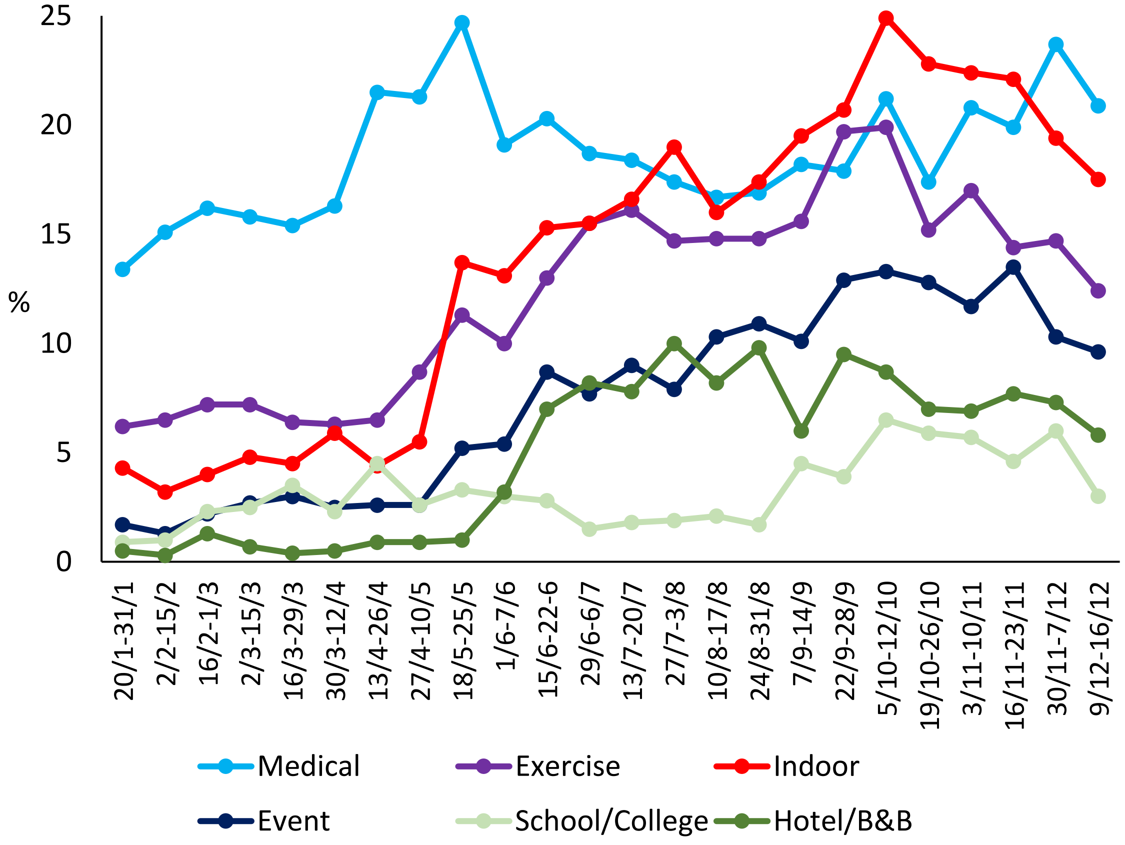


The downward trend in the number of locations visited during the week before completing the survey continued. There was no further fall in the average number of locations visited the previous day.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Locations visited (previous week)

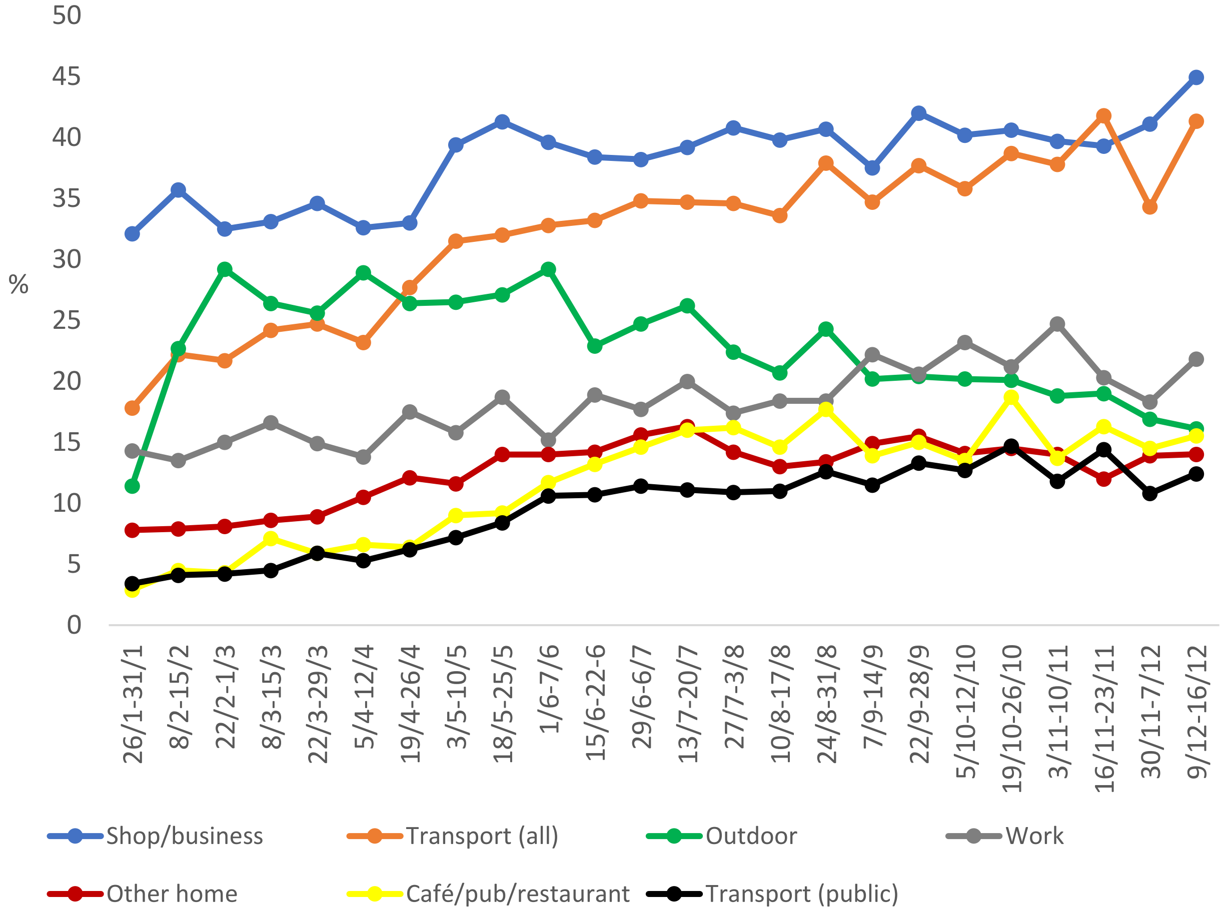


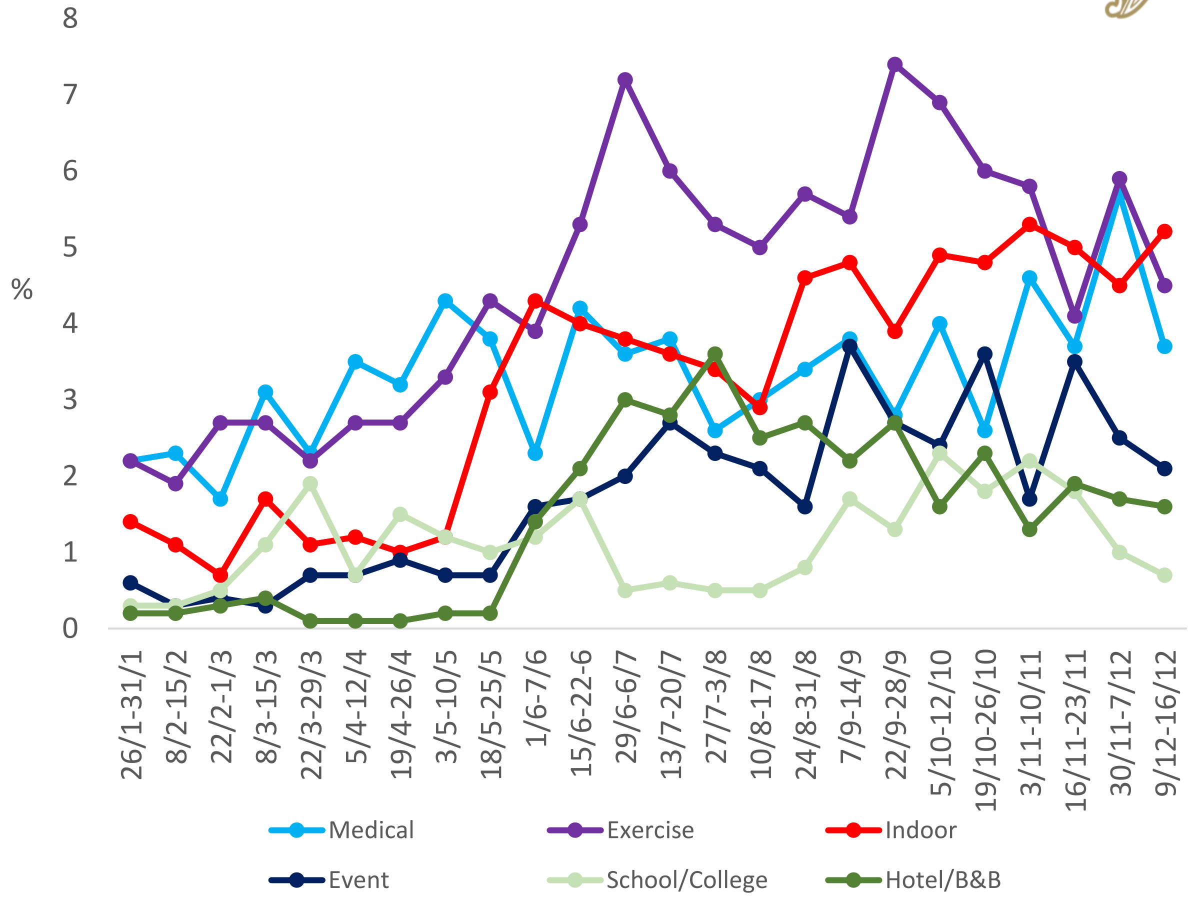


The proportions who visited shops, homes, workplaces and hospitality venues during the previous week were broadly stable, but there were falls in the proportion visiting exercise facilities and other indoor locations.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Locations visited (yesterday)

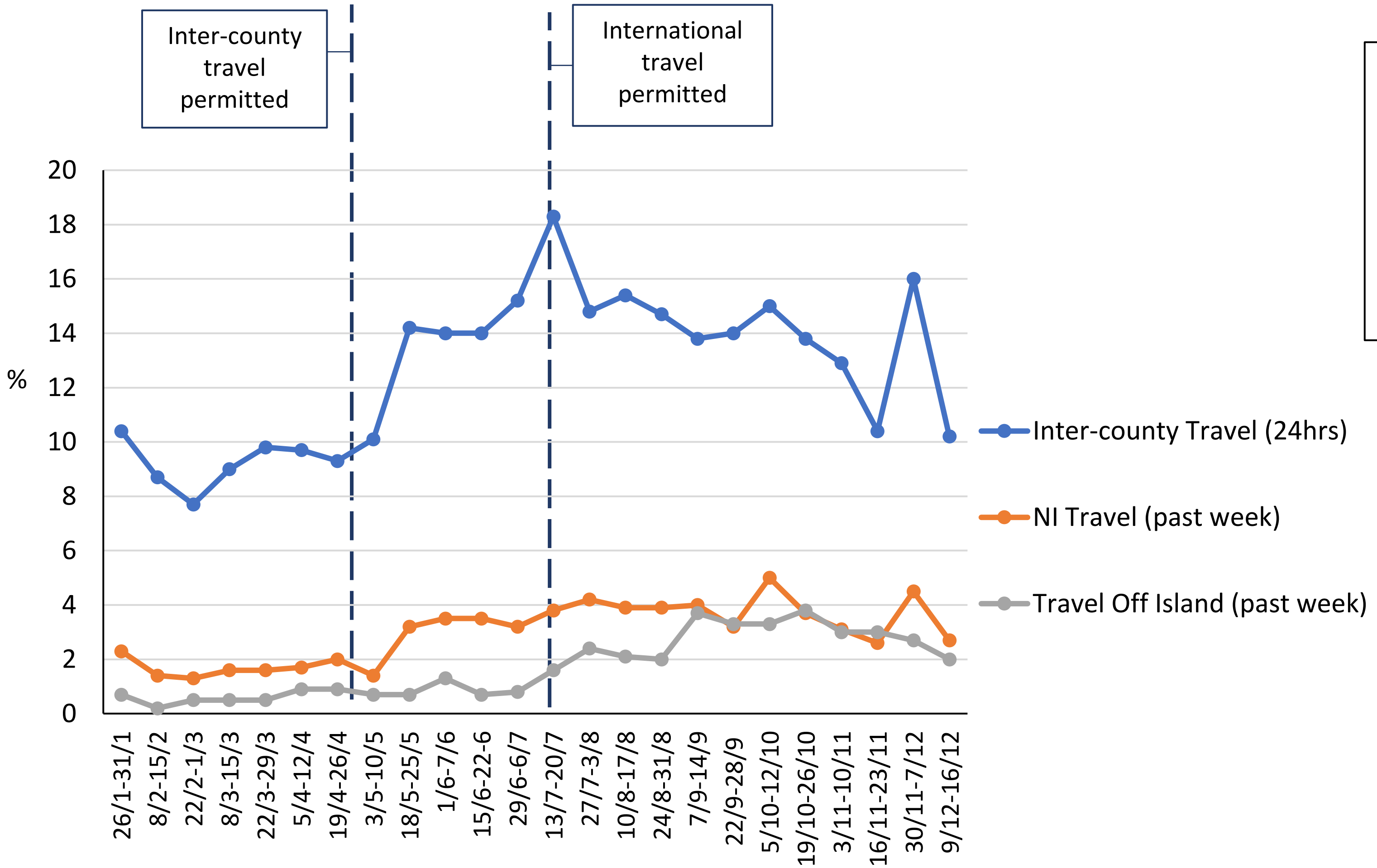




There were increases in the frequency of visits to shops and workplaces, coupled with more use of transport. These were compensated for by reductions in visits to most other locations.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

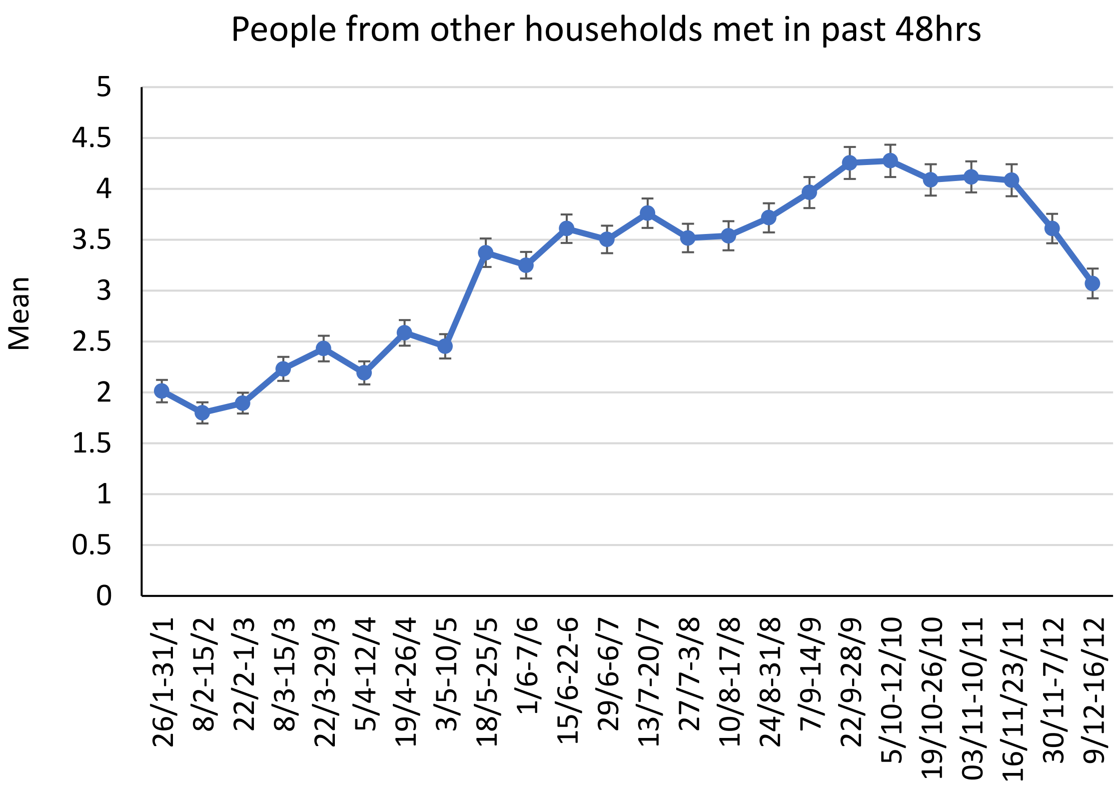
National and international travel



Inter-county travel and travel to Northern Ireland dropped back to previous levels, consistent with a burst of Christmas shopping at the start of December.

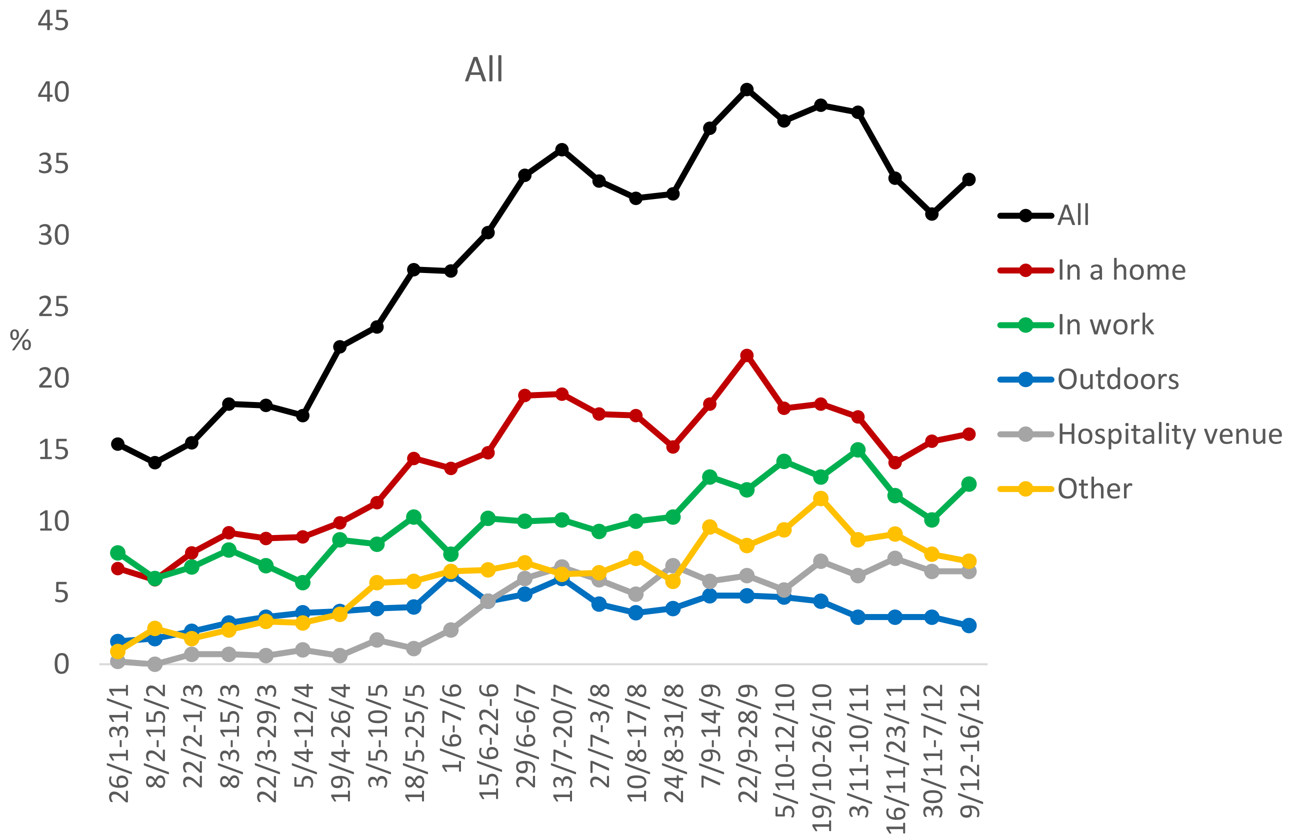
Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

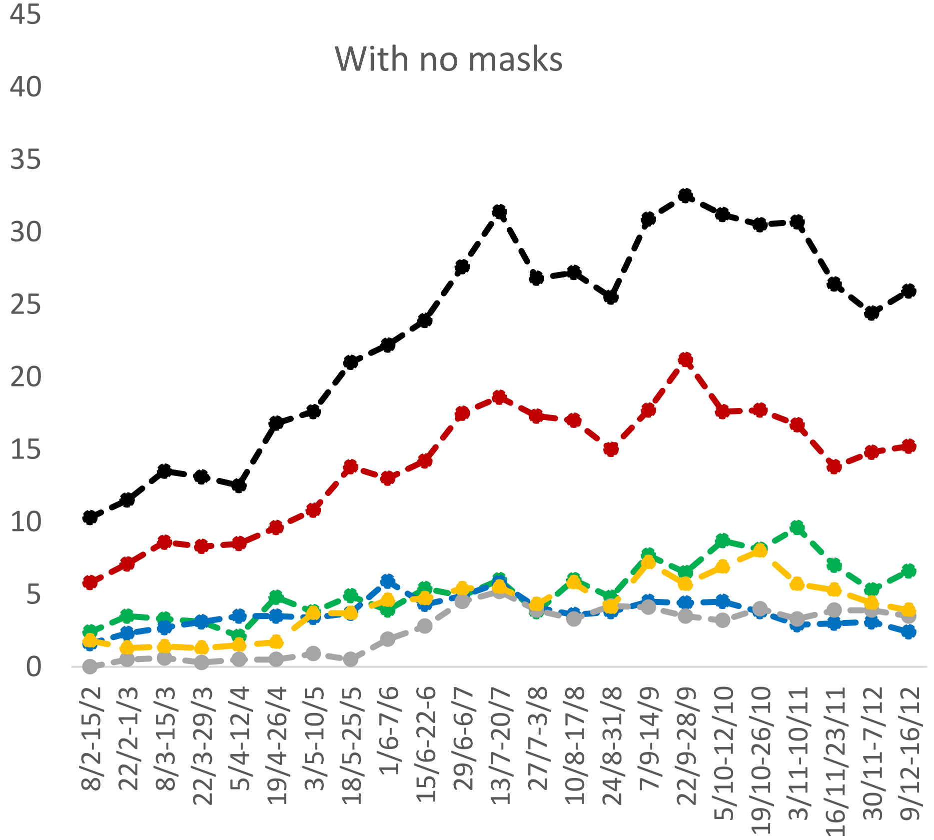
Number of people met and close contacts



The declining trend in close contacts over recent weeks did not continue, but individuals have reduced the number of people they meet up with from outside their own household.

Close contacts - locations

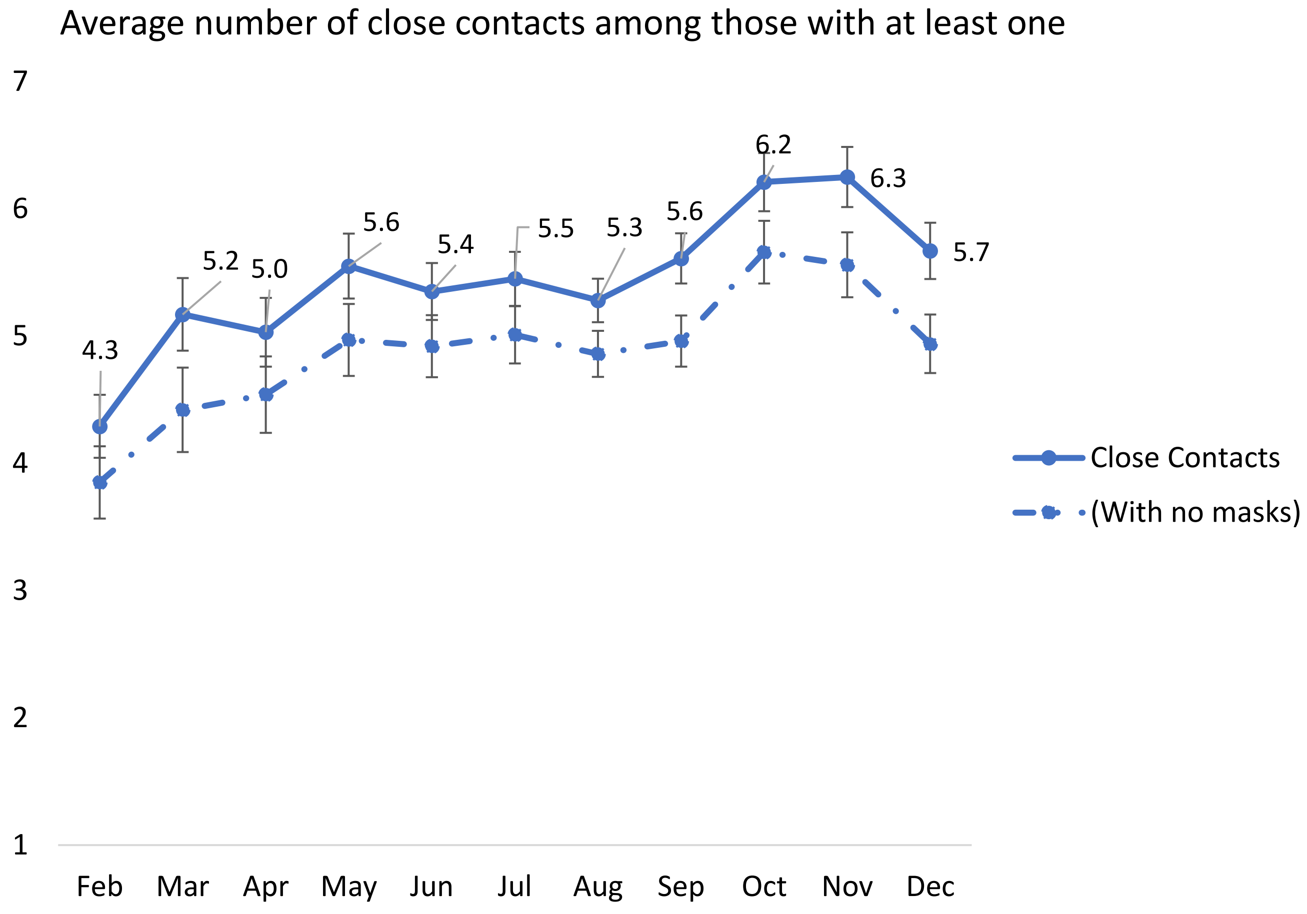




The recent downward trends in the proportions of the population having close contacts in homes and at work have not continued.

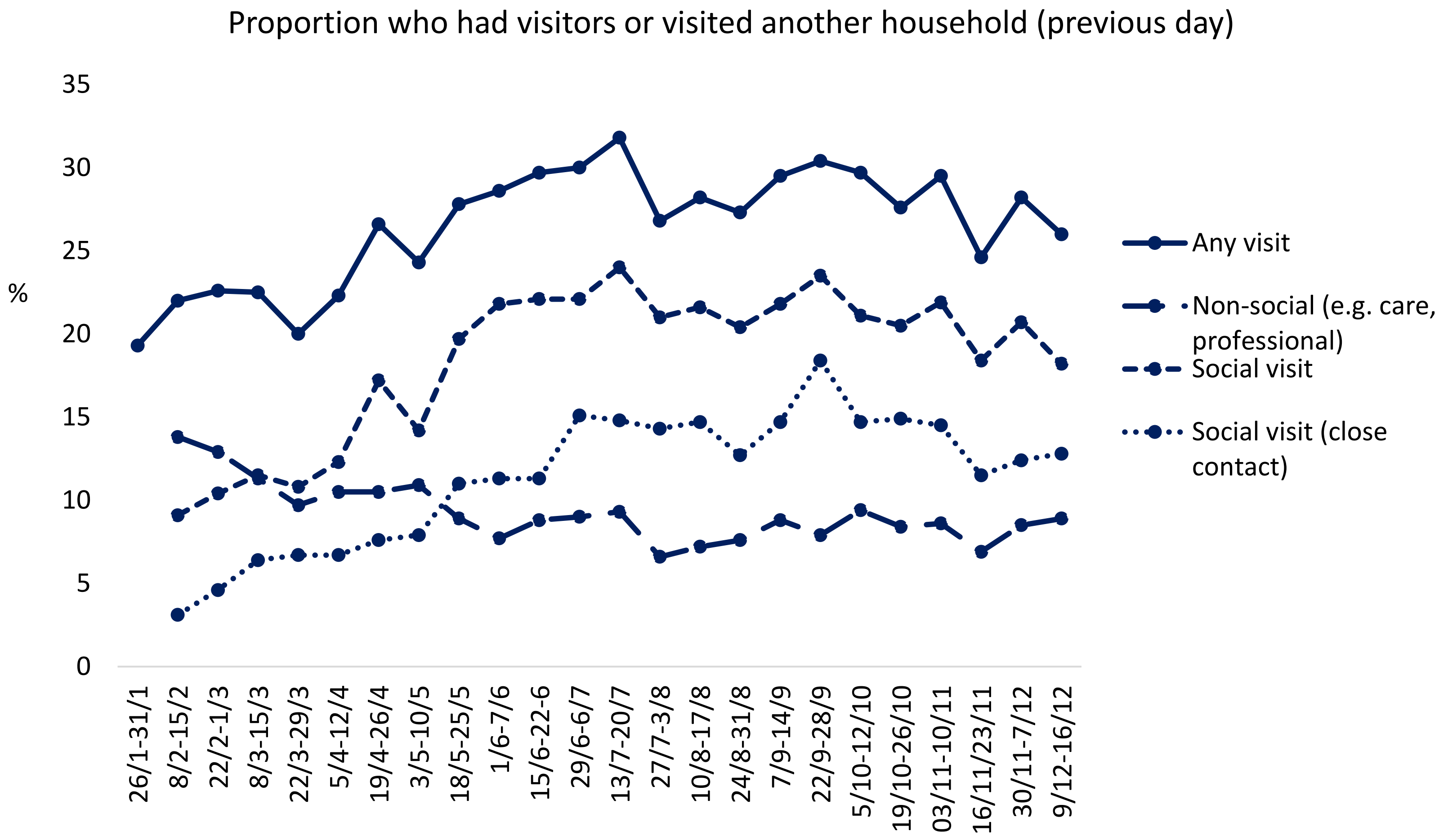
Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Number of close contacts



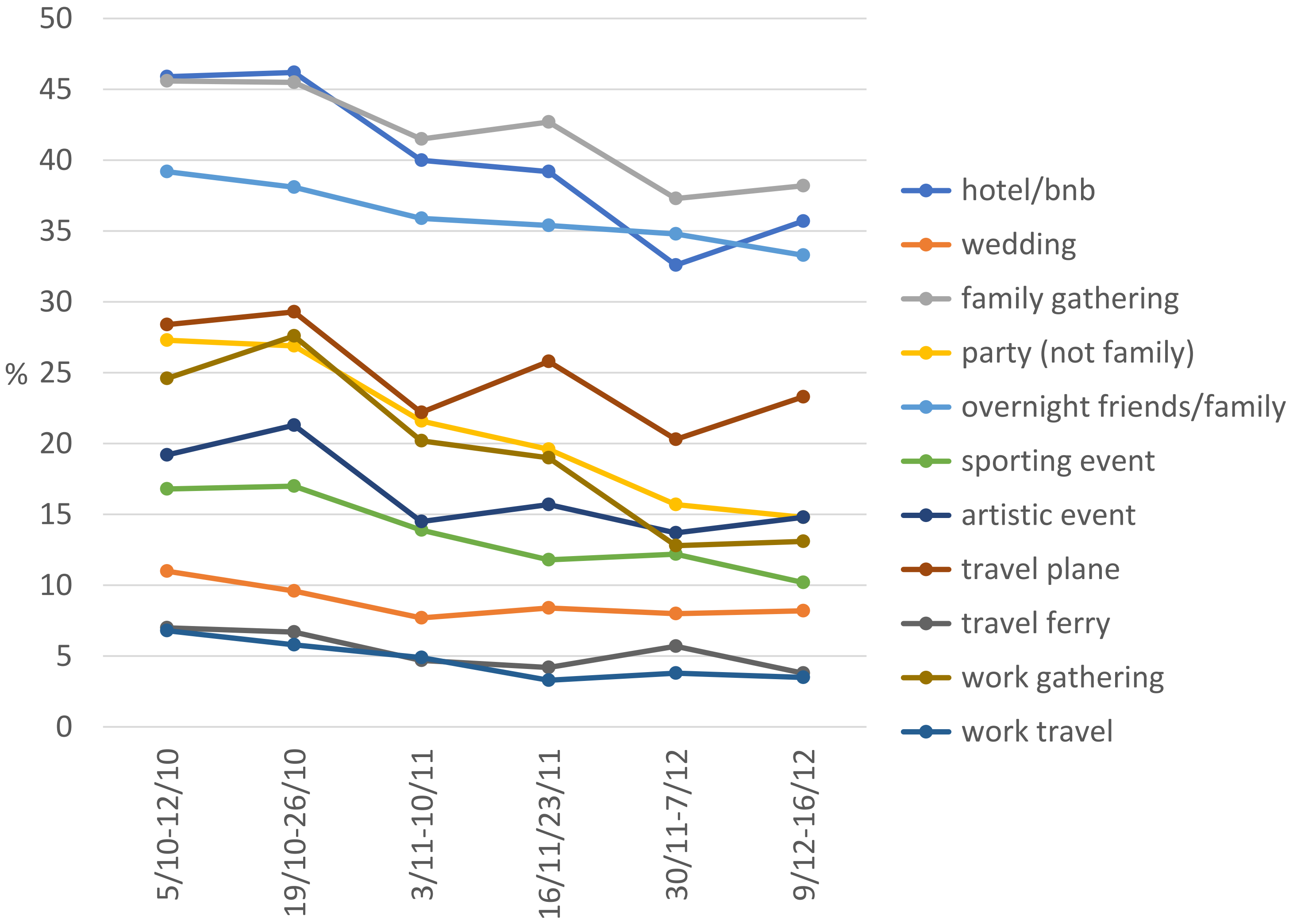
Among those who had a close contact the previous day, the average number of close contacts has fallen, but remains above the level it was at during the Summer.

Home visits



The proportion of the population that was involved in a household visit the previous day remained broadly stable. Overall, since the Autumn, there has been a slight downward trend in household visits, including visits that lead to close contacts.

Plans for the next 3 months

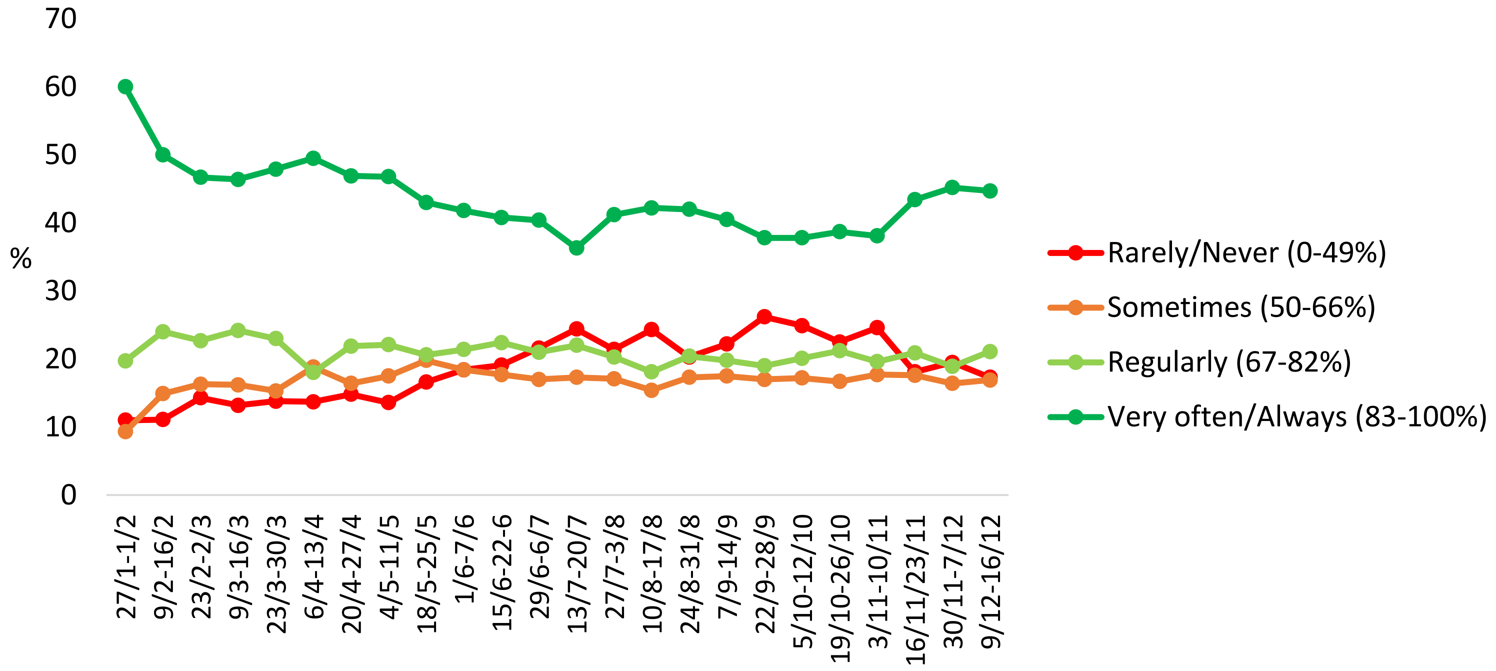


This chart shows the percentage of the population who have definite plans to take part in the listed social activities over the next 3 months. Plans for all activities have fallen during the present wave of infections.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

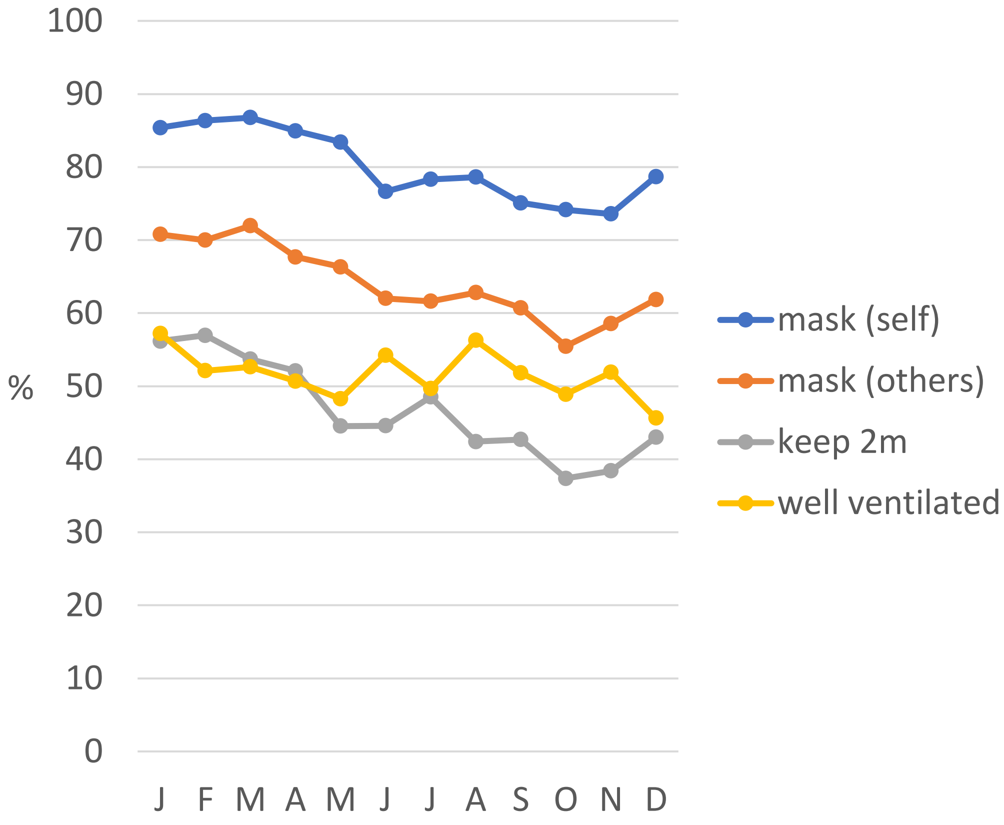
Mitigation

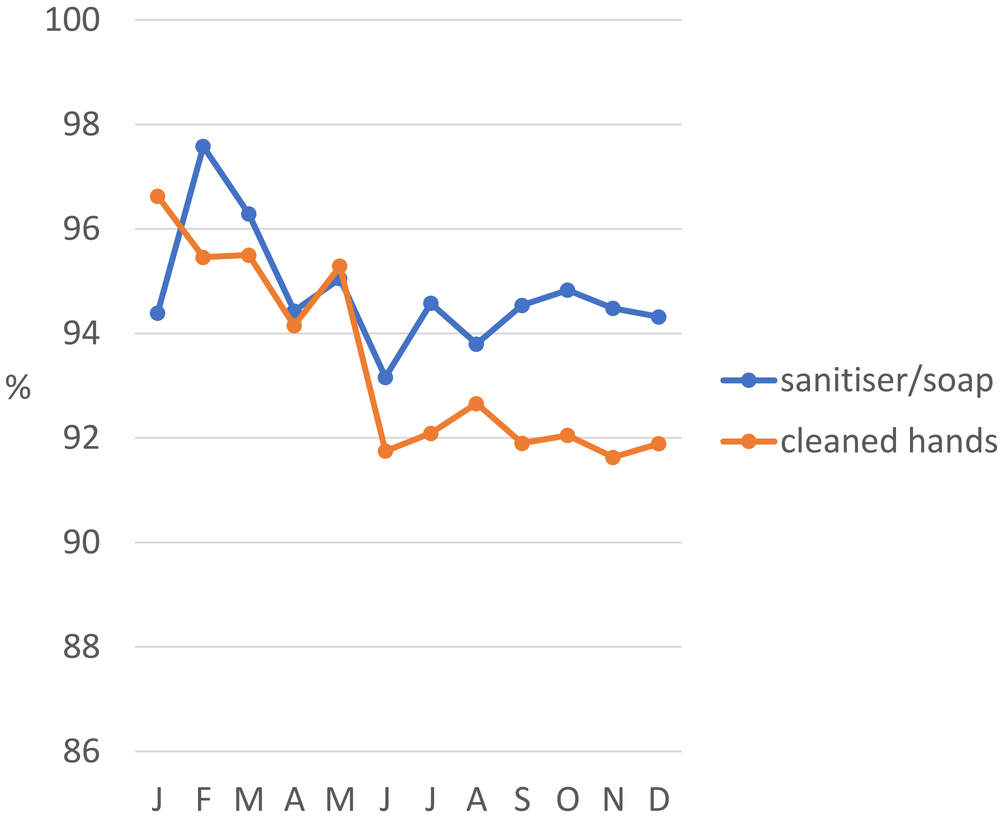
Frequency of mitigative behaviours (wearing a mask, keeping 2m, sanitising hands)
when outside the home



The recent increase in mitigative behaviours (wearing a mask, keeping 2m, sanitising hands) since the Autumn has been sustained.

Workplace mitigation

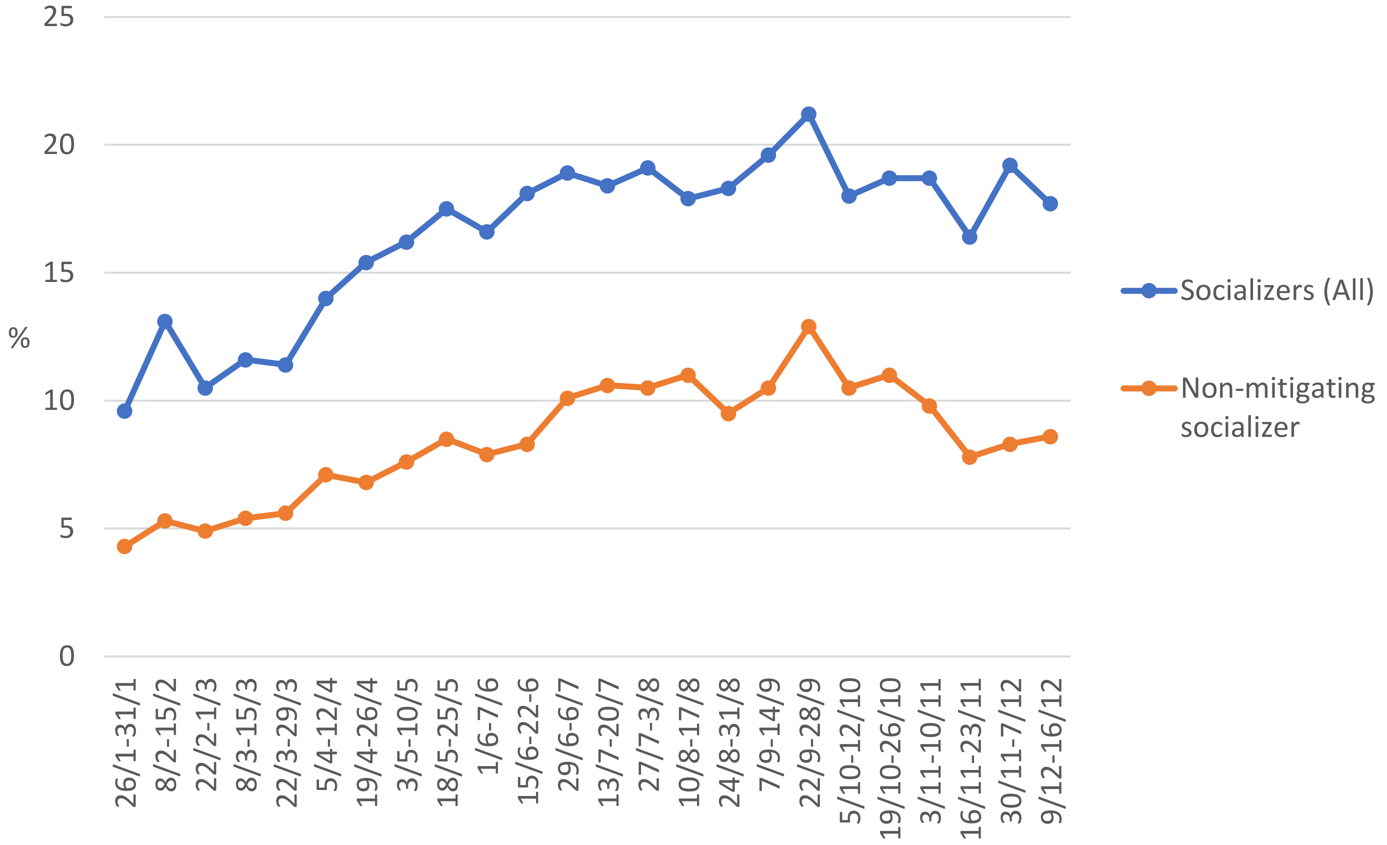




Workers have become more inclined to wear masks and maintain 2m distance since October, but ventilation of workplaces worsened as temperatures fell. Hand hygiene practices have remained relatively stable for some months, after falling in the early part of the year.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

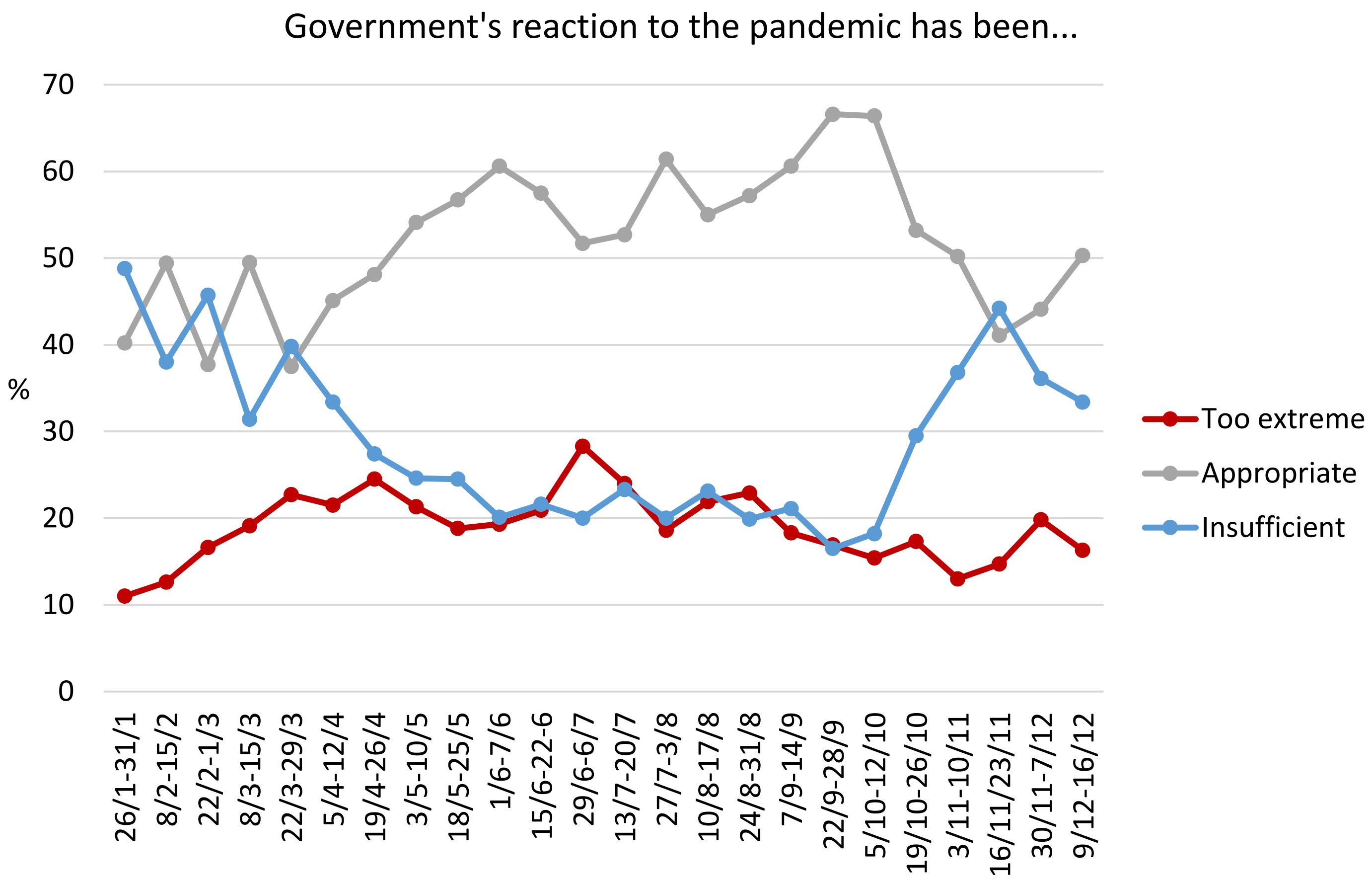
People with high social activity



The charts shows the proportion of people who engage in particularly high levels of social activity ('socialisers') and those who do so while taking few or no precautions, such as wearing a mask or maintaining 2m distance, ('non-mitigating socialisers'). The degree of behaviour change over recent weeks among this most active section of the population is similar to the broader population – a modest decline in activity combined with additional caution.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

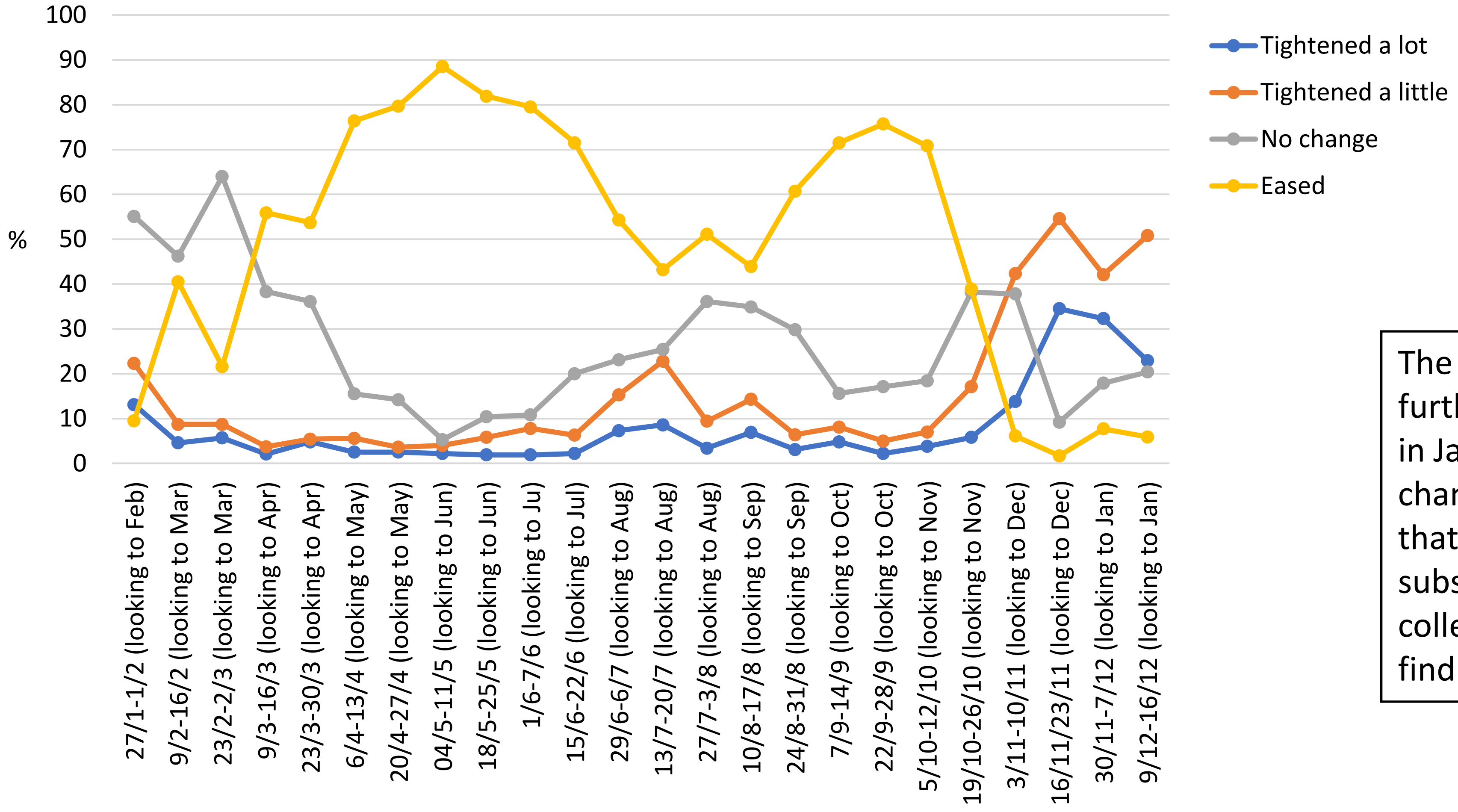
Government response to the pandemic



On average, the reintroduction of restrictions has been welcomed, with a majority again saying the response is now appropriate. More than twice as many people still regard the response as insufficient than view it as too extreme.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

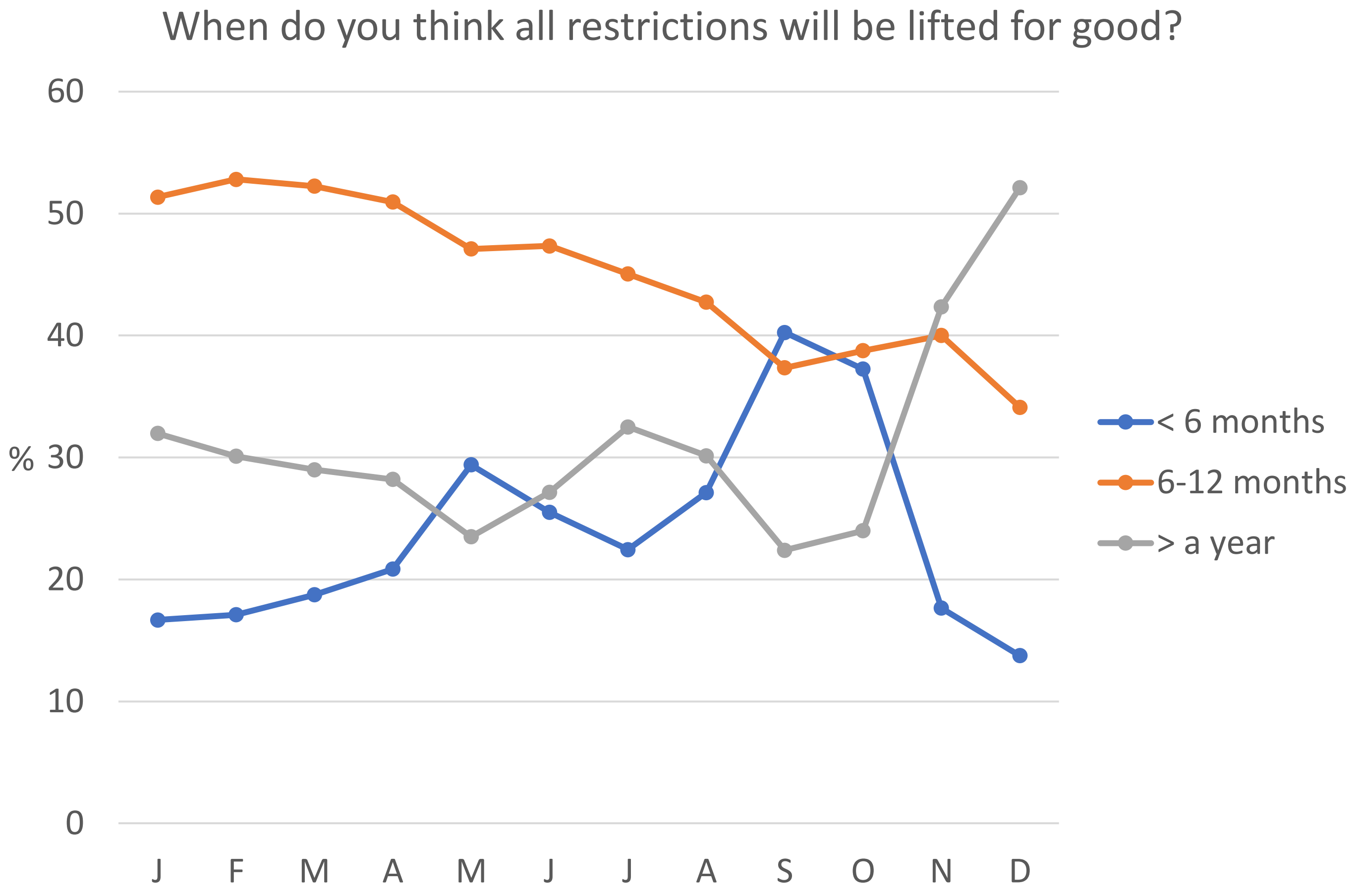
Expectations for easing restrictions (next month)



The large majority expected further tightening of restrictions in January, although the scale of change expected reduced. (Note that restrictions were tightened substantially the day after data collection was completed, so this finding may no longer apply).

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

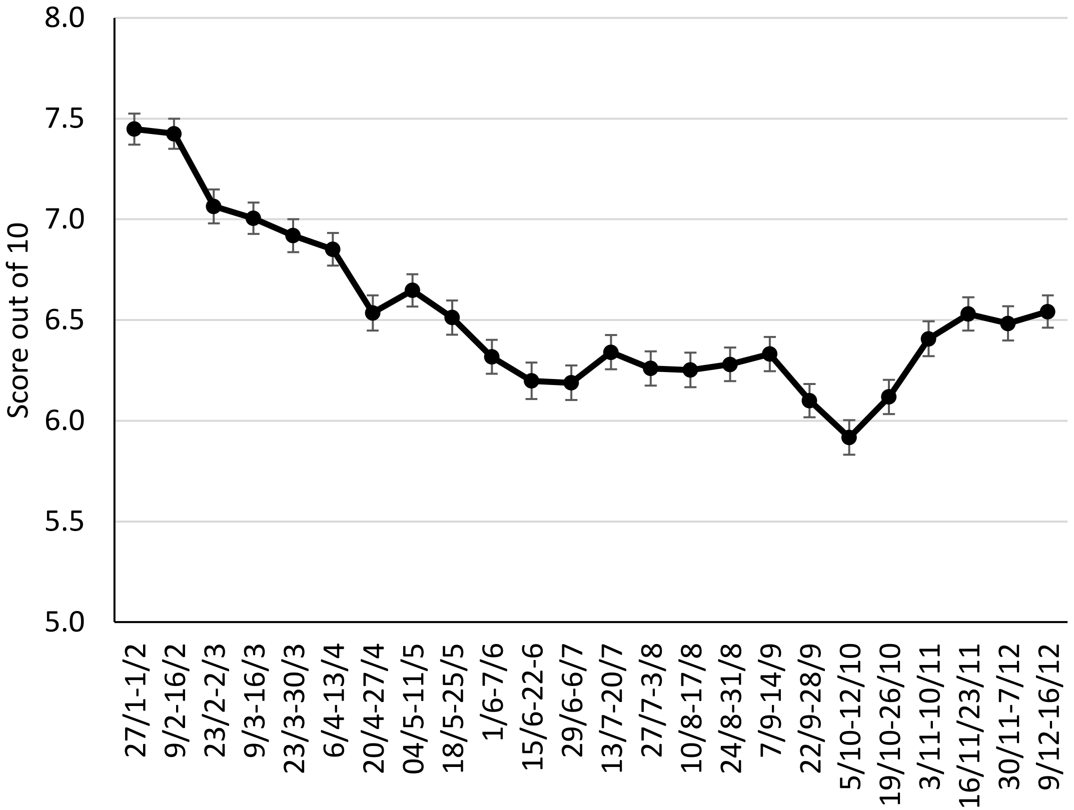
Long-term expectations

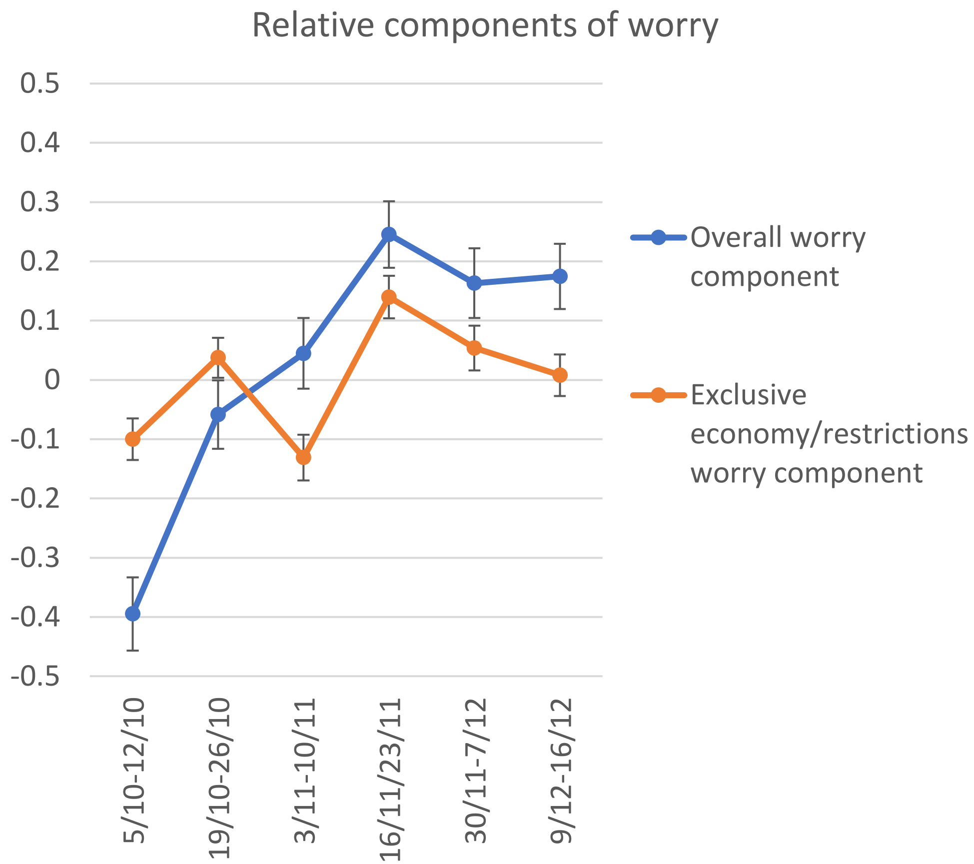


The latest wave of infection has resulted in a strong swing in log-term expectations. The majority now expect some public health restrictions to be in place for at least another year, with fewer than 1-in-7 now believing that all restrictions will be lifted within 6 months.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Worry

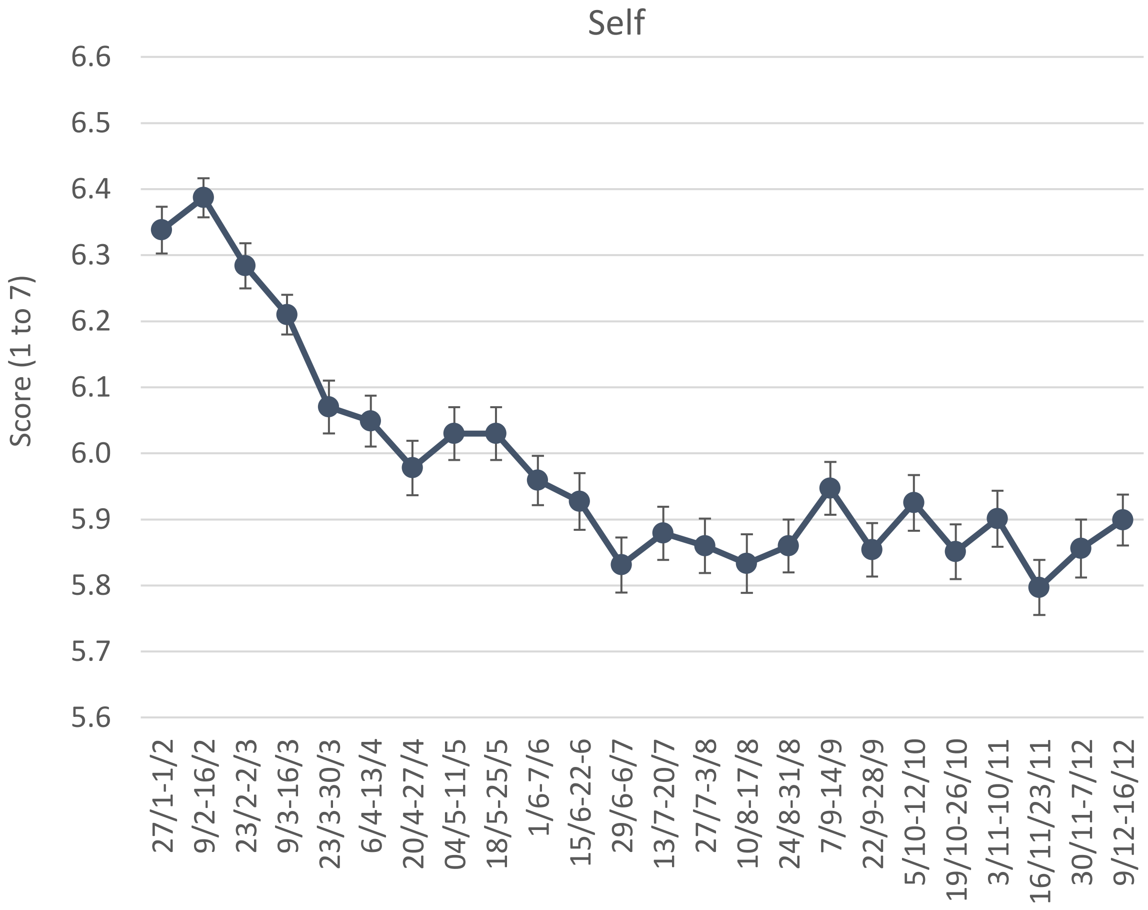


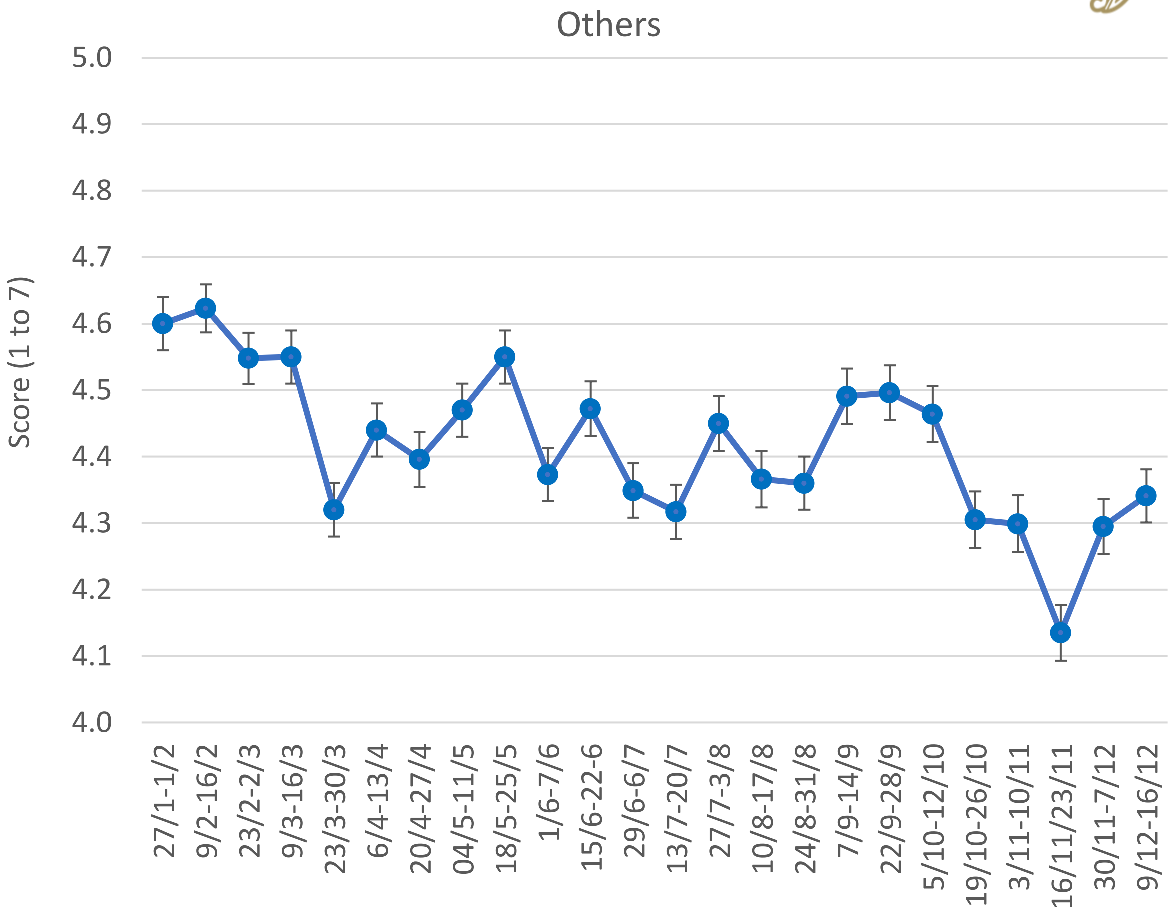


There has been no additional increase in overall worry over the past two rounds of SAM, despite news about the Omicron variant. Overall worry about the virus now dominates worry about restrictions and the impact on the economy.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Self-reported compliance

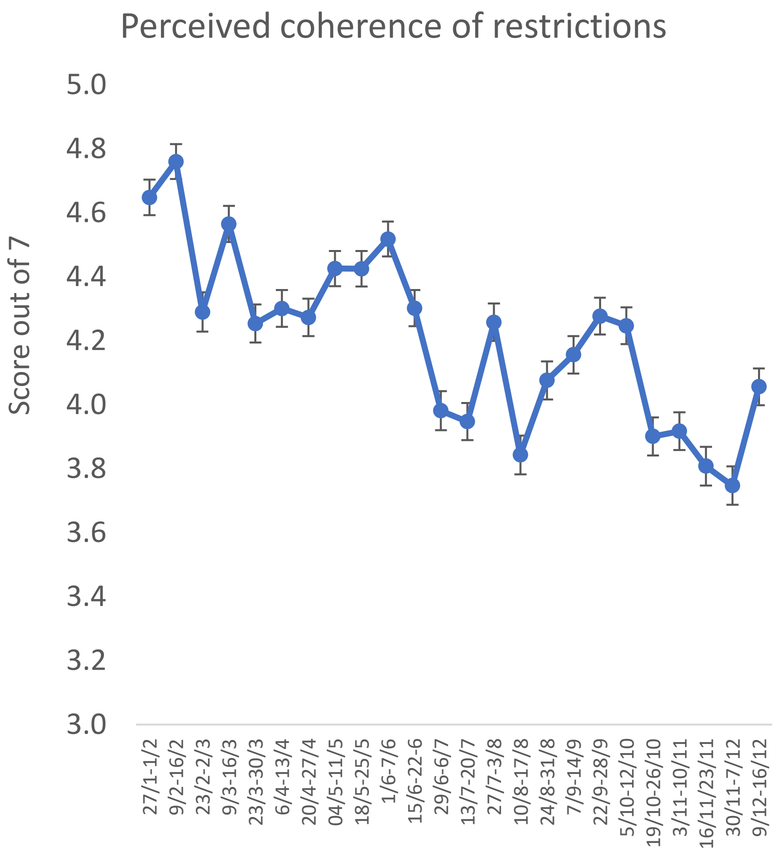


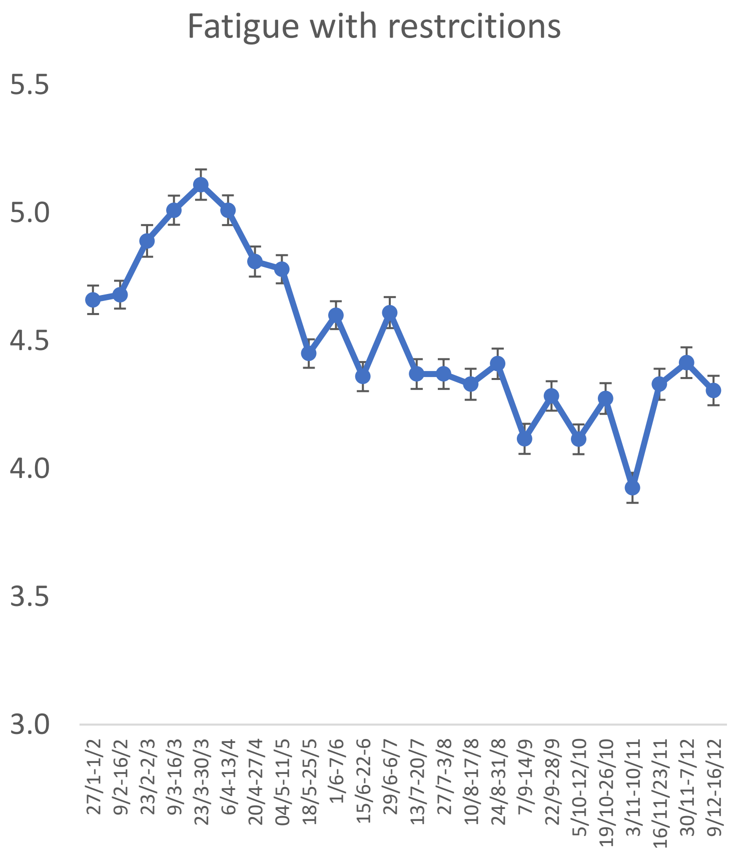


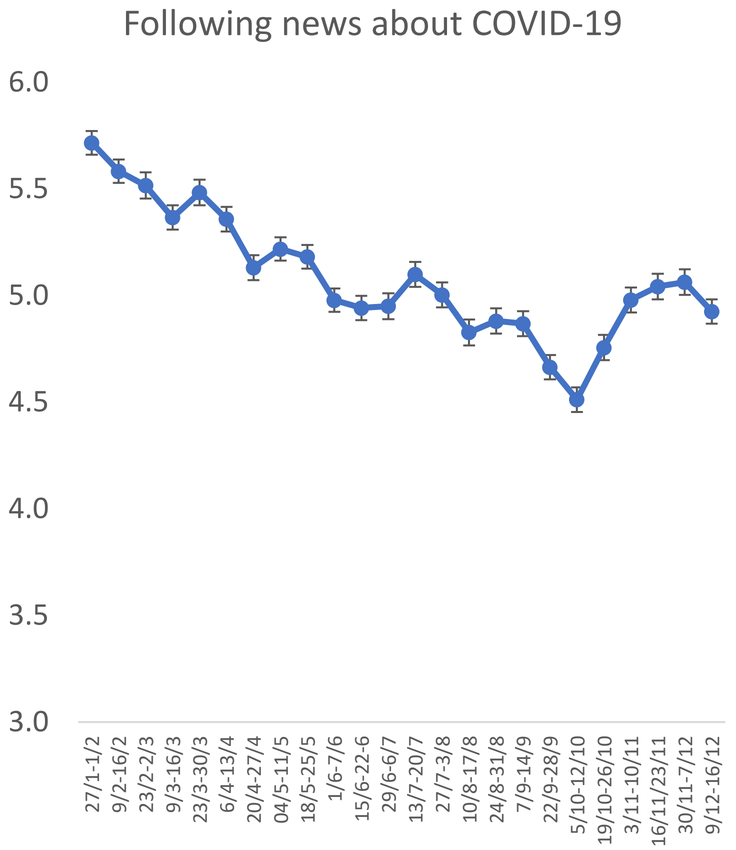
Small increases in self-reported compliance and perceived compliance of others were not statistically significant.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Psychological drivers of behaviour



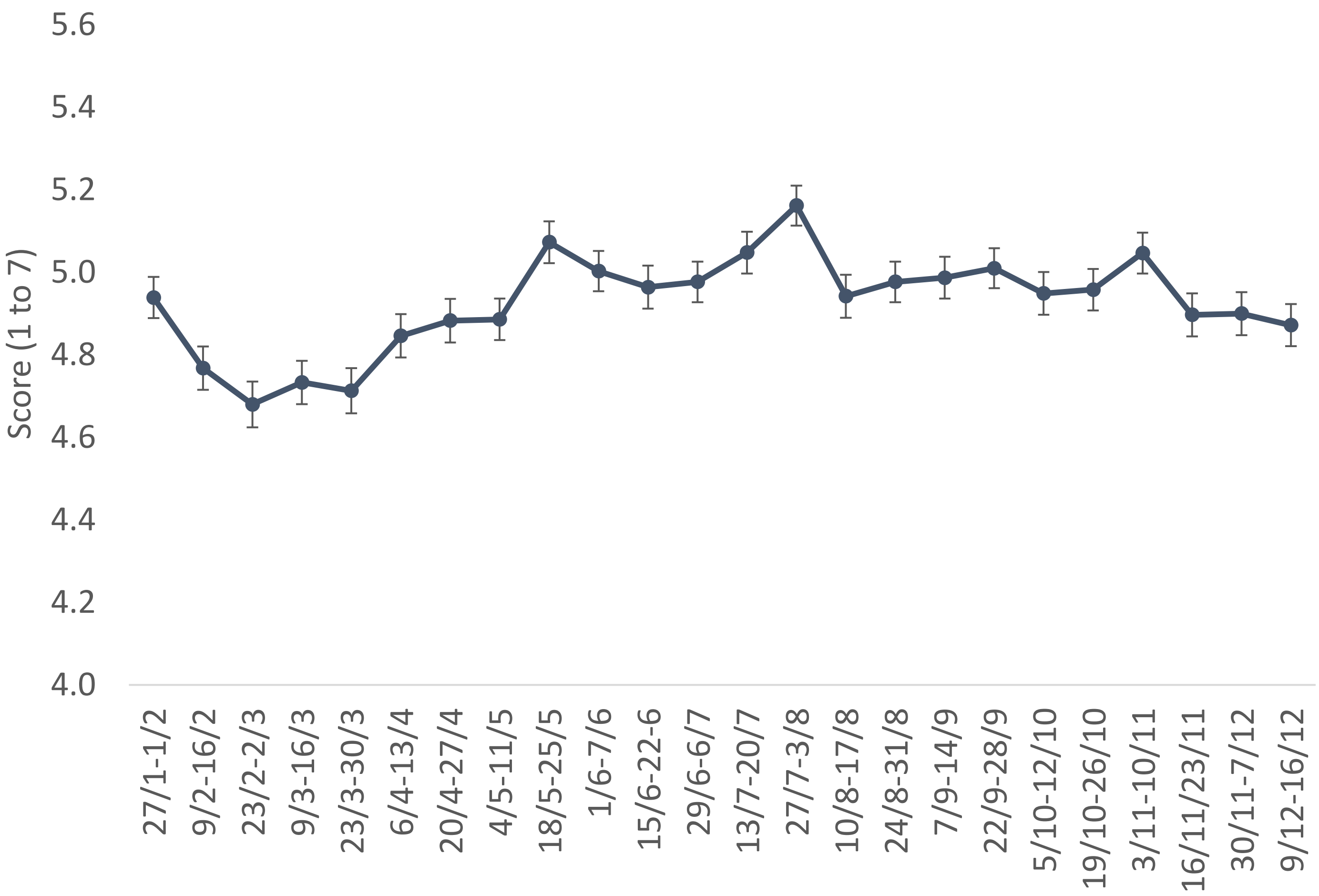




There was a significant jump in the perceived coherence of the restrictions in this round of SAM. Fatigue and how much people are following coverage of COVID-19 remained unchanged.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

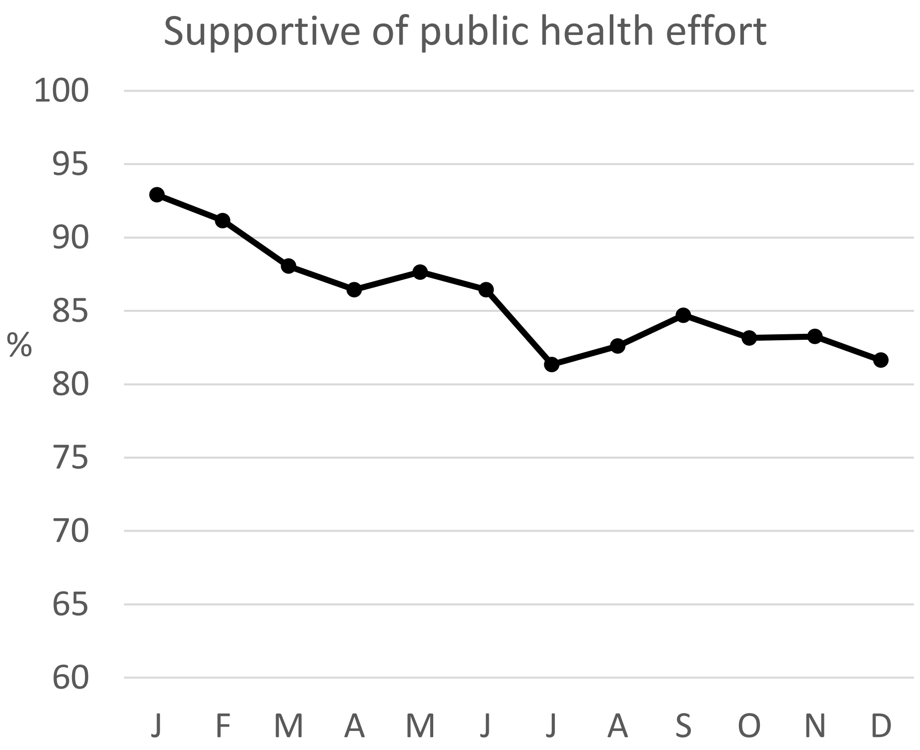
Wellbeing

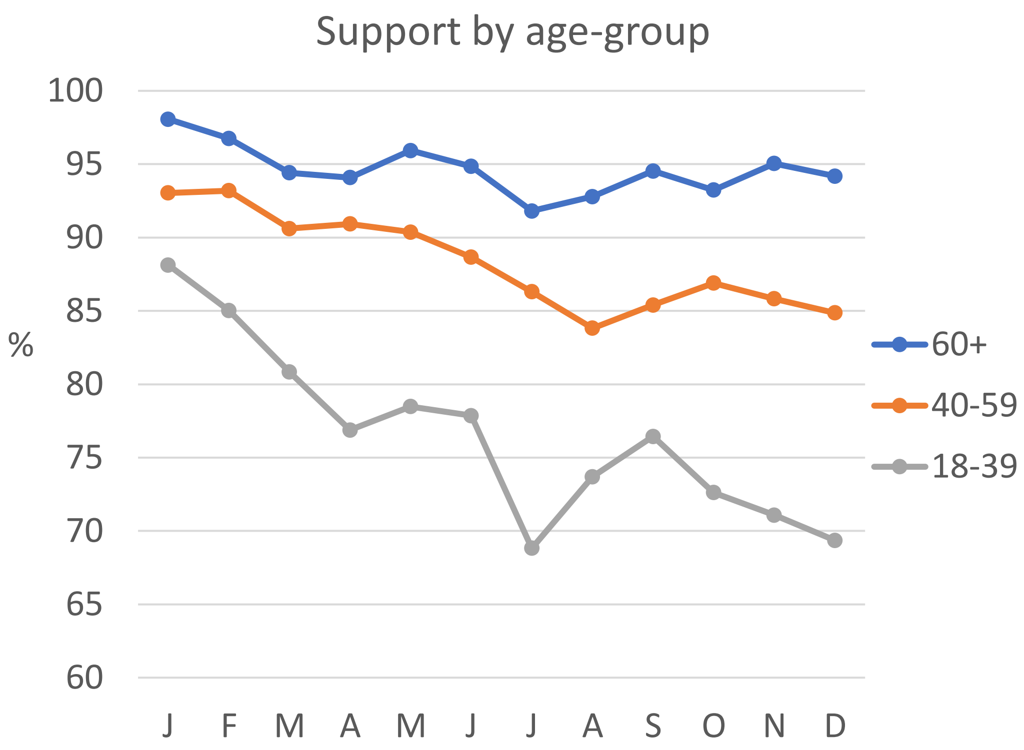


While self-reported wellbeing is lower than it was in the Autumn, it remains higher than during the Level 5 lockdown of early 2021 and appears, so far, not to have been affected by news about the Omicron variant.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

Overall support for the public health effort

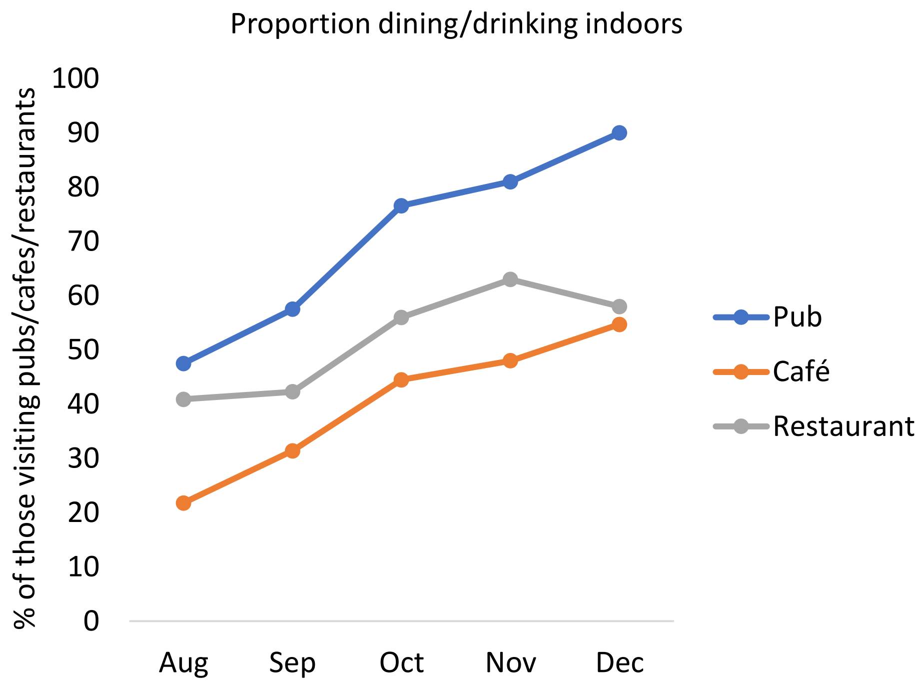


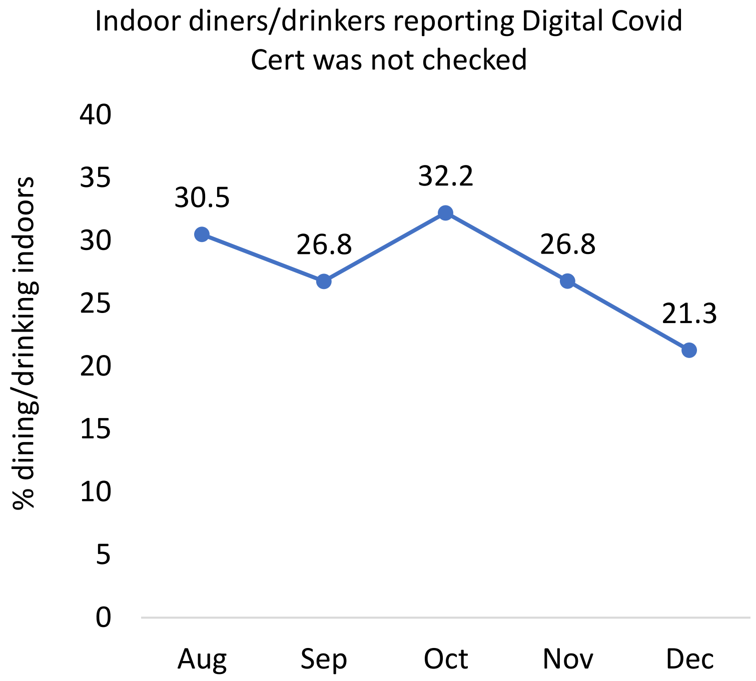


Measured by a pattern of generally positive responses across multiple questions, a majority support the public health effort, but this majority has fallen across 2021, especially among younger adults.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach

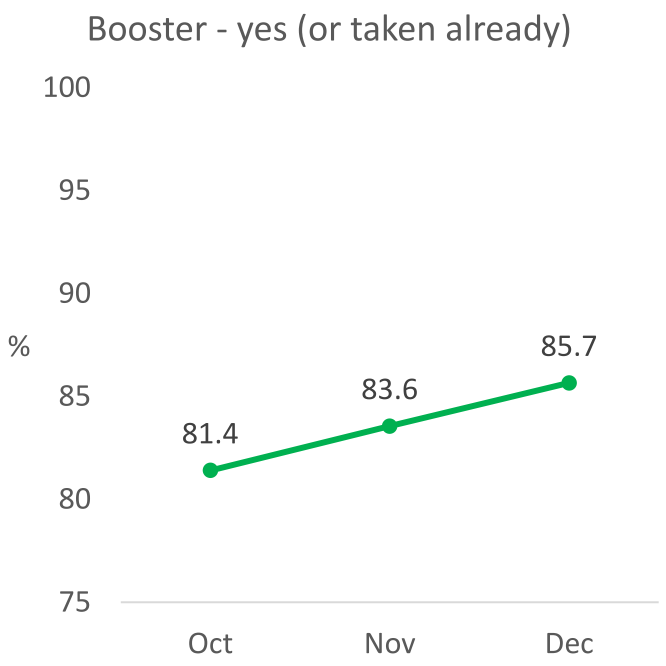
Hospitality – Digital Covid Certs

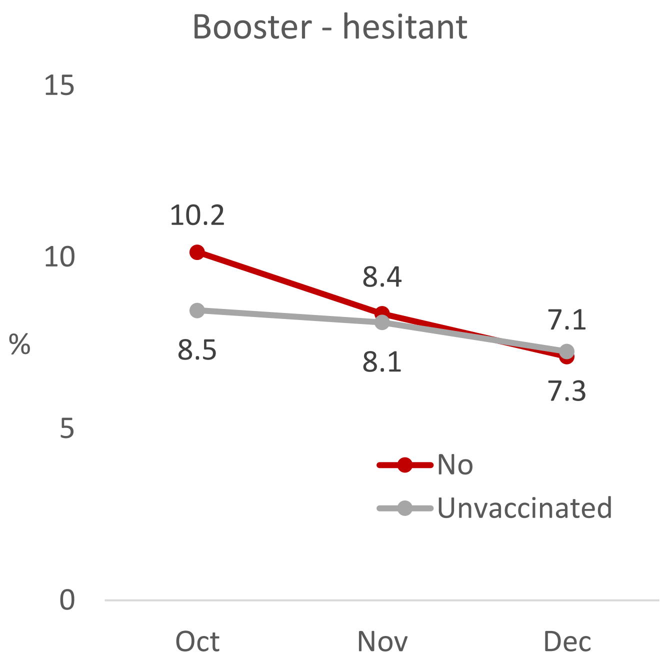


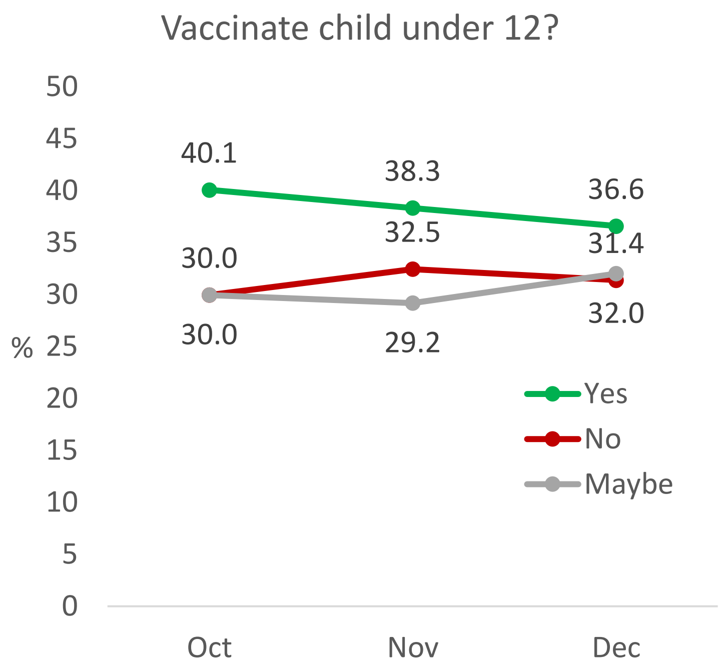


The proportion of those visiting pubs and cafés who opted to dine/drink indoors continued to increase, although there was no similar increase for restaurants. Aggregating across venues, a lower proportion of customers in December reported that their Digital Covid Certificate had not been checked.

Vaccine intentions







The proportion who have either taken the booster vaccine or intend to take it is rising, while unwillingness to take the booster is falling. Changes in willingness of parents to vaccinate children under 12 are not statistically significant, with intentions divided and many parents still unsure.

Source: ESRI Social Activity Measure for the Department of the Taoiseach