



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Social Activity Measure

Jan 4th – 11th 2022



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

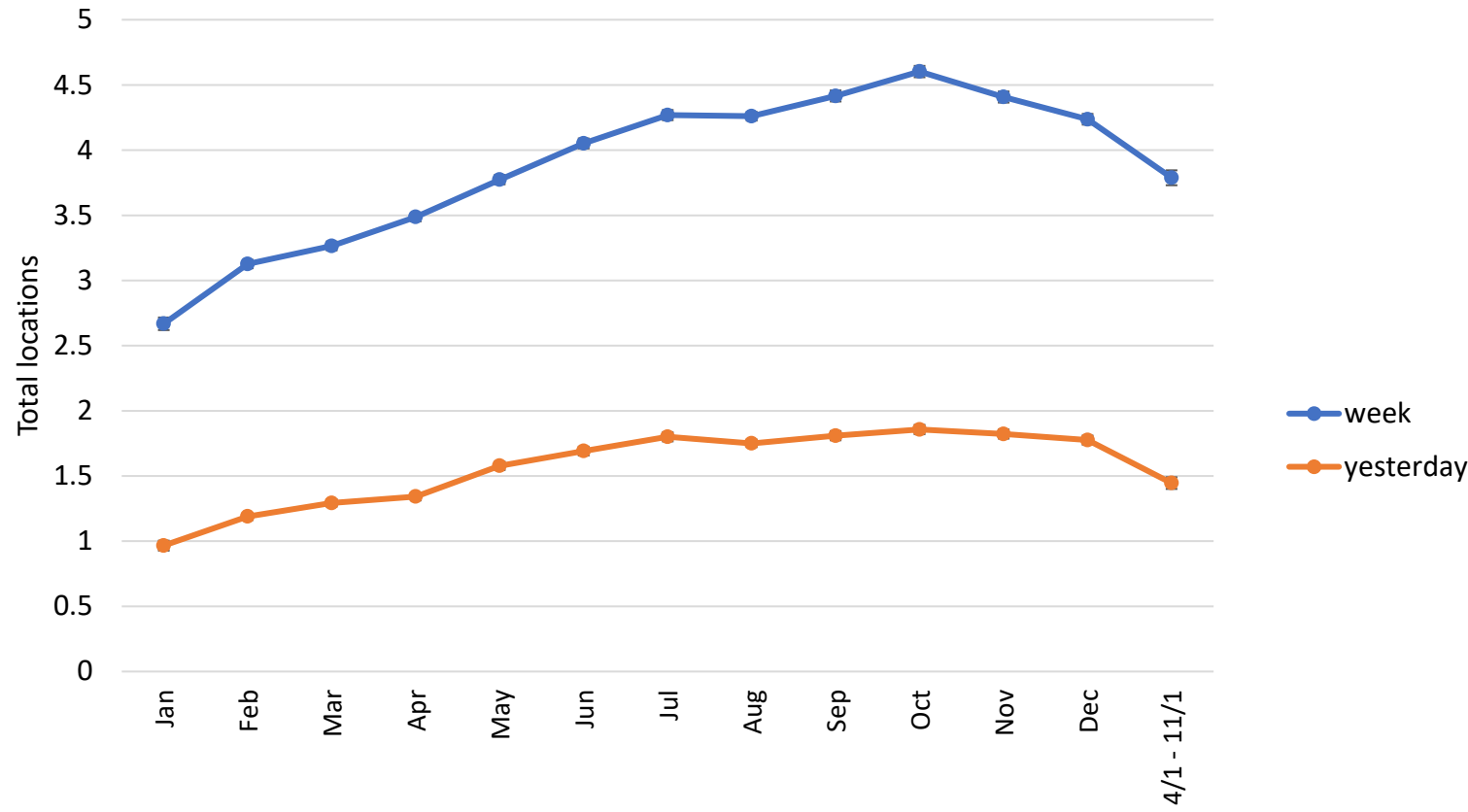
The Social Activity Measure (SAM) is a behavioural study that records the public response to the risk of COVID-19 infection over time. Designed by the ESRI's Behavioural Research Unit (BRU), SAM is an anonymous, interactive, online study that surveys people about their recent activity. The study offers 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 has been updated in this round to include more detailed information on behavioural changes and future plans in light of the widespread lifting of restrictions in September. 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 January 4th and 11th 2022. Data were collected during a period of high case numbers but with some signs that the Omicron variant, alongside high levels of vaccination, leads to less severe infection than previous variants. New public health guidance for use of antigen tests among those aged 4-39 with symptoms came into effect on January 3rd and the curfew on the hospitality sector remained in place.

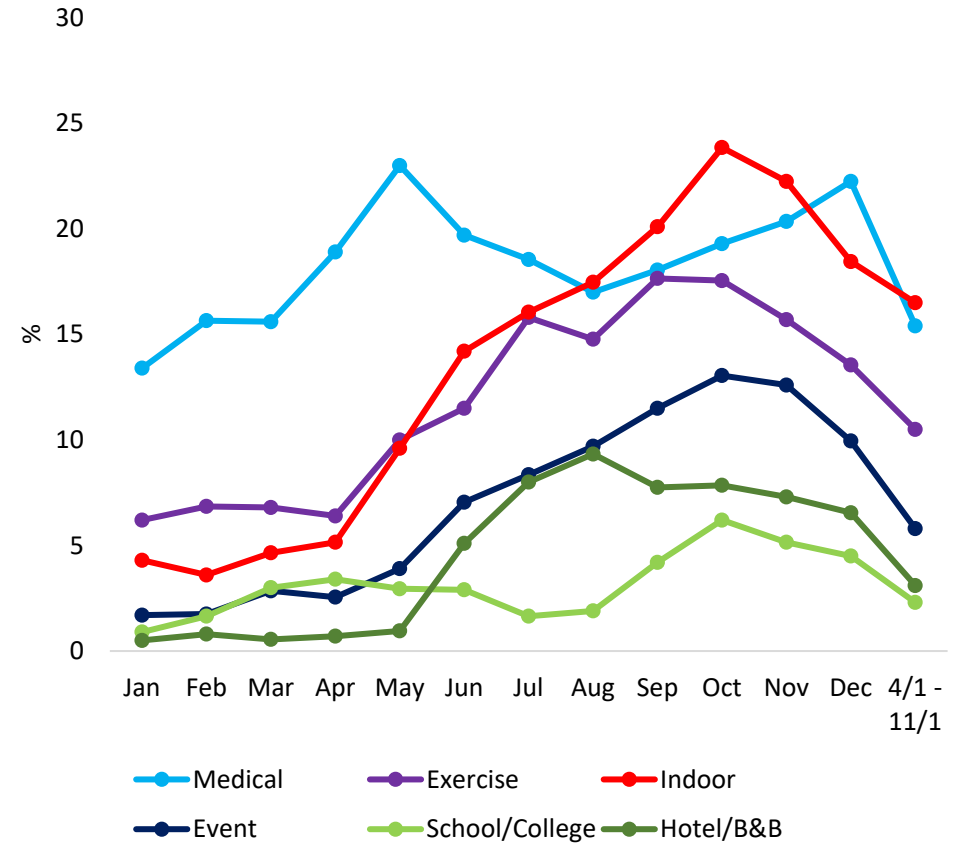
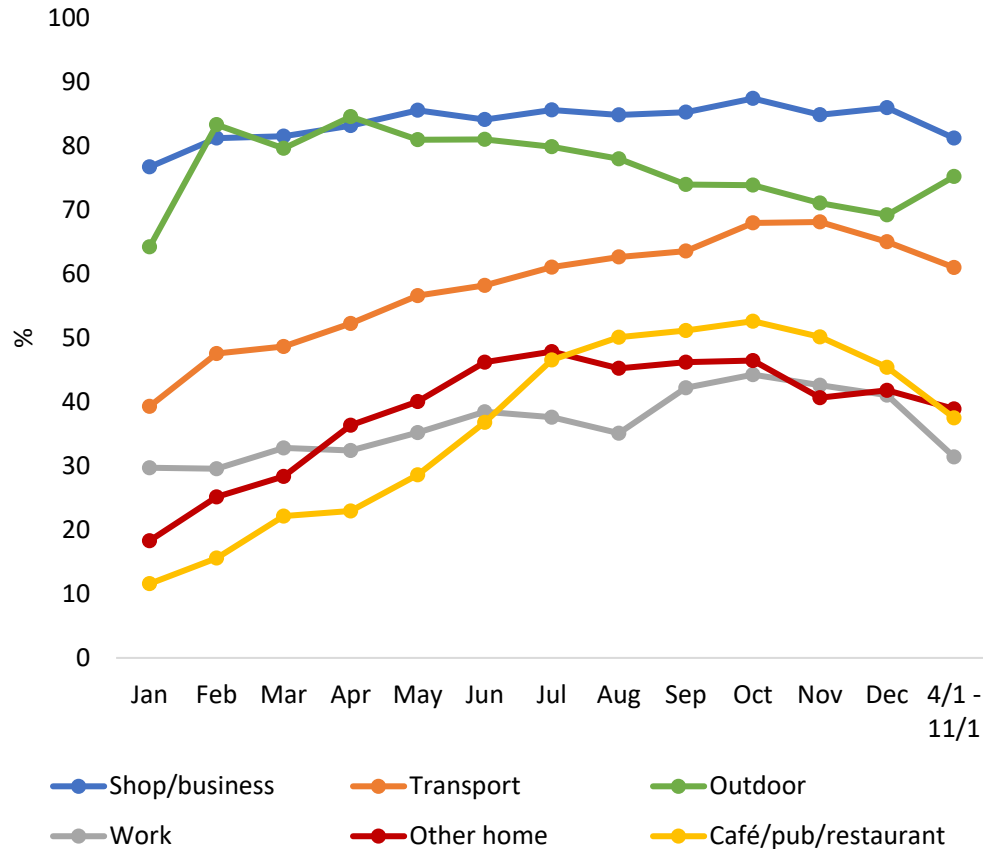


Total locations visited



There was a drop in total locations visited both yesterday and over the week.

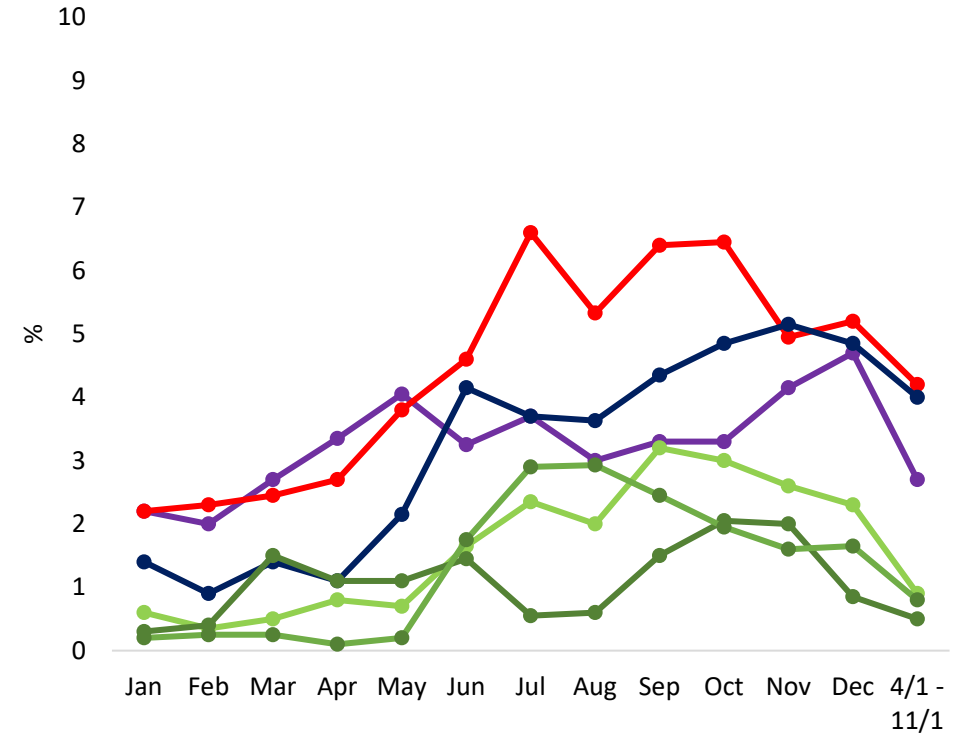
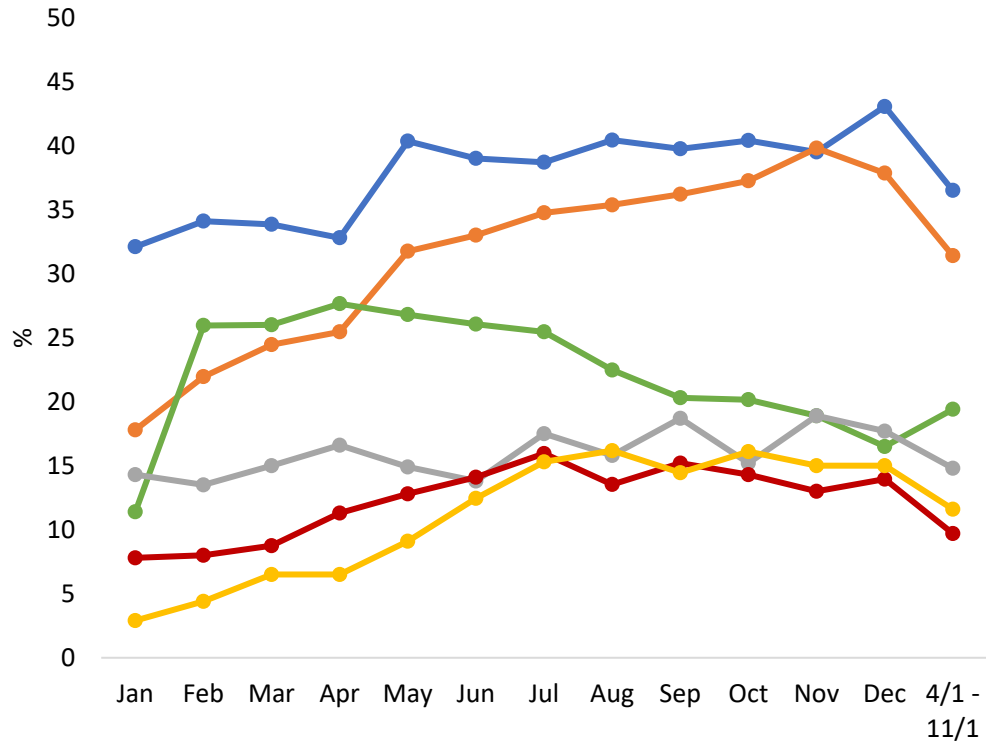
Locations visited (previous week)



Visits over the week declined this wave for most locations except outdoors where they increased. All declines were statistically significant except for visits to other homes, exercise facilities and schools/colleges.



Locations visited (yesterday)

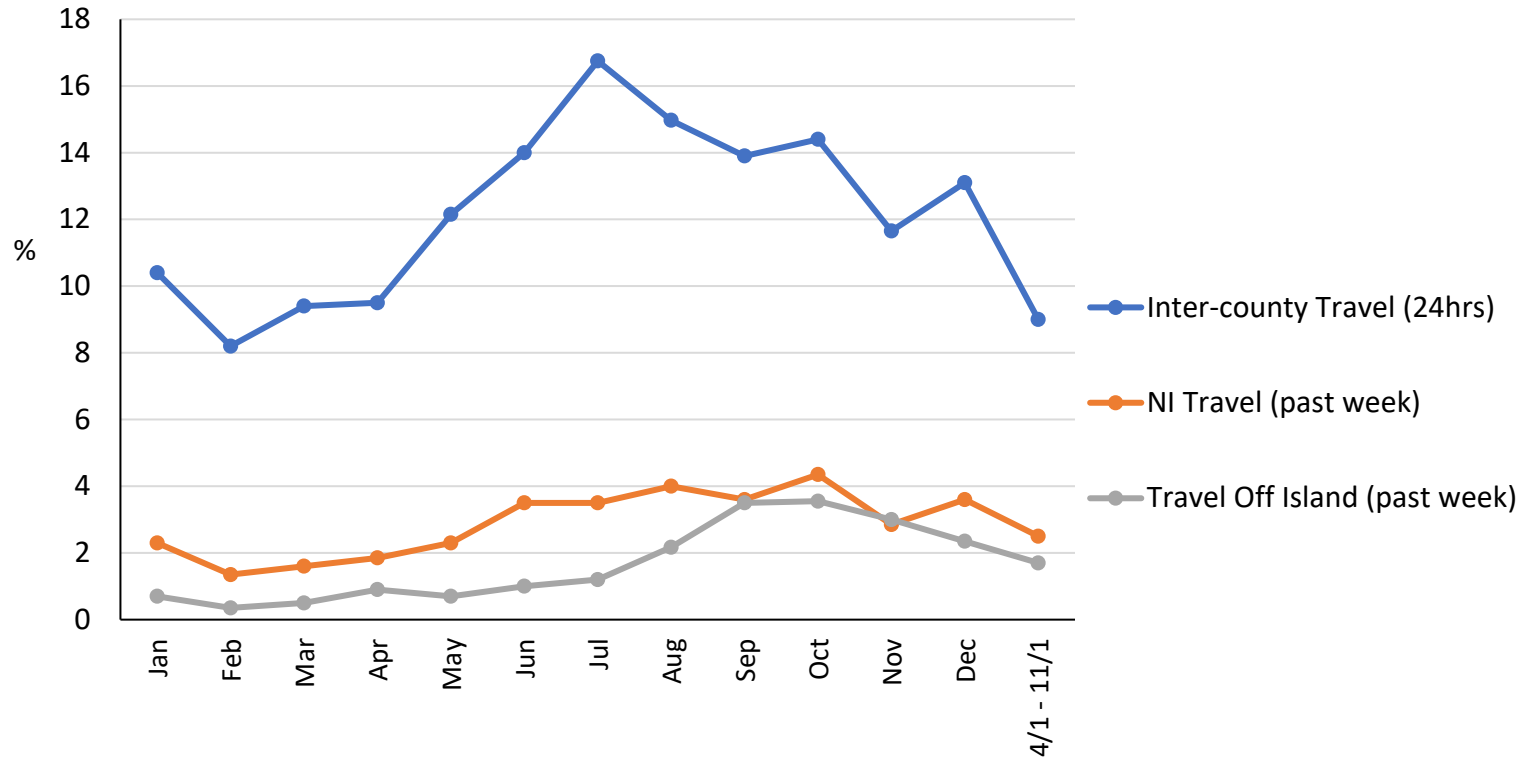


● Shop/business ● Transport (all) ● Outdoor
● Work ● Other home ● Café/pub/restaurant

● Medical ● Exercise ● Indoor
● Event ● School/College ● Hotel/B&B

Similarly, visits the previous day declined this wave for most locations except outdoors where they increased. All declines were statistically significant except for visits to other homes, exercise facilities, indoor locations or schools/colleges.

National and international travel

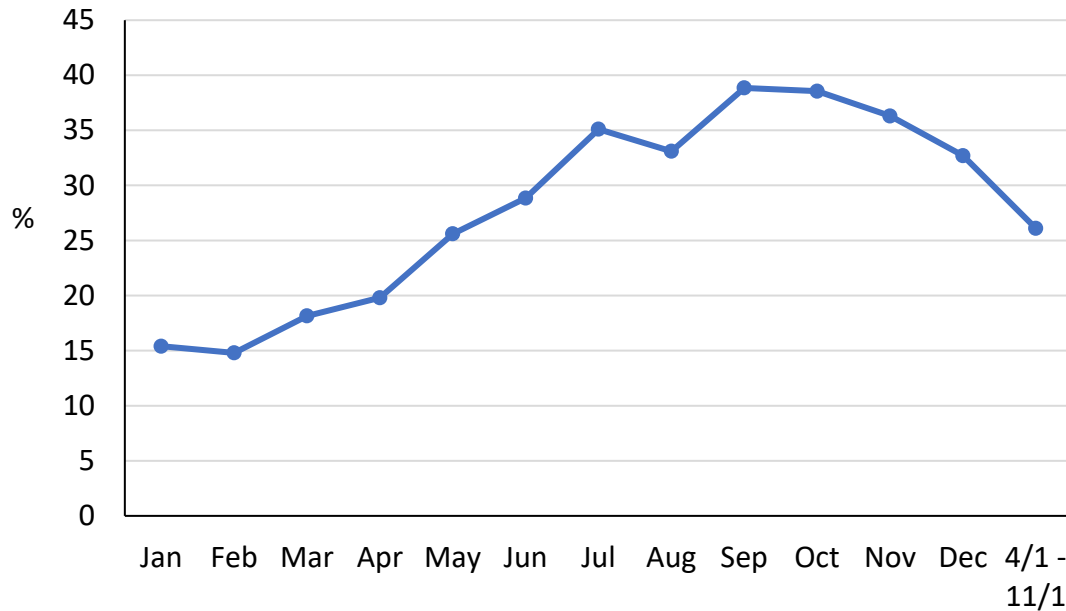


Inter-county travel dropped sharply in this wave of SAM compared with December, to one of its lowest levels since early 2021.

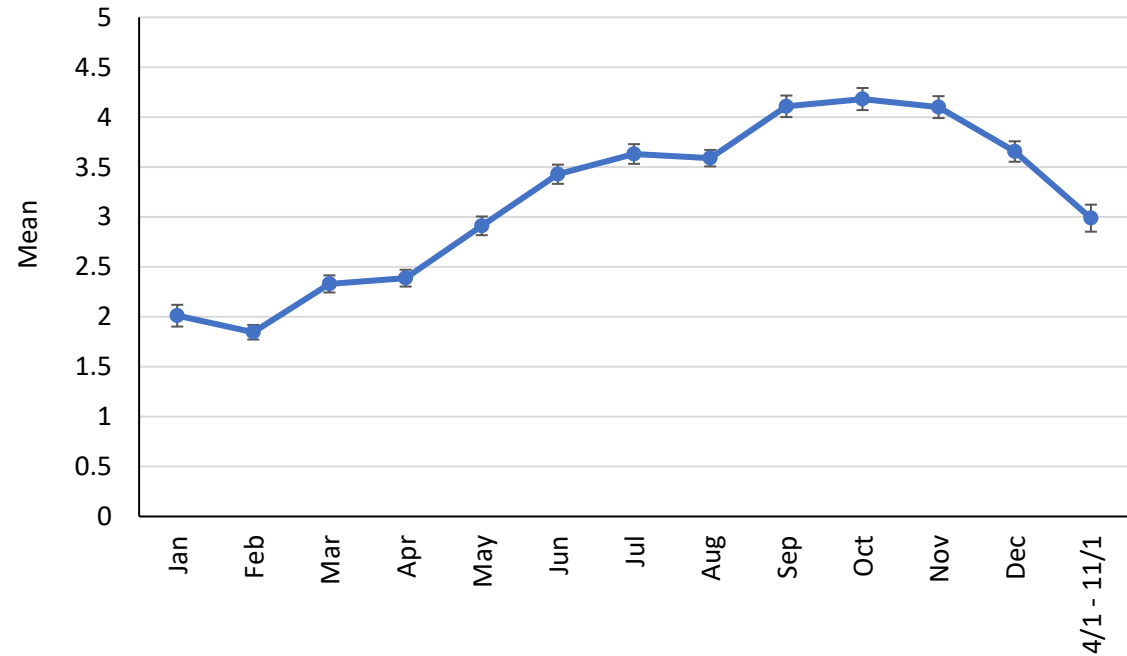
Number of people met and close contacts



Close contact in past 24 hours



People from other households met in past 48hrs

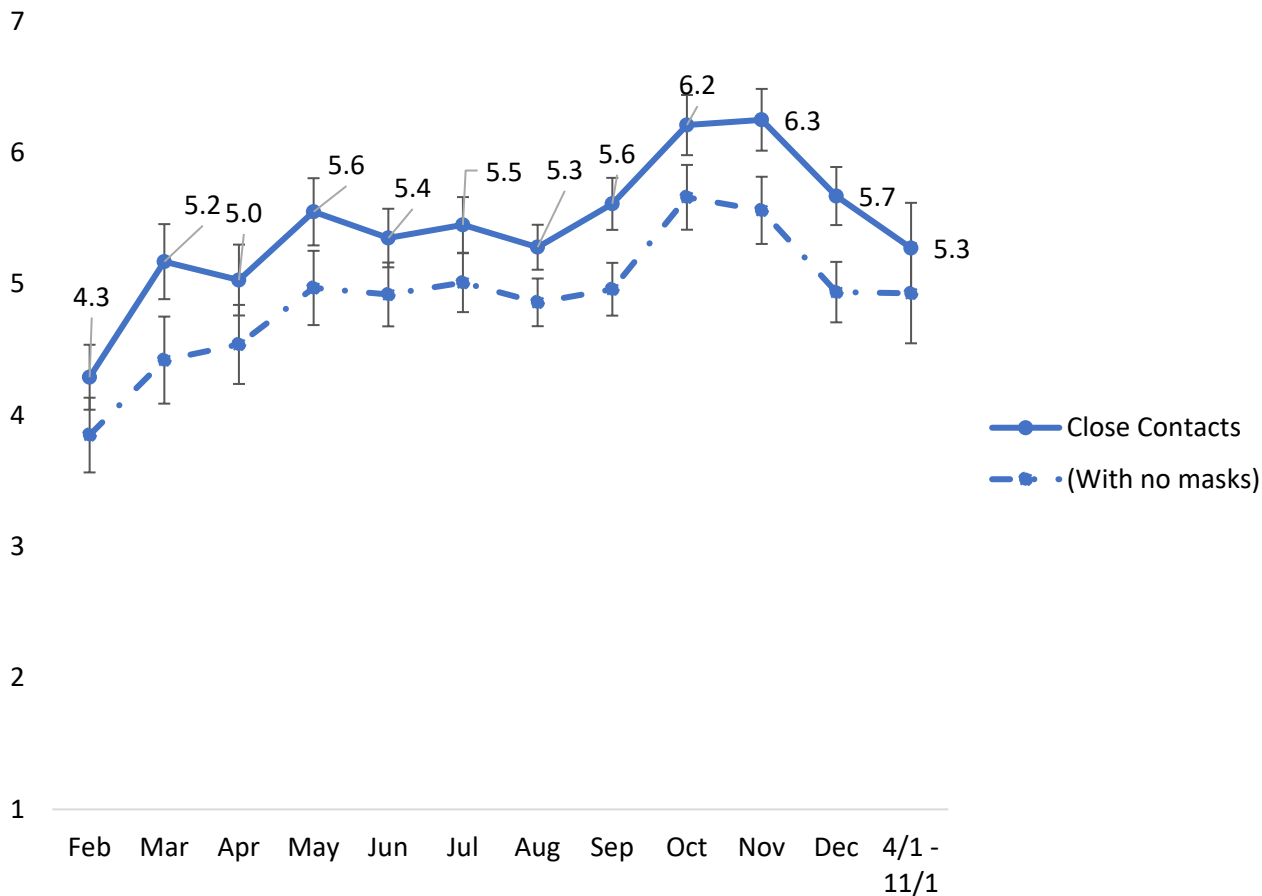


There was a drop in both the proportion of people who had a close contact and in the number of people met.

Number of close contacts

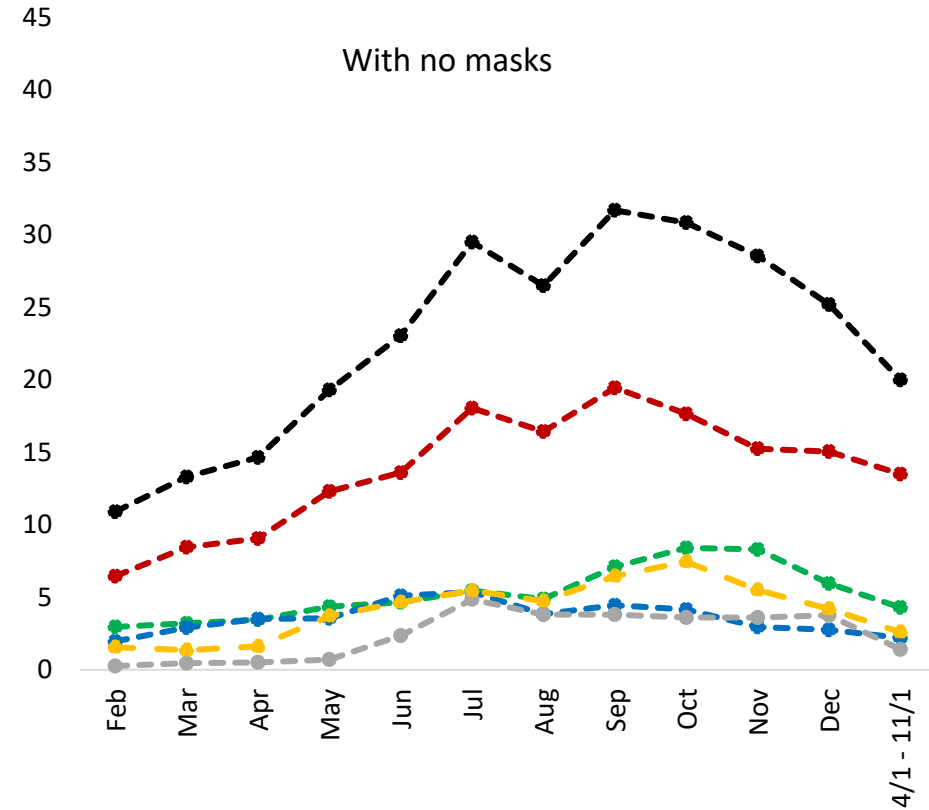
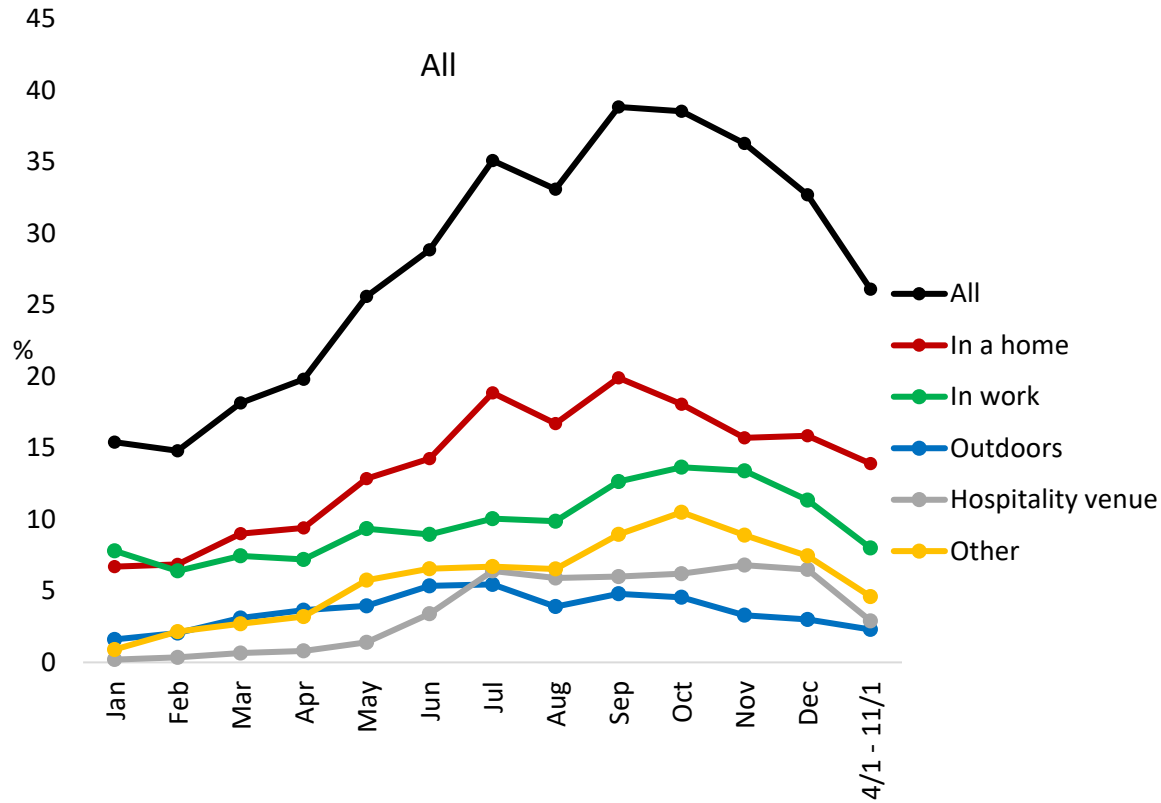


Average number of close contacts among those with at least one



Among those who had a close contact the previous day, the average number has continued to fall, but not among those who did not wear masks.

Close contacts - locations

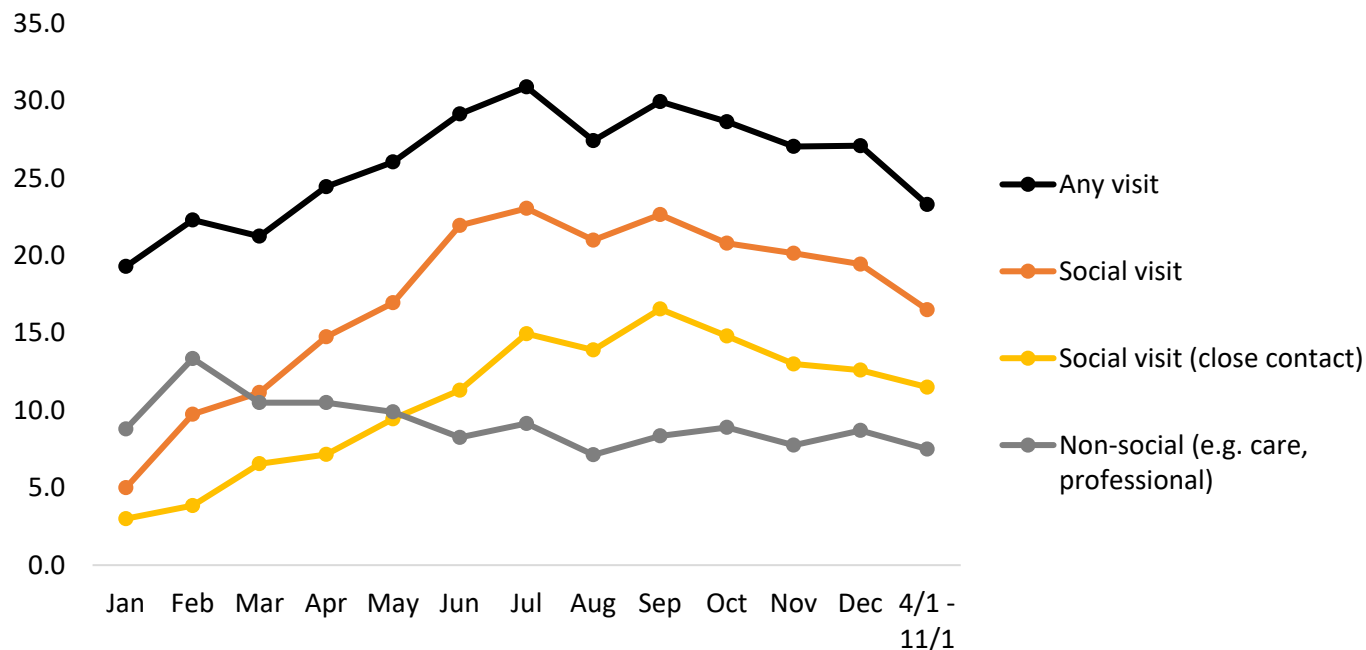


There was also a drop in close contacts overall and without masks. This was mostly driven by declines in close contacts at work and hospitality venues.

Home Visits



Proportion who had visitors or visited another household (previous day)

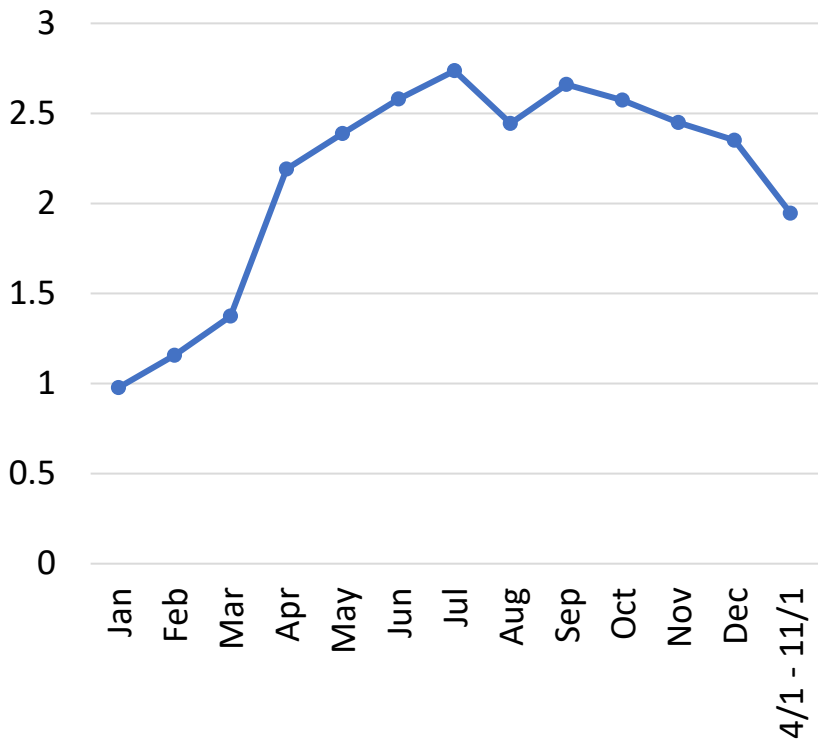


There was a drop in home visits the previous day, driven primarily by a decline in visits for social reasons.

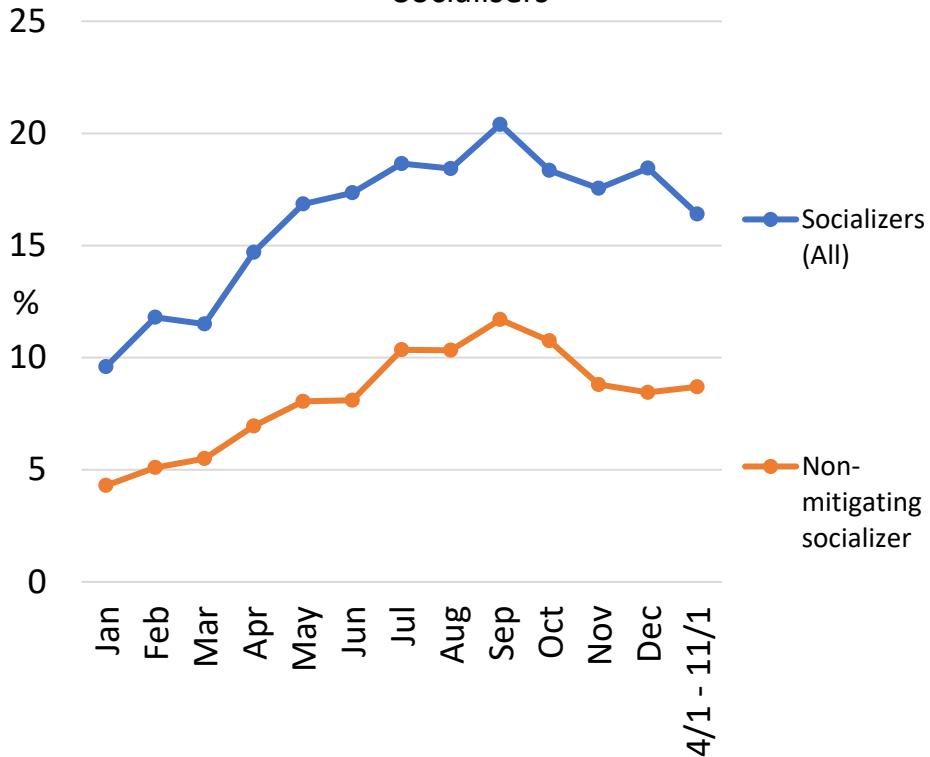
Social Activity



Index of overall activity

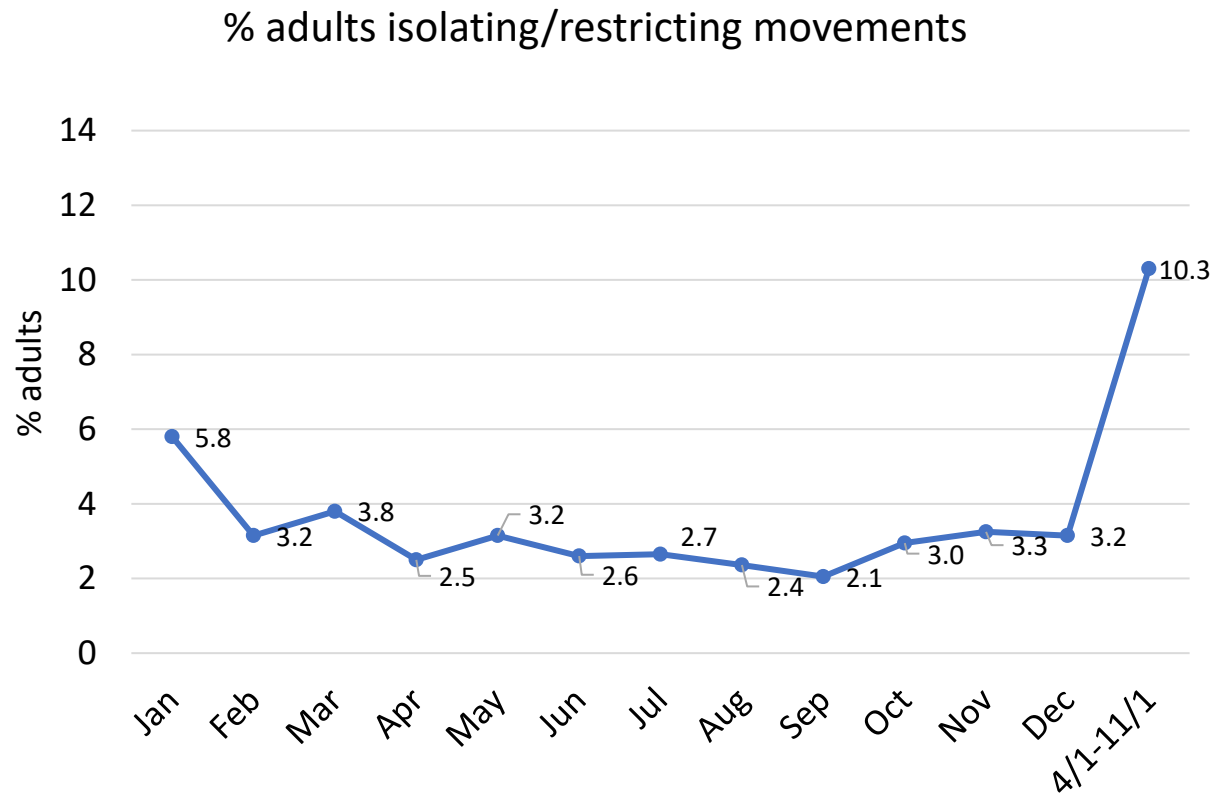


Socialisers



The left chart shows that overall social activity, measured by a combination of places visited and people met, has fallen this wave. This is the largest single drop in social activity observed in SAM. The right chart shows the percentage of people who engage in particularly high levels of social activity ('socialisers') and the subset who do so while taking few or no precautions, such as wearing a mask or maintaining 2m distance, ('non-mitigating socialisers'). These proportions have been relatively stable since early Autumn. Although there was a drop in "socialisers" this wave, it was not statistically significant.

Self-Isolation

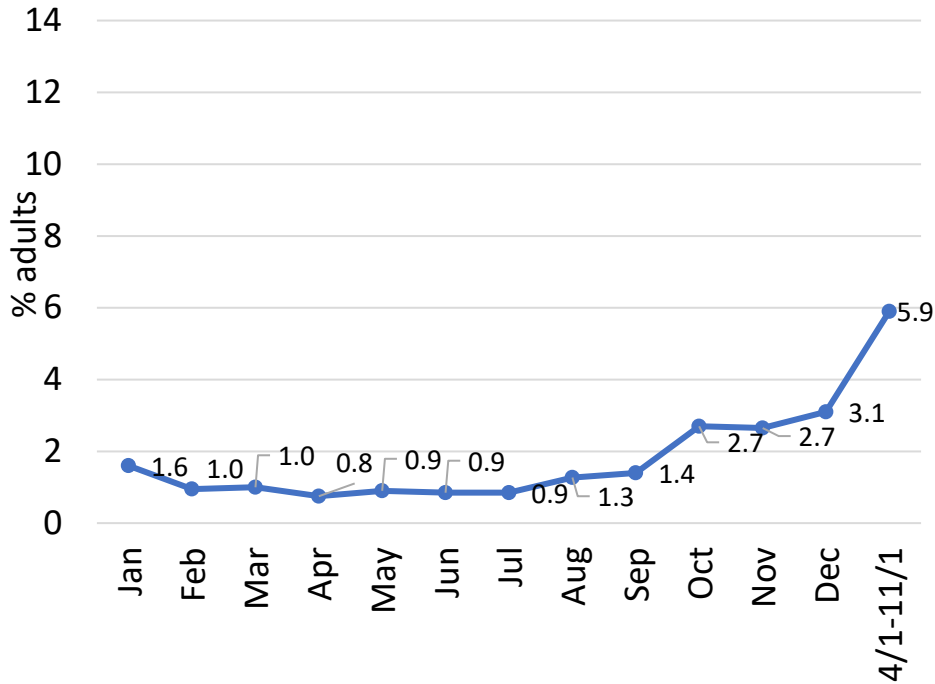


At least some of the decline in social activity can be linked to self-isolation. There was a sharp rise in the number of respondents who reported that they are self-isolating or restricting their movements, up to one-in-ten adults. This figure is significantly higher than all other timepoints in SAM.

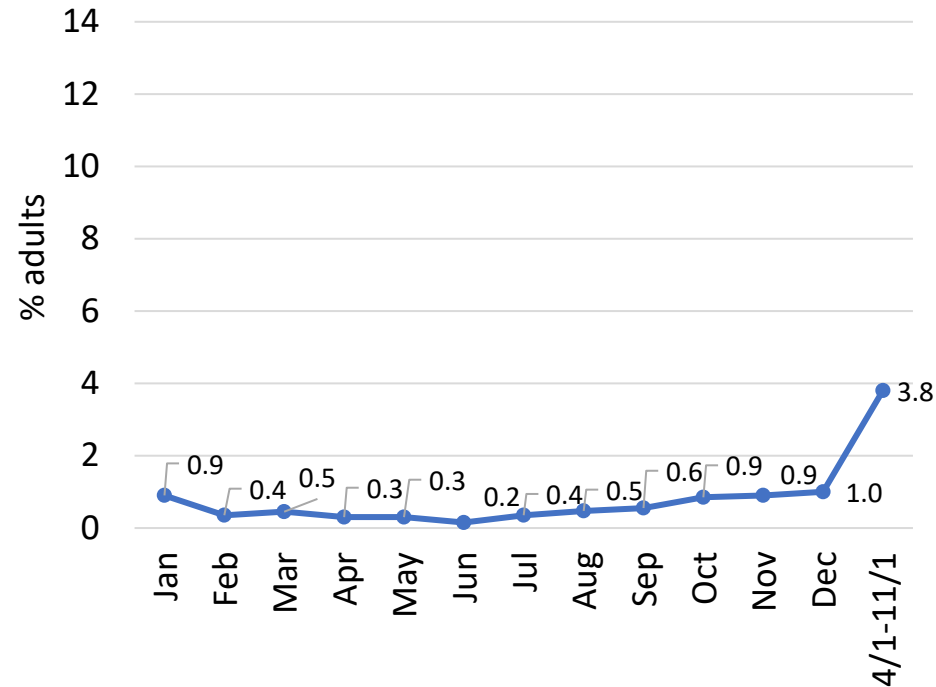
Symptoms



% of adults with symptoms



% of adults with symptoms NOT isolating

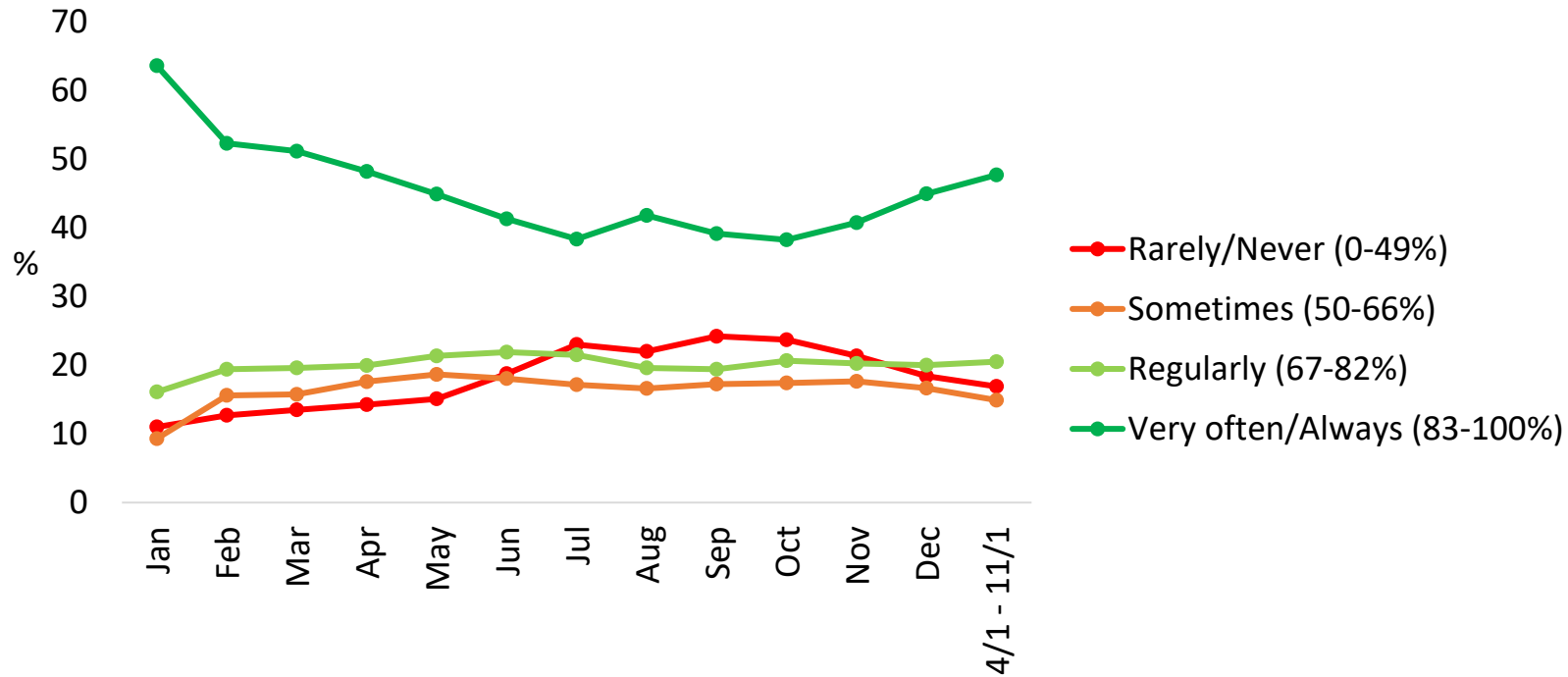


The percentage of adults who report they are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19 has risen since September, with a sharp increase in the latest wave of SAM compared to December. A very small number of respondents report that have symptoms but are not self-isolating. A majority of this group also report being close contacts of a confirmed case, although numbers are too small from one wave to specify an exact figure.

Mitigation



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

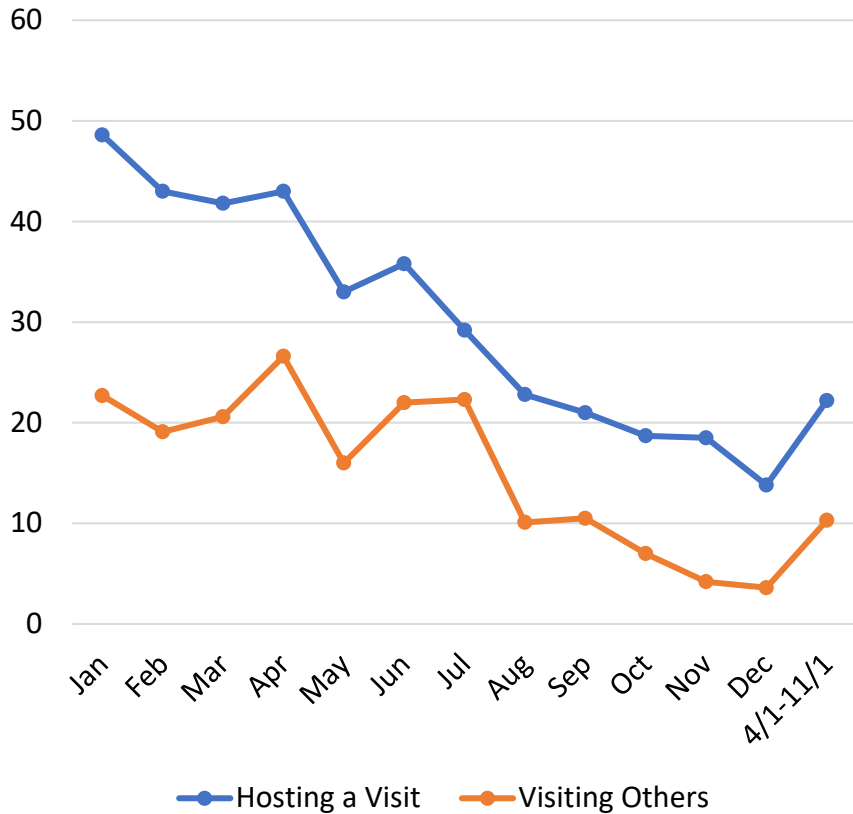


Mitigative behaviours (keeping distance, washing hands, wearing masks) remain higher than they were in November. They are now at the highest level that they have been since April 2021.

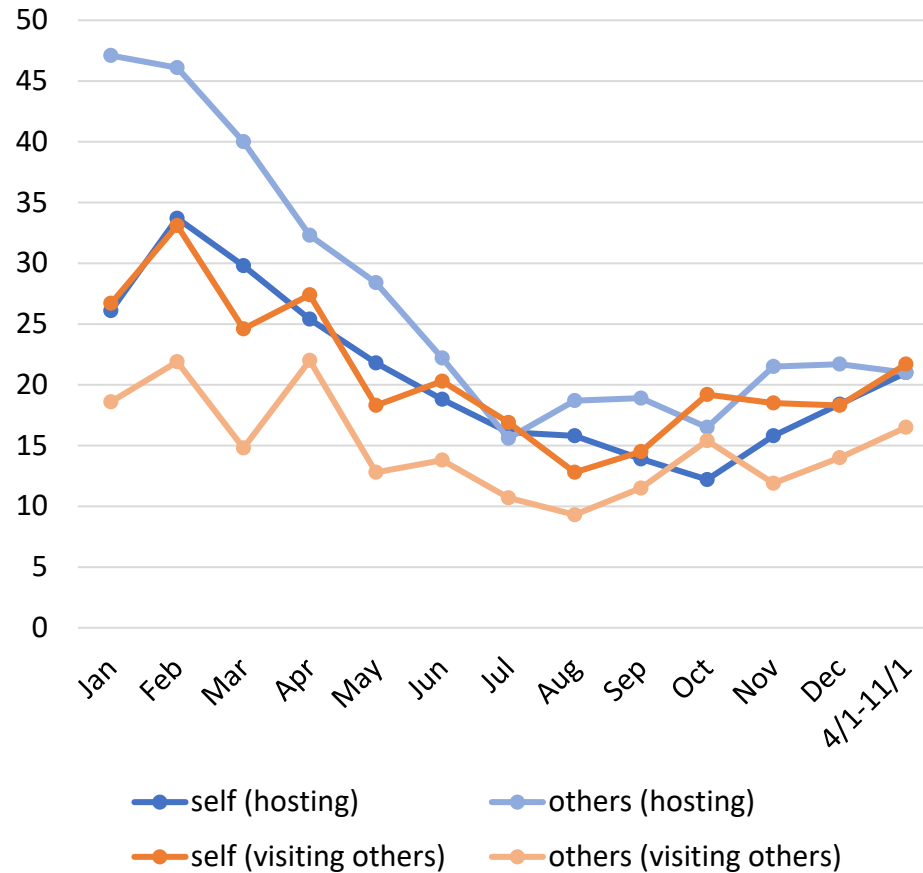
Home Visits - Mitigation



Proportion of Visits Held Outdoors

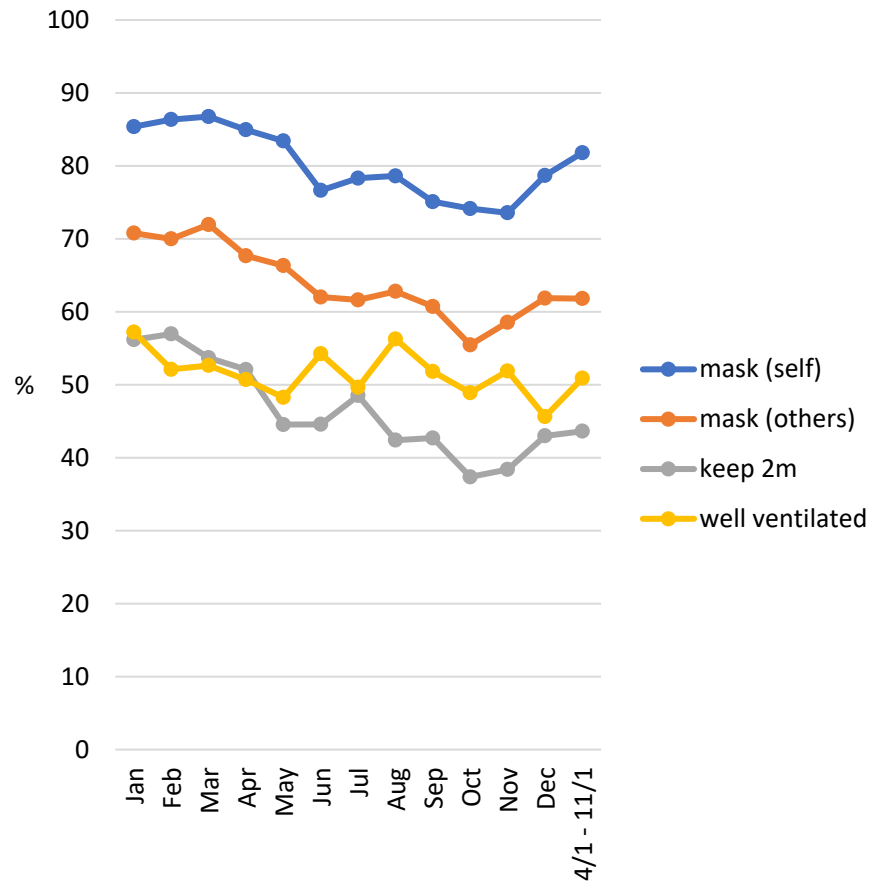


Mask Wearing (if Indoors)



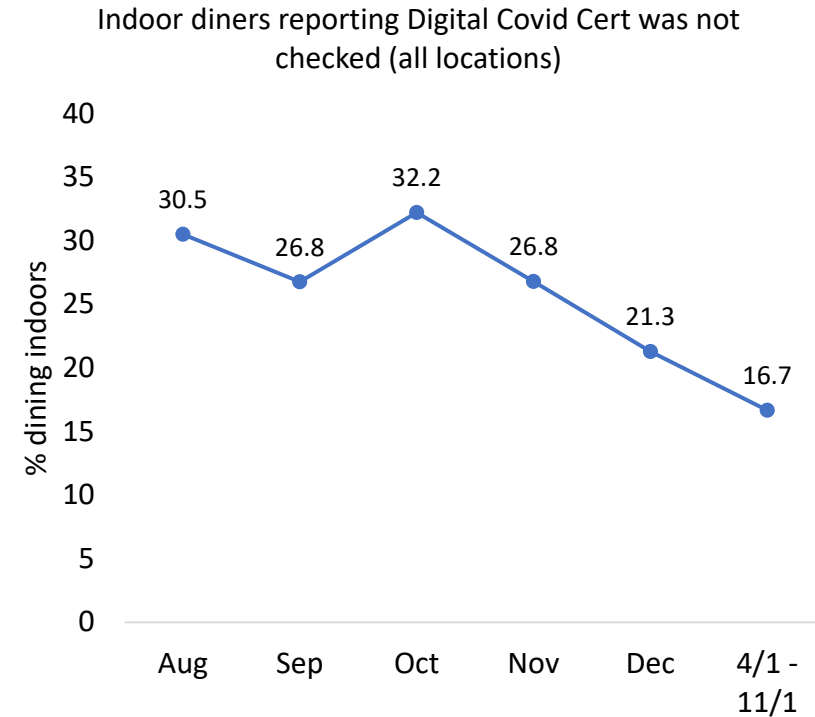
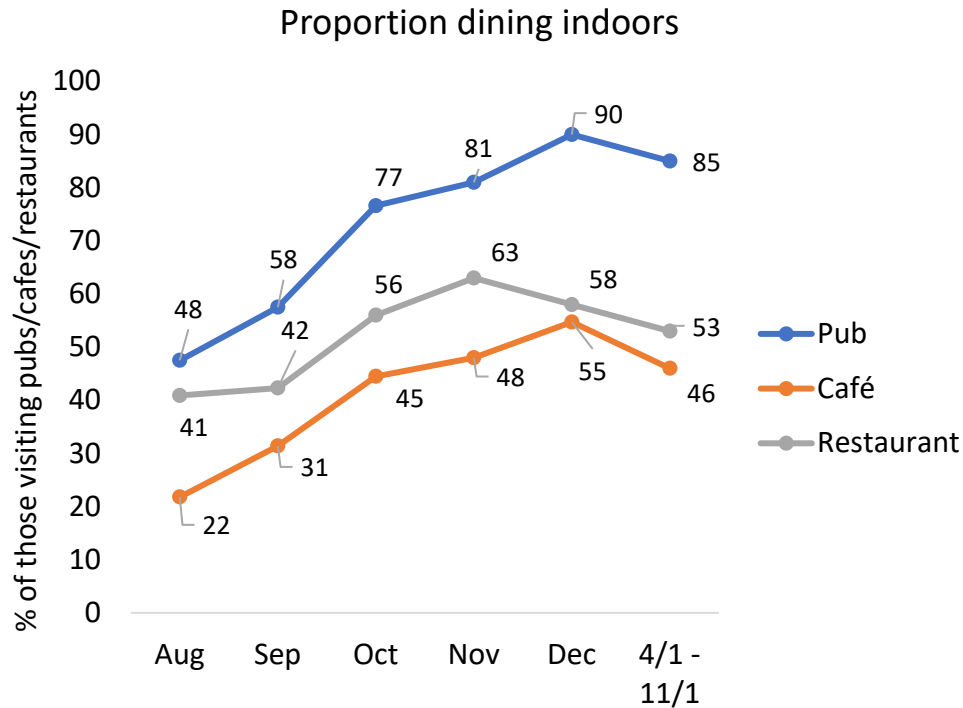
There have been recent upticks in household visits held outdoors and in mask-wearing when visits take place indoors.

Workplace - Mitigation



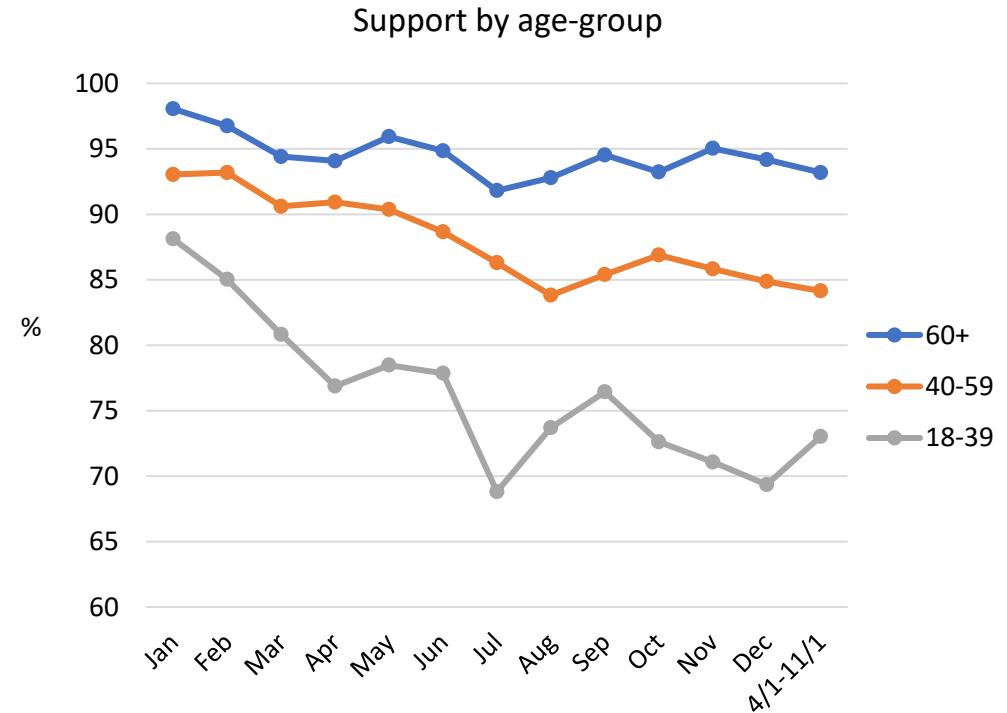
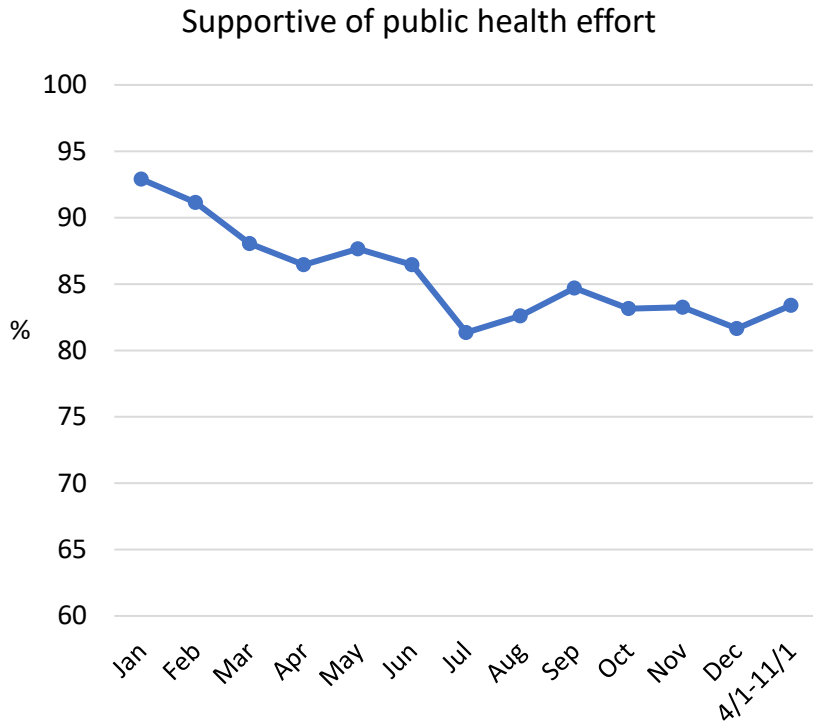
Significantly more respondents who attended their workplace reported wearing masks than in November. There was a small increase in reported hand hygiene, although it was non-significant.

Hospitality – Digital Covid Certs



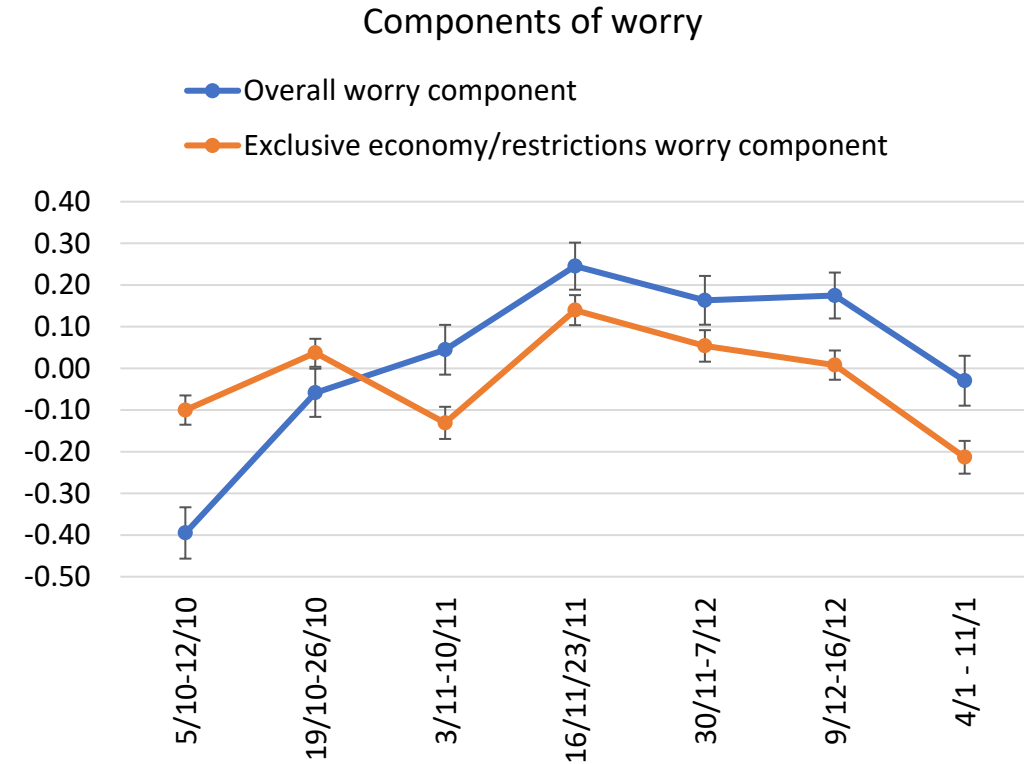
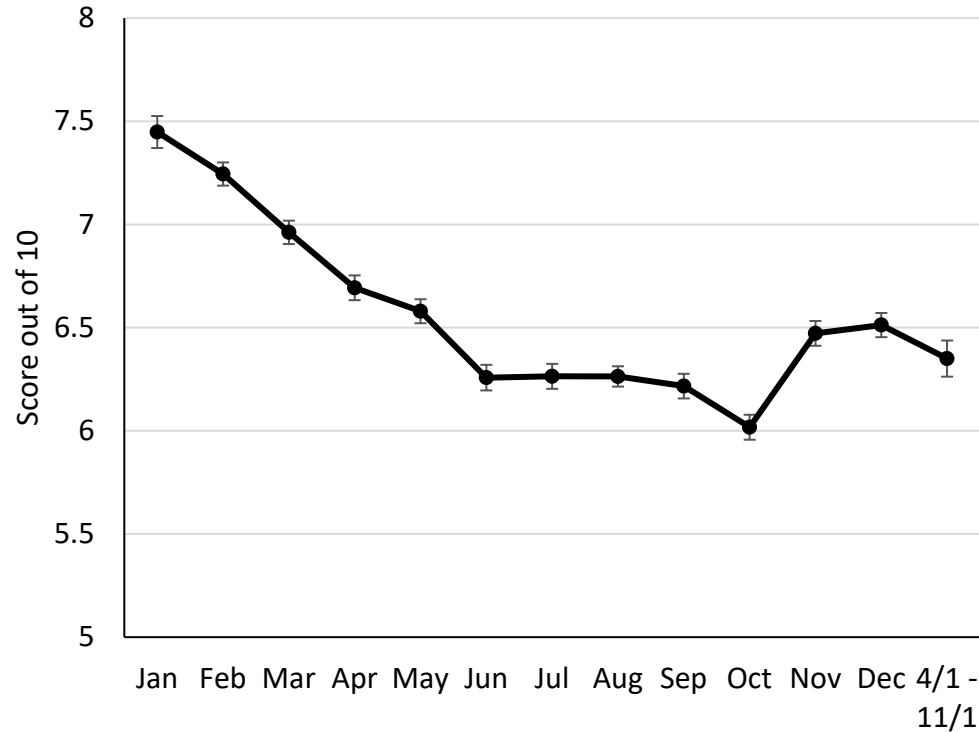
The proportion of diners who dined indoors did not change this wave. The proportion of indoor diners who said their Covid Cert was not checked continues to decline when all locations are pooled (which is necessary given small numbers dining indoors in this wave of SAM).

Overall support for the public health effort



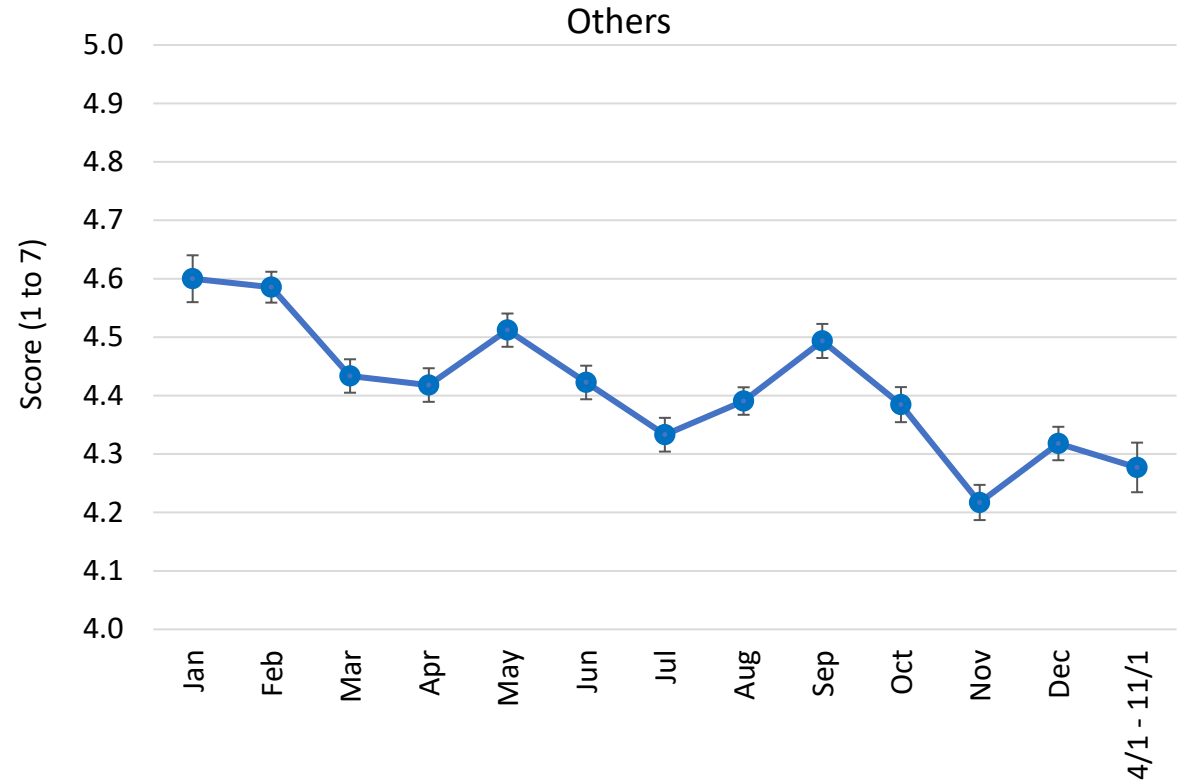
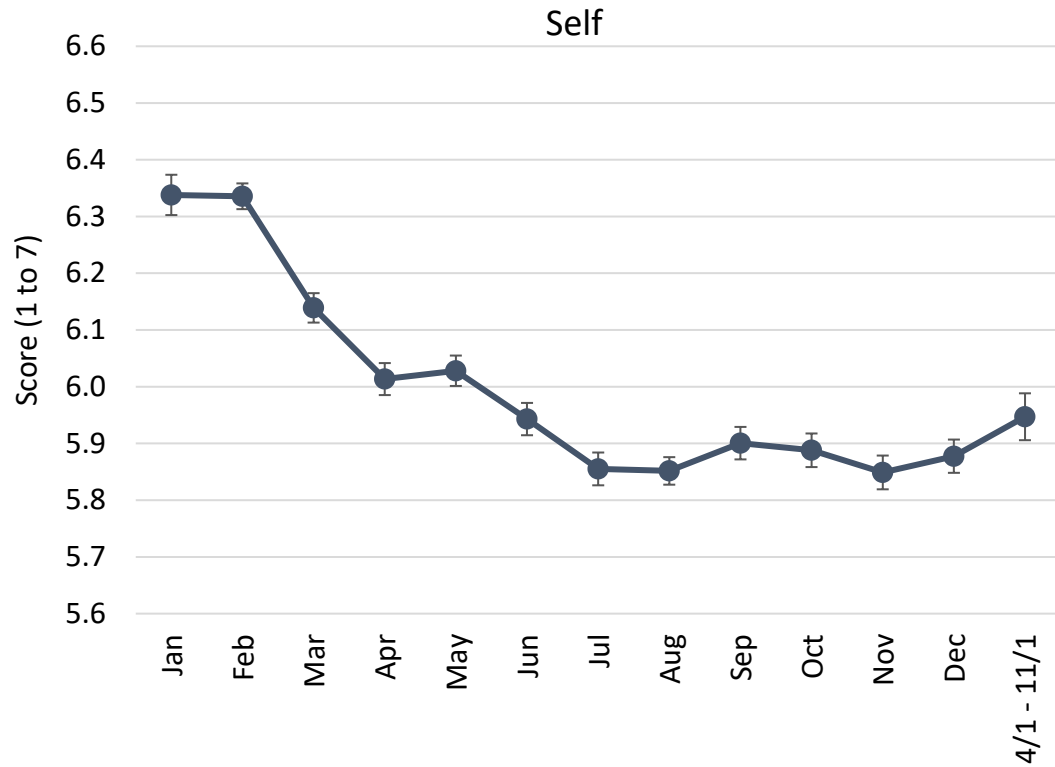
Measured by a pattern of generally positive responses across multiple questions, overall support for the public health effort has remained stable this wave. The long-standing decline in support amongst 18-39 year olds showed an upward tick, though this was not statistically significant.

Worry



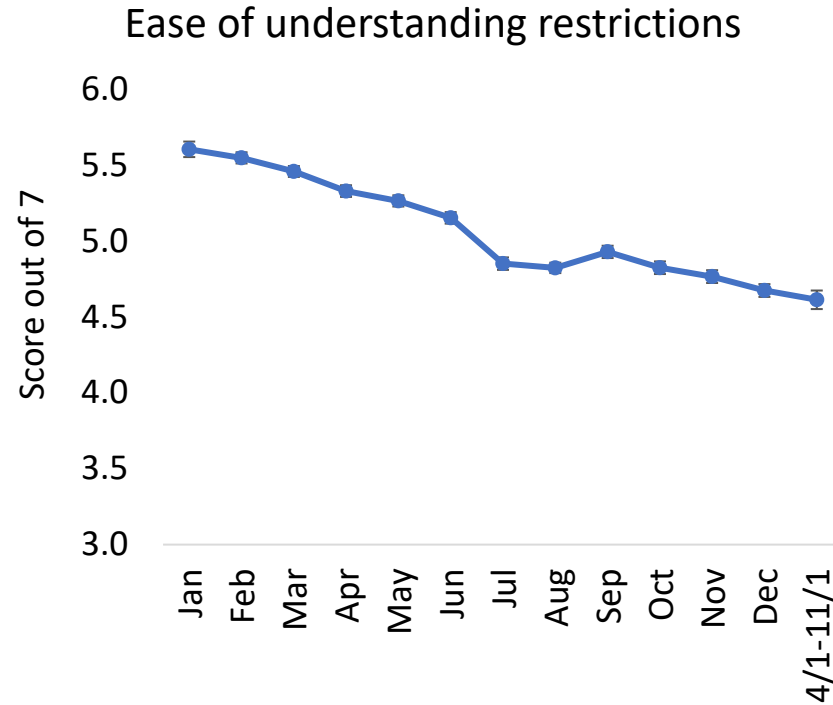
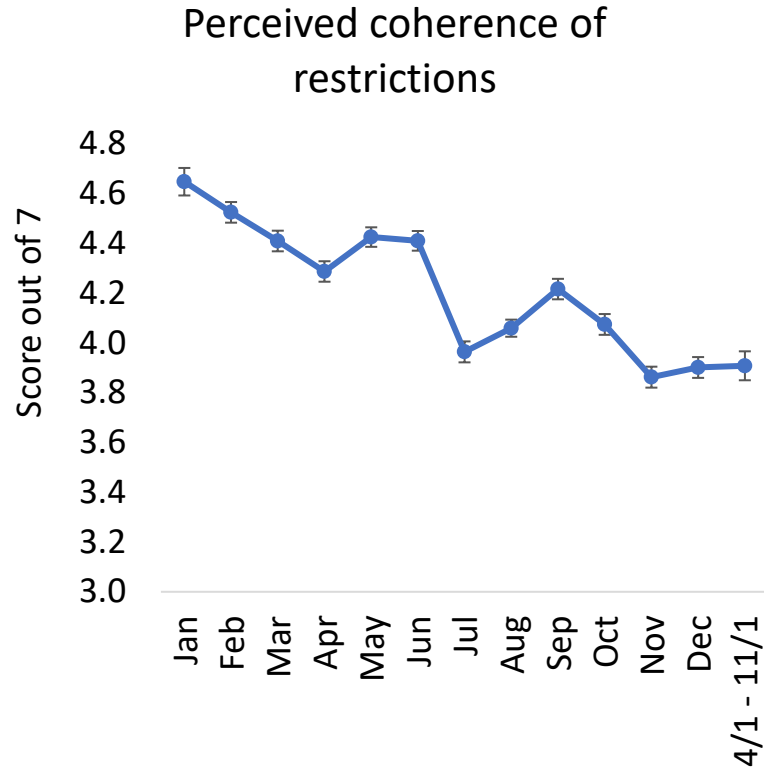
Worry about COVID-19 dipped slightly this wave. This was true both for worry overall and for exclusive worry about the economy and restrictions.

Self-Reported Compliance



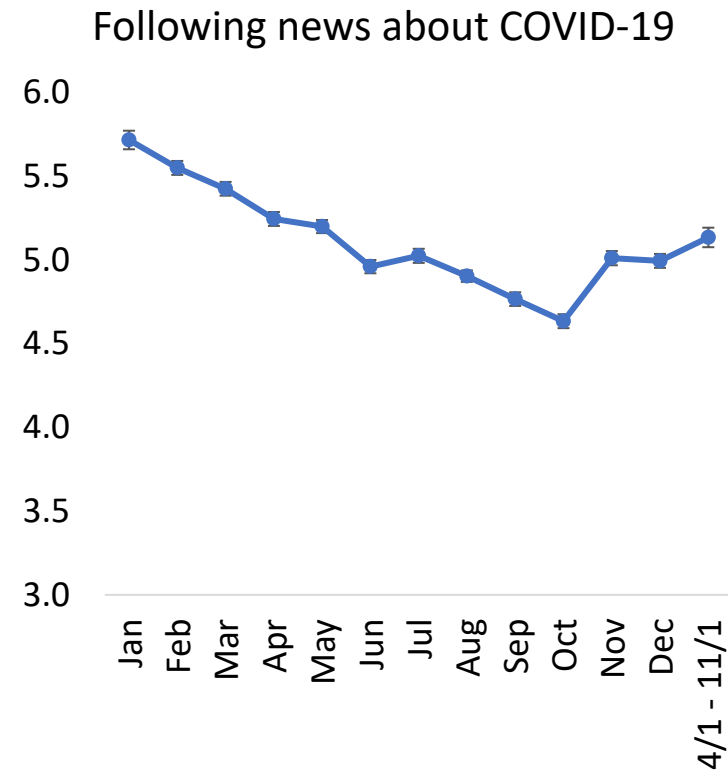
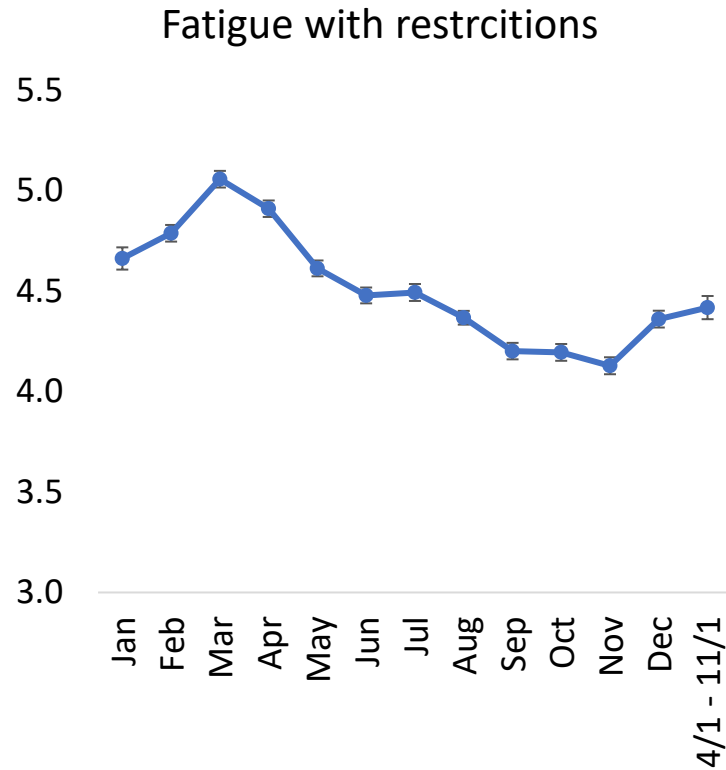
There were no changes in self-reported compliance or in reported compliance of others compared to December but self-reported compliance is significantly higher than November.

Psychological Drivers of Behaviour



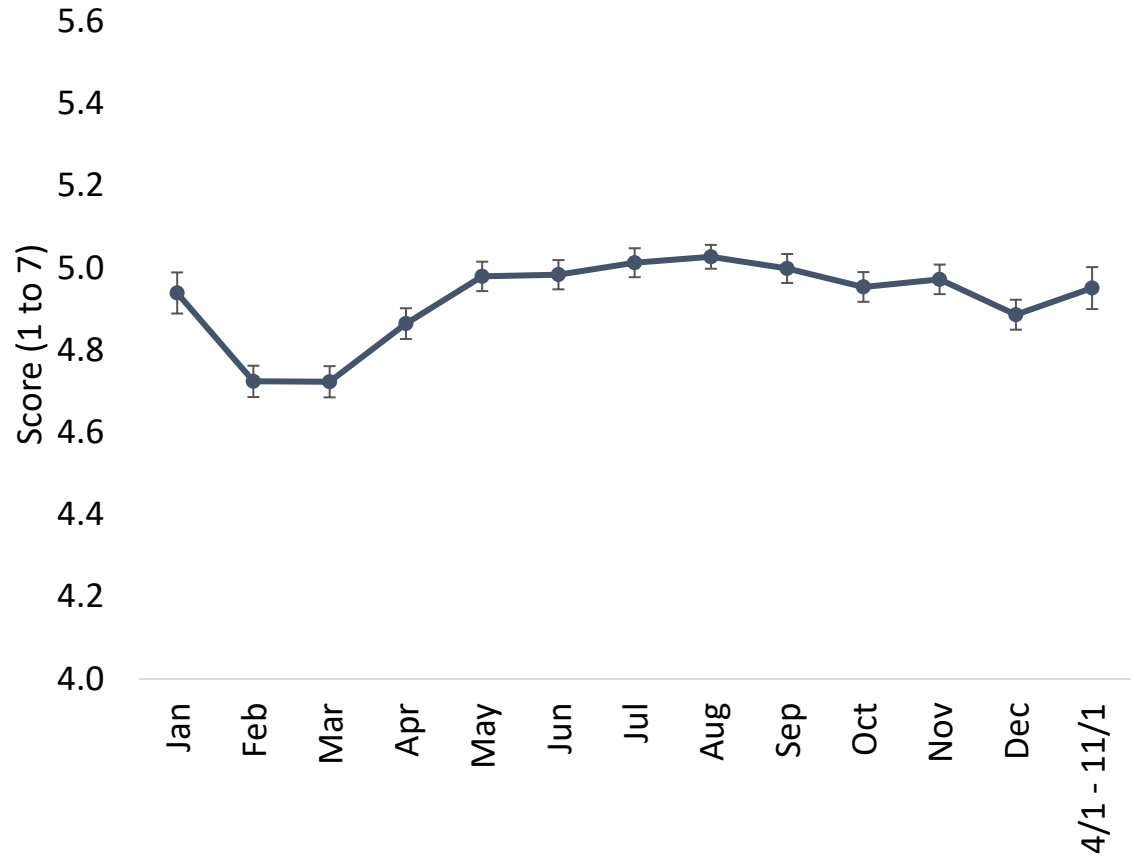
There were no changes in the perceived coherence of restrictions but ease of understanding restrictions is on a clear downward trend.

Psychological Drivers of Behaviour



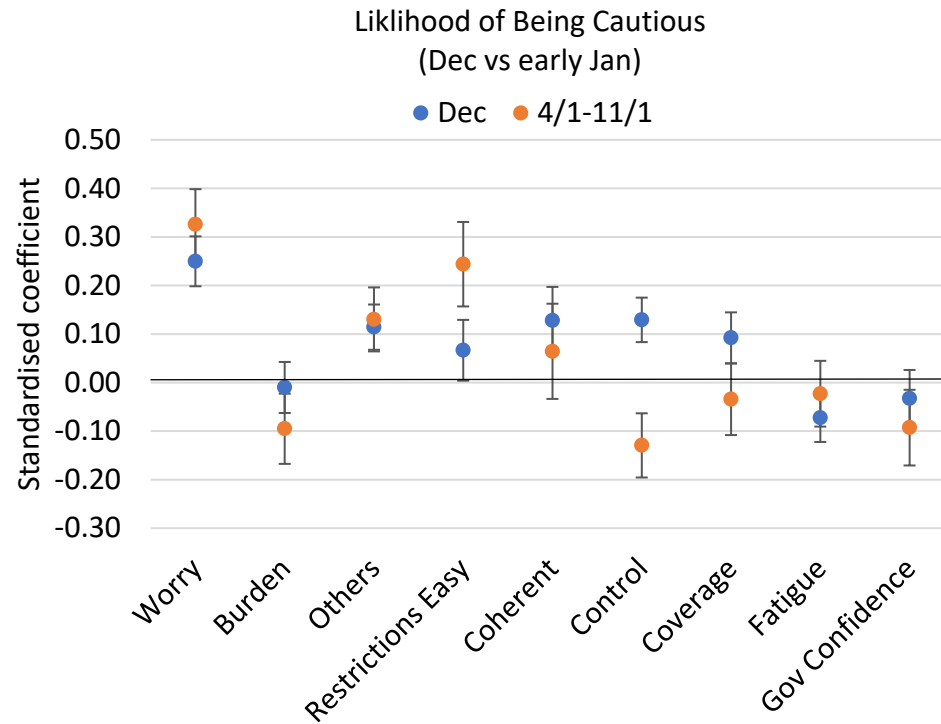
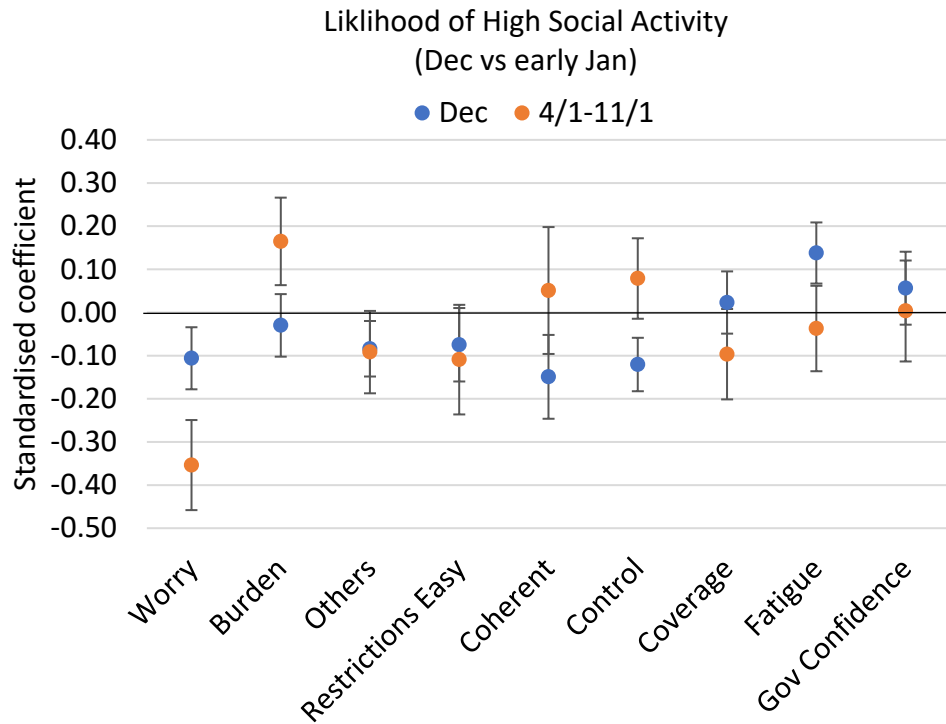
There were no changes in fatigue with restrictions. Respondents reported following news coverage about COVID-19 more this wave than December.

Wellbeing



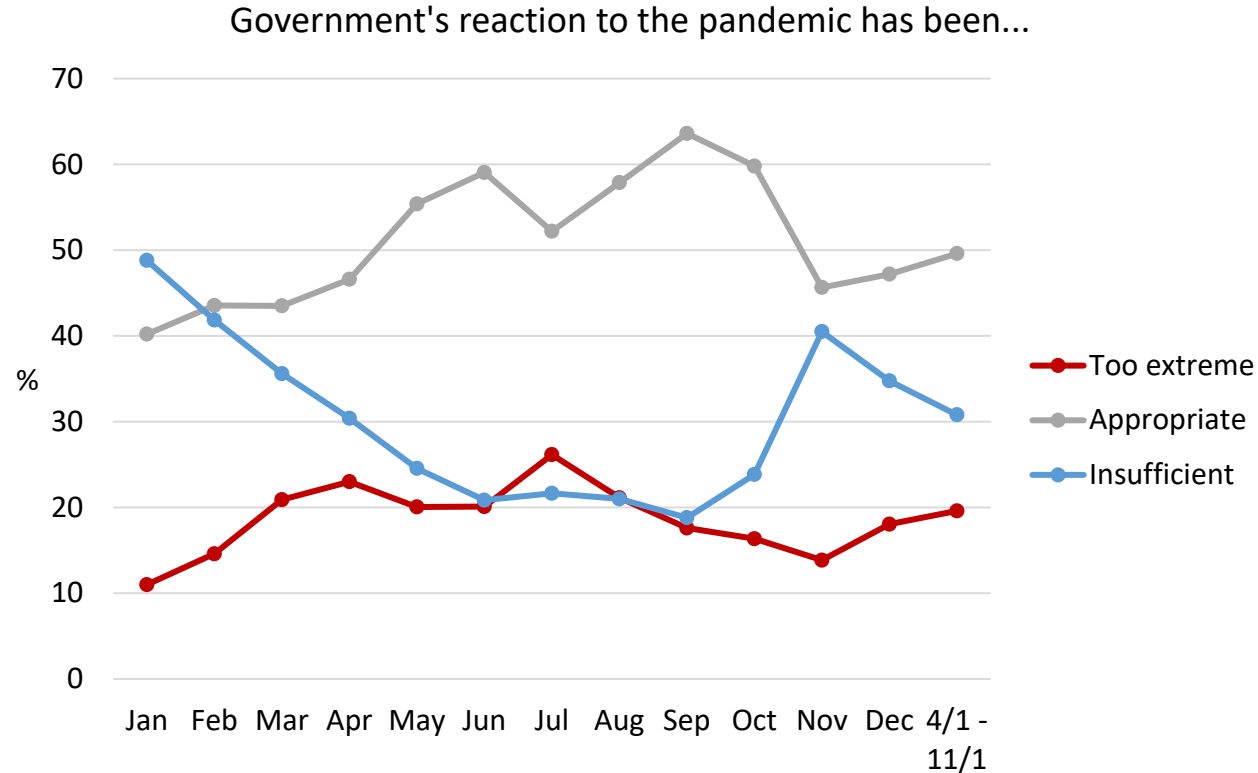
Overall wellbeing did not change this wave.

Psychological Drivers of Behaviour



The above charts show how strongly the psychological variables recorded in SAM relate to behaviour, once socio-demographic variables are controlled for. Worry and judging preventing the spread of the virus to be more important than the burden of restrictions are strongly predictive of behaviour, similar to early 2021. Perceiving others to follow guidelines and judging the restrictions to be easy to understand are linked to taking more precautions (e.g. mask wearing).

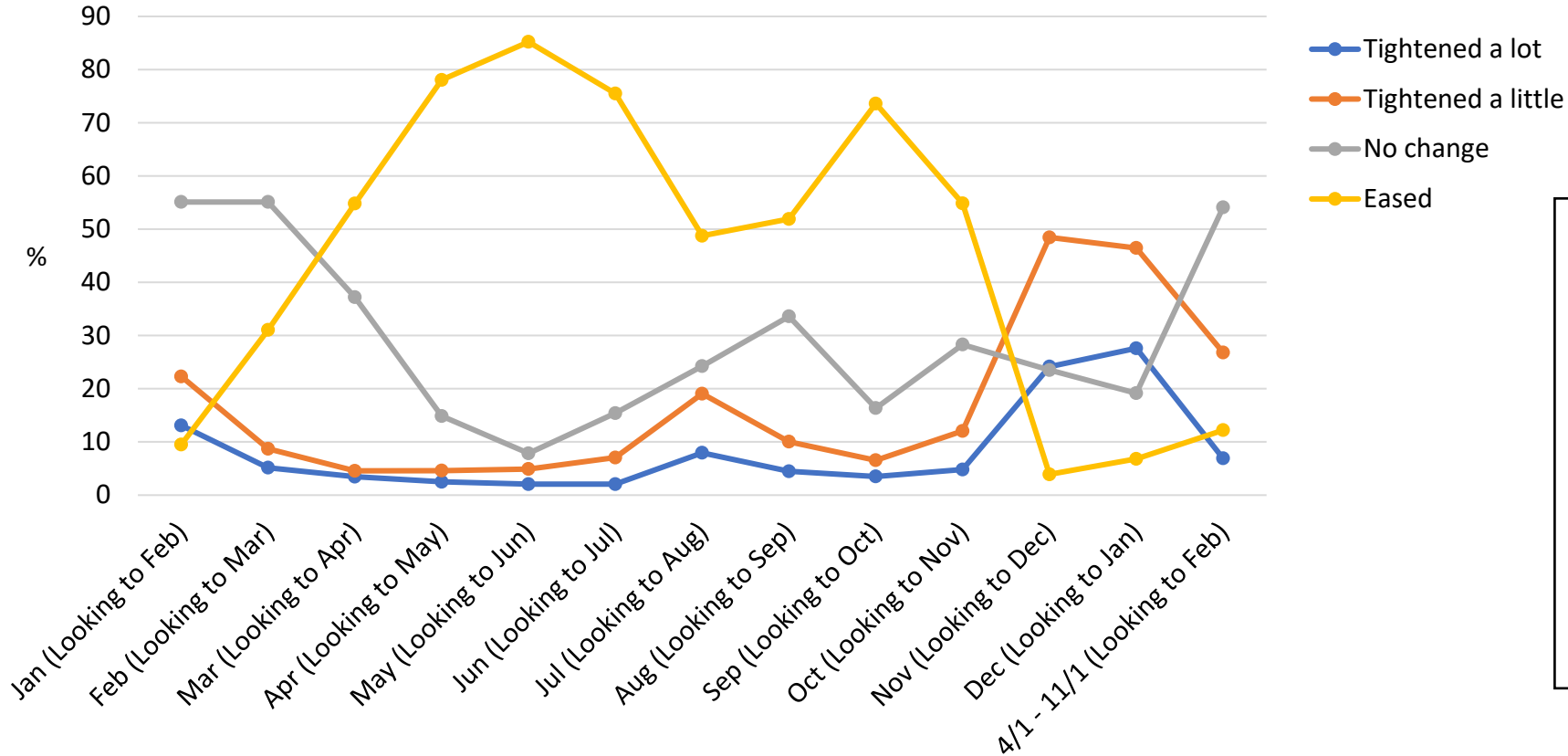
Government Response to the Pandemic



Compared with December, more people this wave thought the Government's response to the pandemic is appropriate and less thought that it was insufficient. Approx. 1 in 5 judged that the response is too extreme.

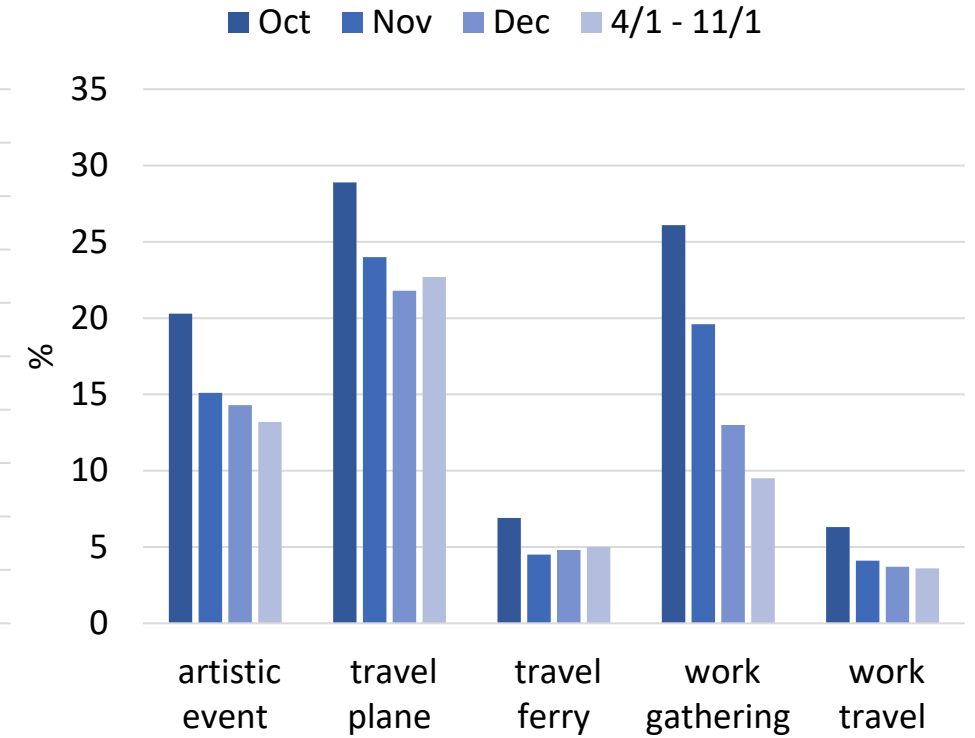
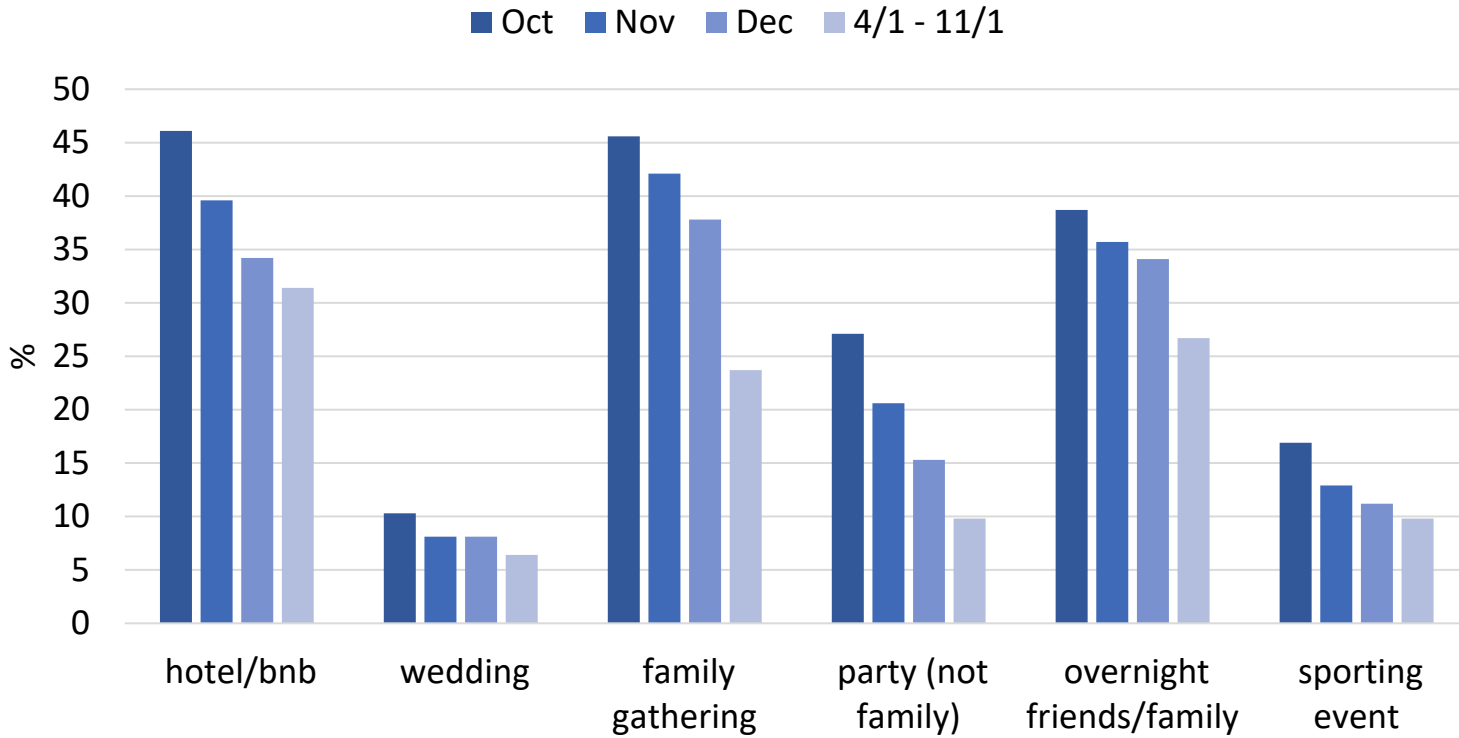


Expectations for easing restrictions (next month)



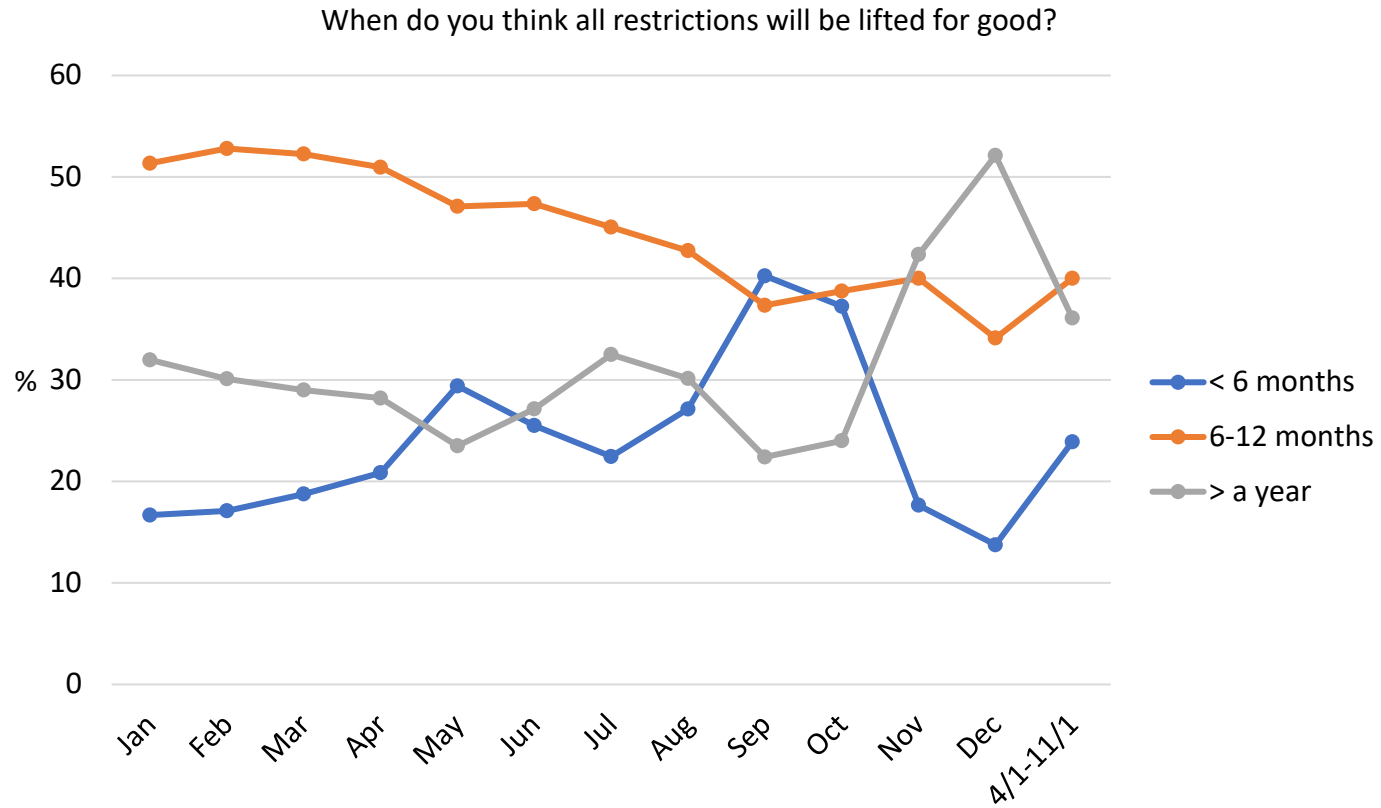
Looking forward to February, fewer people thought that restrictions would tighten and more thought that they would remain as they are compared to expectations in December for January. A growing minority of people expect restrictions to ease in the near future, although the change is non-significant.

Plans



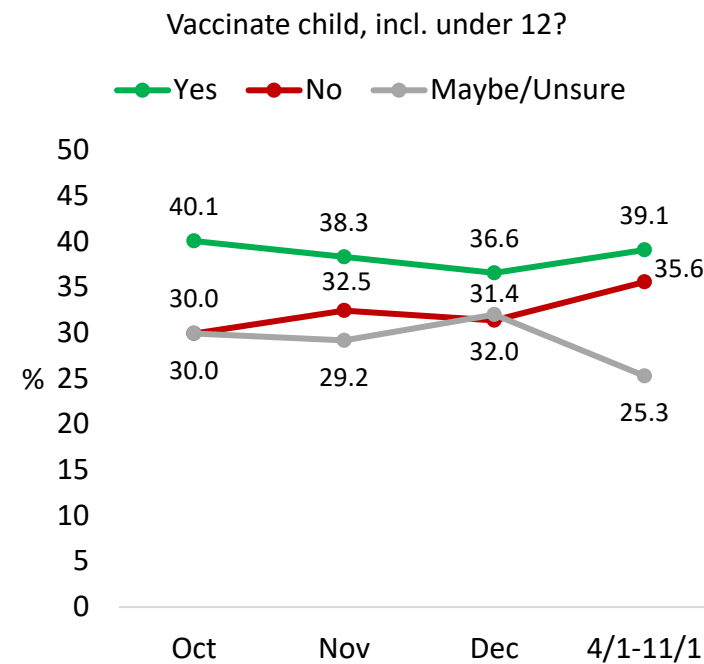
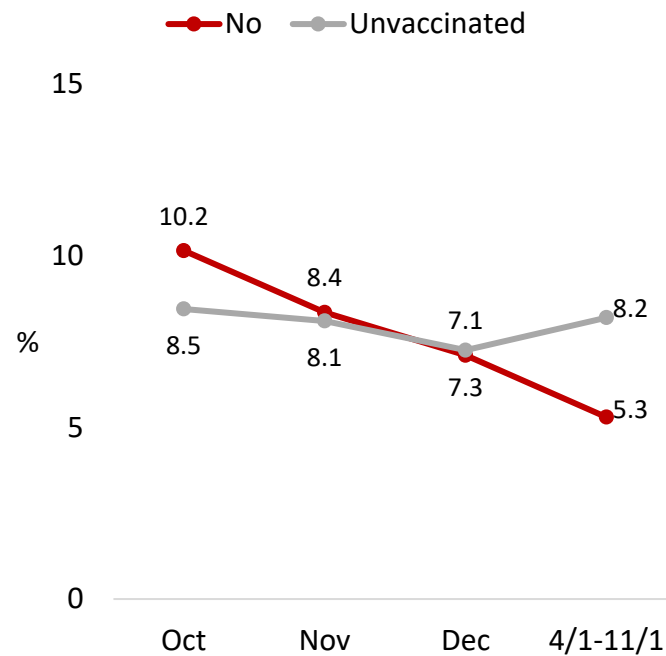
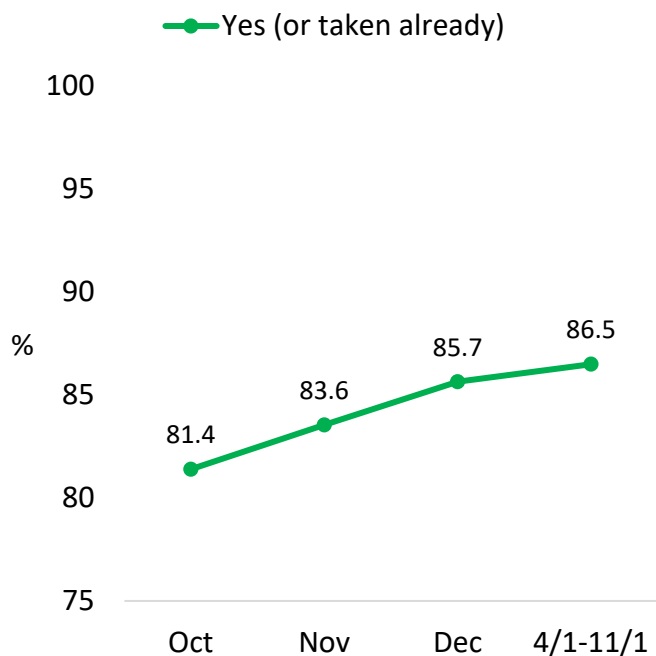
These charts show the percentage of the population who are planning to take part in any of these activities over the next 3 months. We ask people to only include activities for which they have a specific plan and date in mind. Respondents had fewer plans in place for family gatherings, parties, overnight stays, and work gatherings.

Long-term expectations



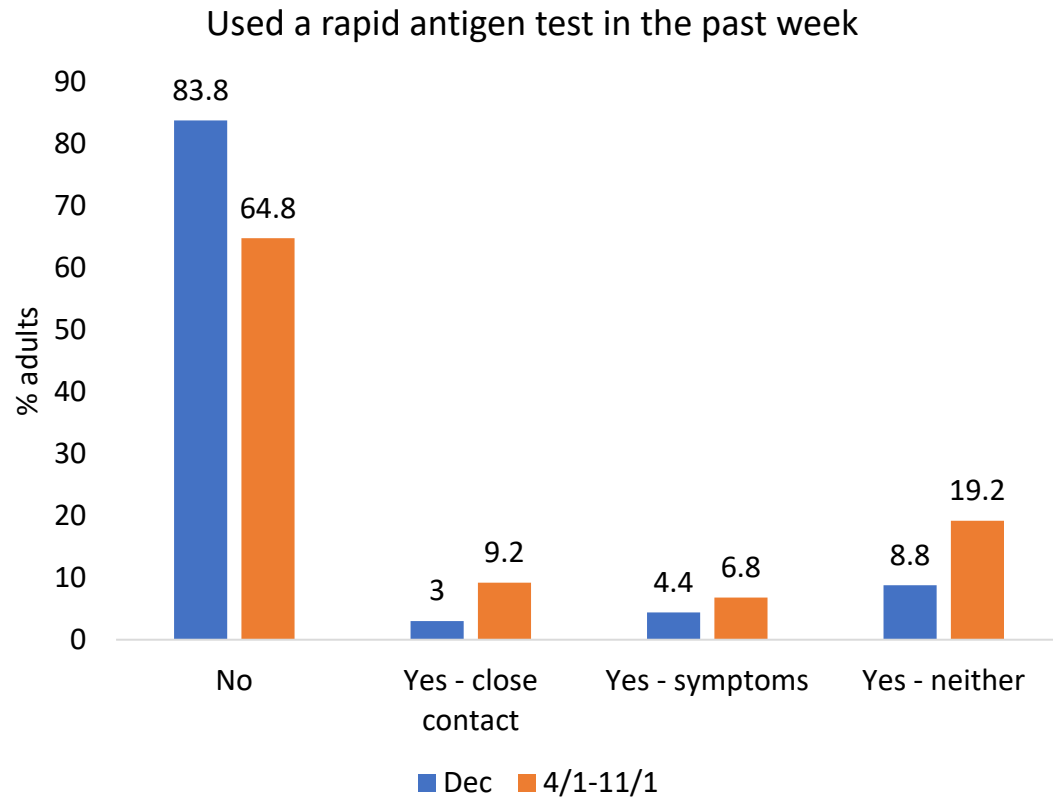
Thinking longer term, more people thought that restrictions would be lifted for good within the next 6 months and fewer people thought that they would last longer than another year compared to expectations in December.

Vaccine Intentions



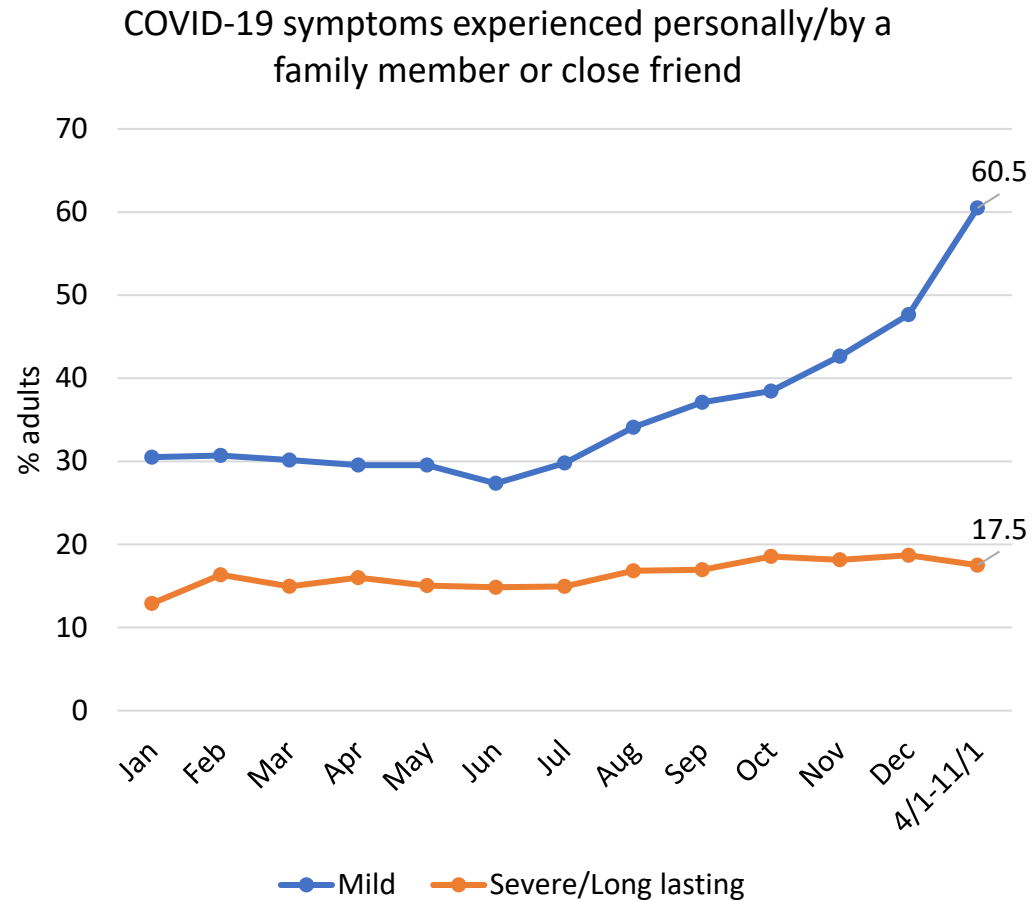
The proportion of the population who have taken/intend to take a booster vaccine has been steadily increasing since October. There has been no change in parents' willingness to vaccinate their children.

Rapid Antigen Testing



In line with the change in public health guidance, a larger proportion of the population report having taken a rapid antigen test in the past week. The most common reason is precautionary (neither a close contact nor experiencing any symptoms) and is reported by almost 1 in 5 people.

Personal experience with COVID



Most people experienced or know someone personally who experienced mild COVID-19 symptoms and this proportion has risen sharply since December. One-in-six experienced or know someone personally who experienced severe or long-lasting symptoms.