

Social Activity Measure March 15th – 22nd 2022

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

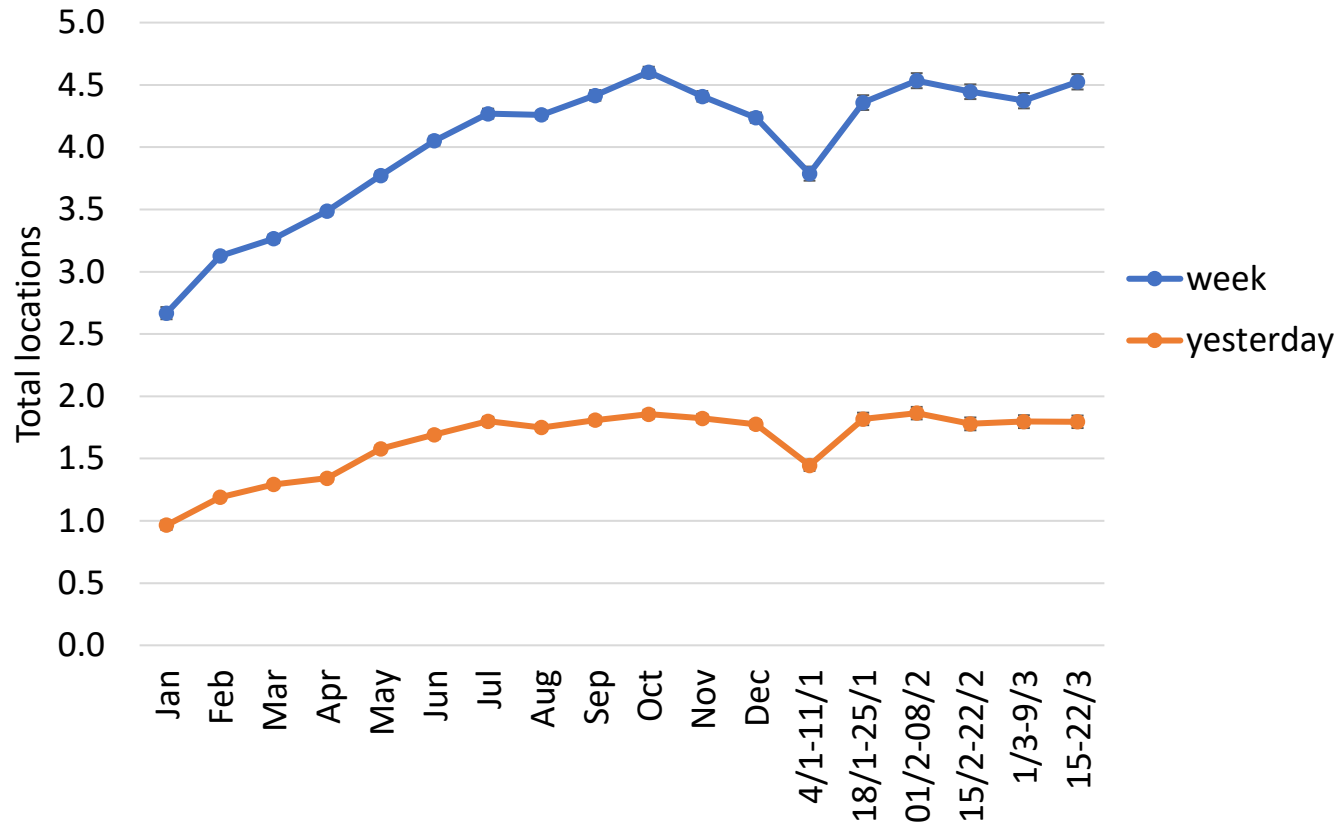
The Social Activity Measure (SAM) is a behavioural study that records the public response to the risk of COVID-19 infection over time. Designed by the ESRI's Behavioural Research Unit (BRU), SAM is an anonymous, interactive, online study that surveys people about their recent activity. The study offers 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 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 March 15th and 22nd 2022. The period therefore included St Patrick's Day and the public holiday on Friday 18th March. The week enjoyed unusually fine weather. However, COVID-19 cases were increasing again, including a rise in hospitalisations, which surpassed 1,000 just prior to data collection.



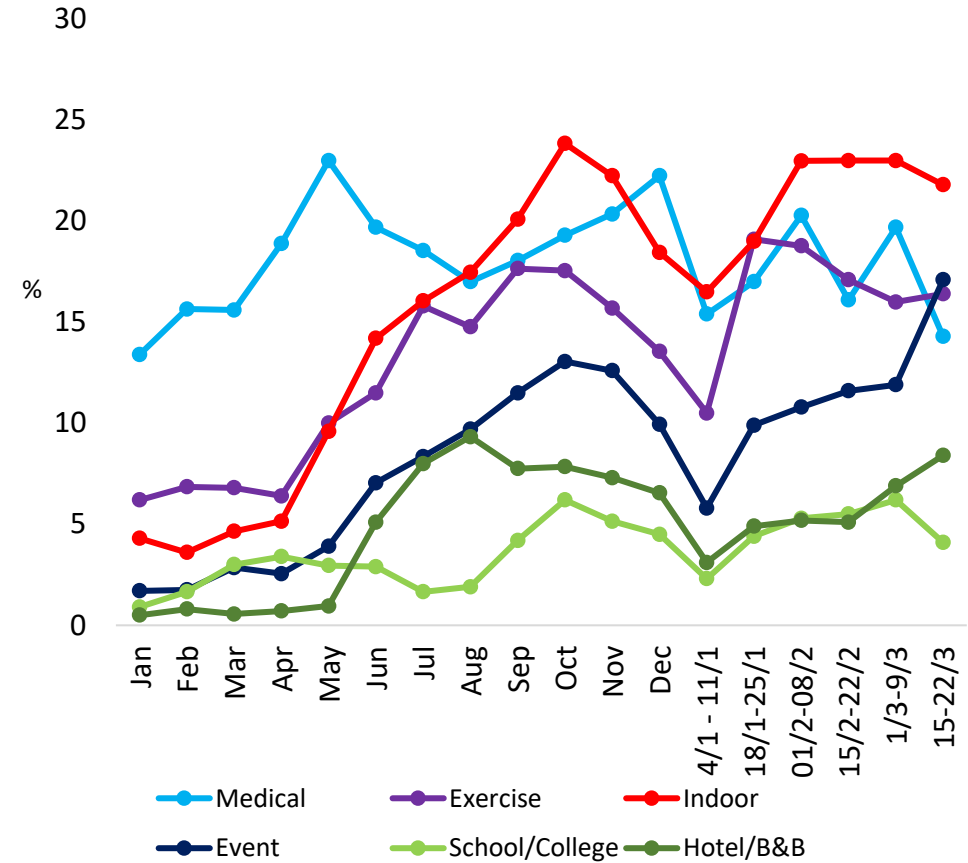
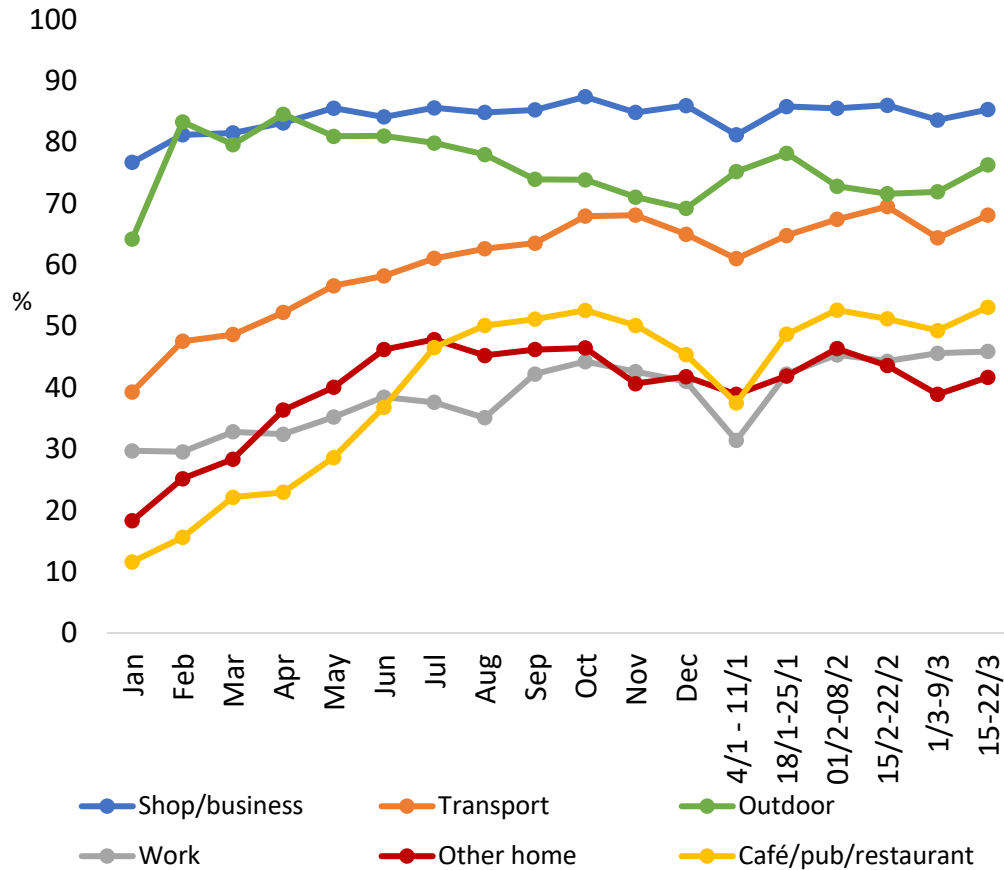
Total locations visited



There was no significant change in aggregate locations visited either over the previous week or the previous day.



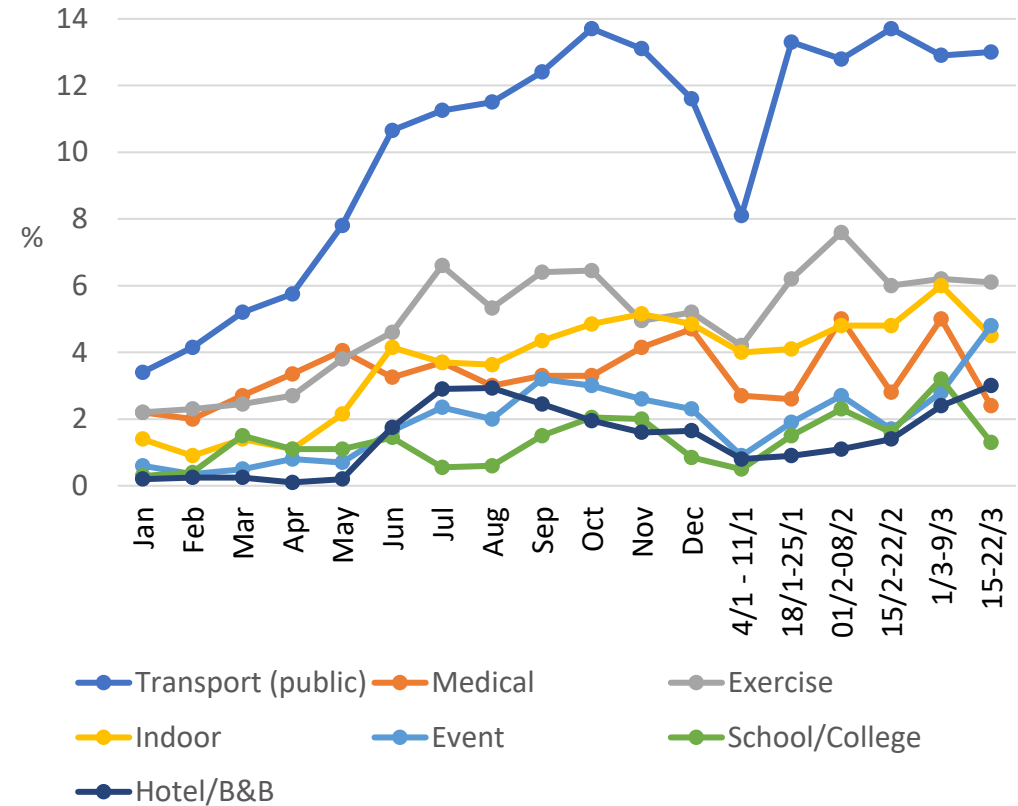
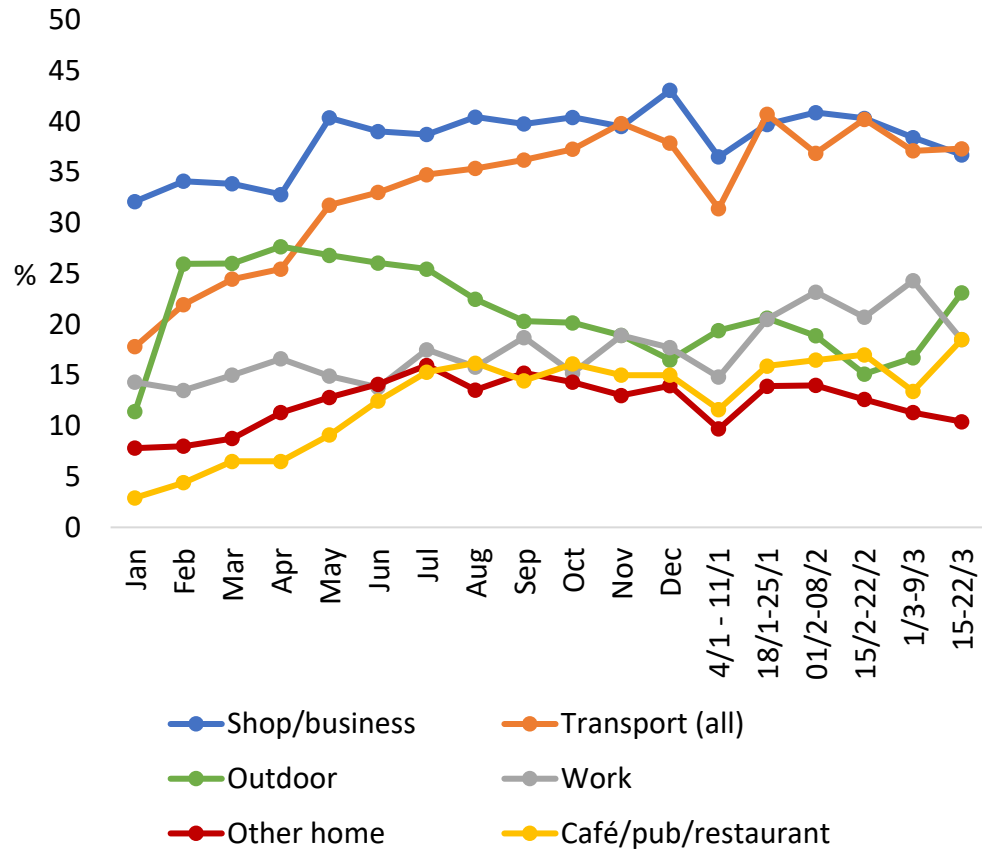
Locations visited (previous week)



There were significant increases in visits to outdoor locations, hospitality venues and, in particular, events. There were decreases in visits to medical locations and schools/colleges. These patterns are likely to be due to the extended public holiday.

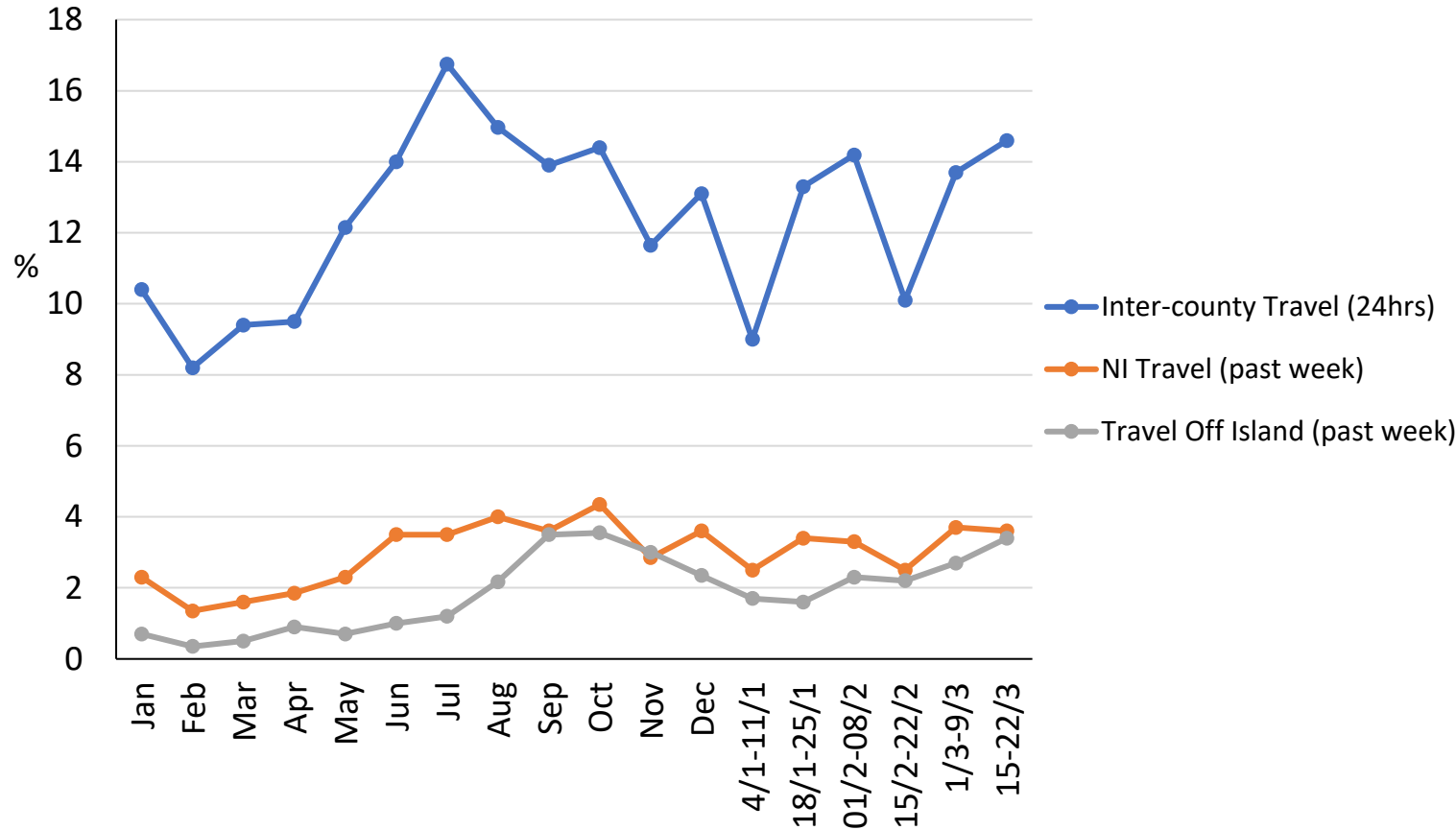


Locations visited (yesterday)



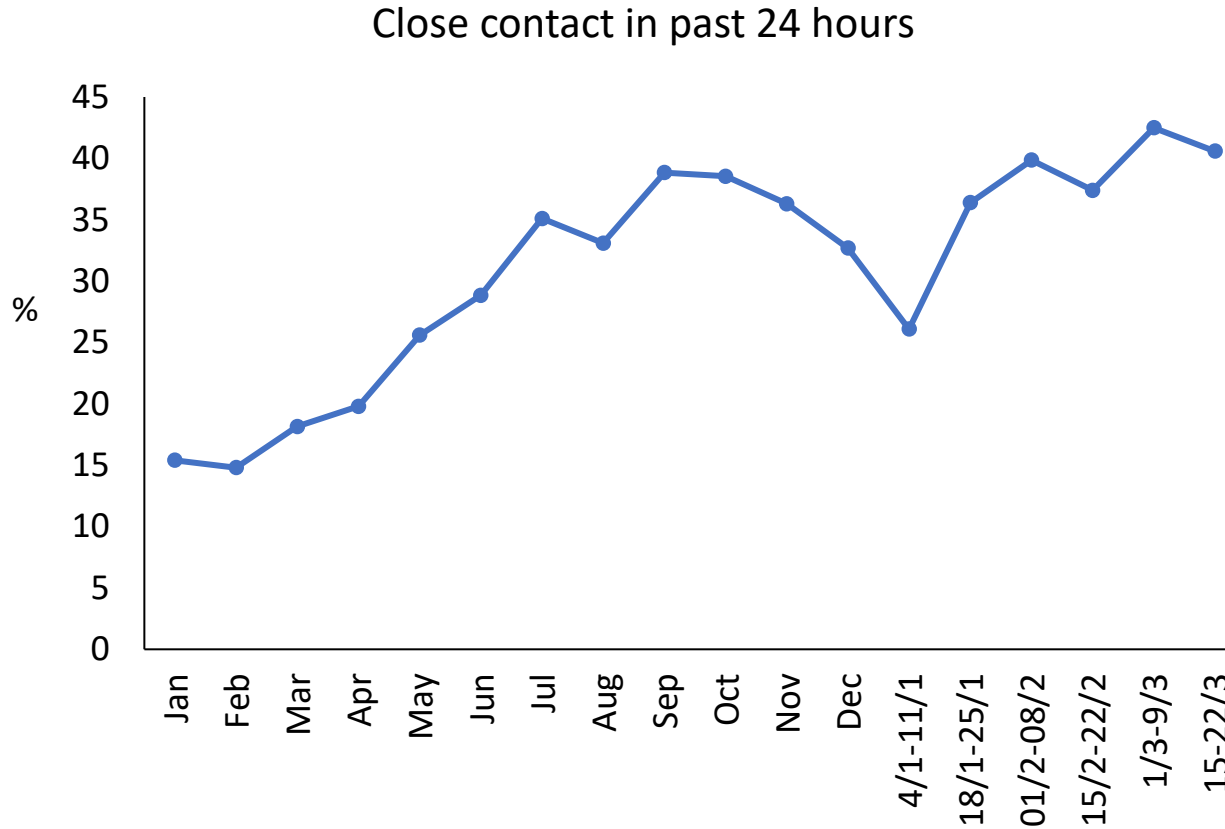
There were significant increase in visits to hospitality venues, outdoor locations, and events. Decreases were evident for attending work, medical locations, schools and colleges. Again, these patterns are to be expected given the public holiday.

National and international travel



There has been a significant increase in international travel since January, with this latest round of data collection recording that just over 1-in-30 people had travelled off the island during the previous week.

Close contacts

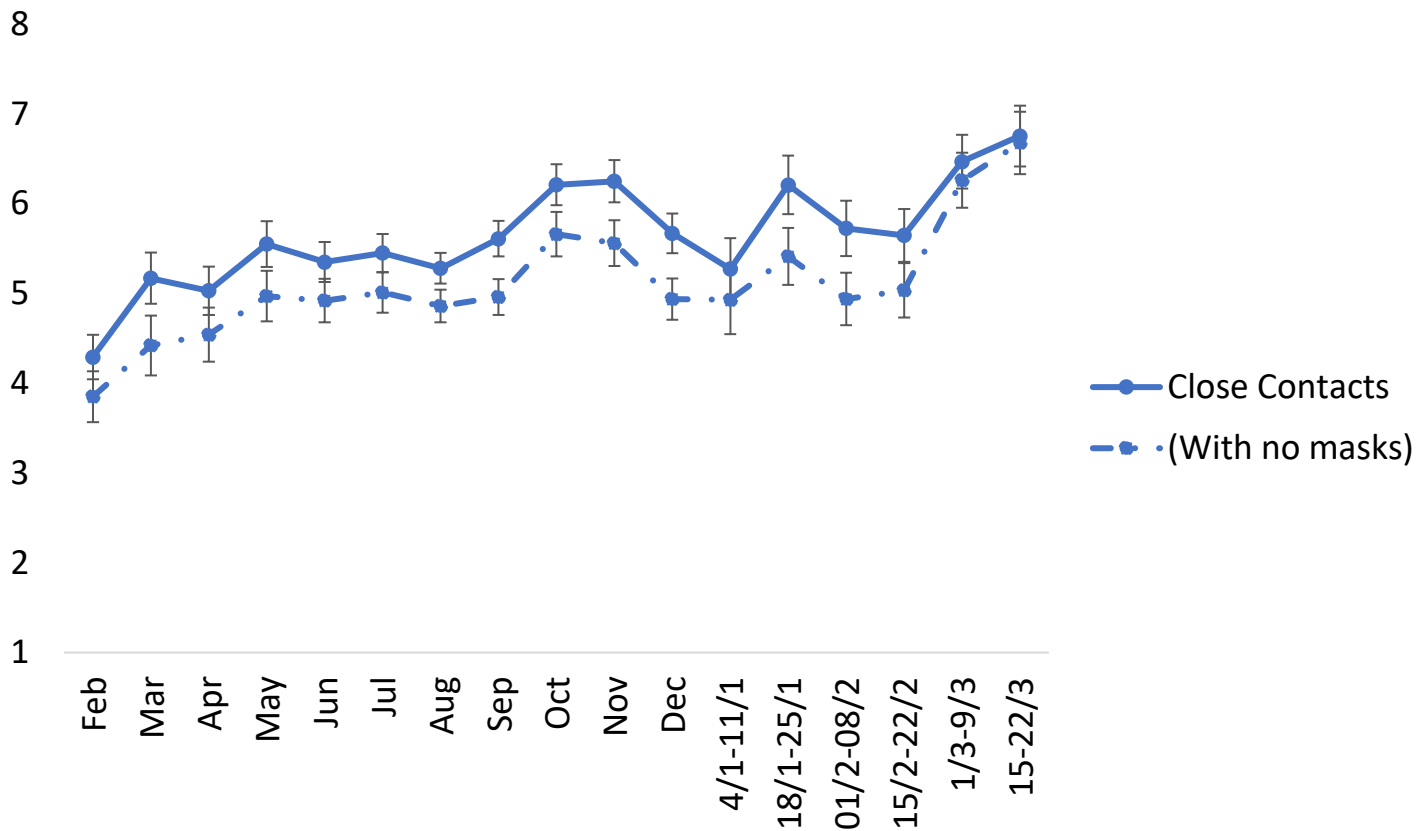


The proportion of people who had a close contact the previous day remained unchanged this round, at just over 40%. However, this proportion is significantly greater than it was in February and higher than at any point during 2021.

Number of close contacts

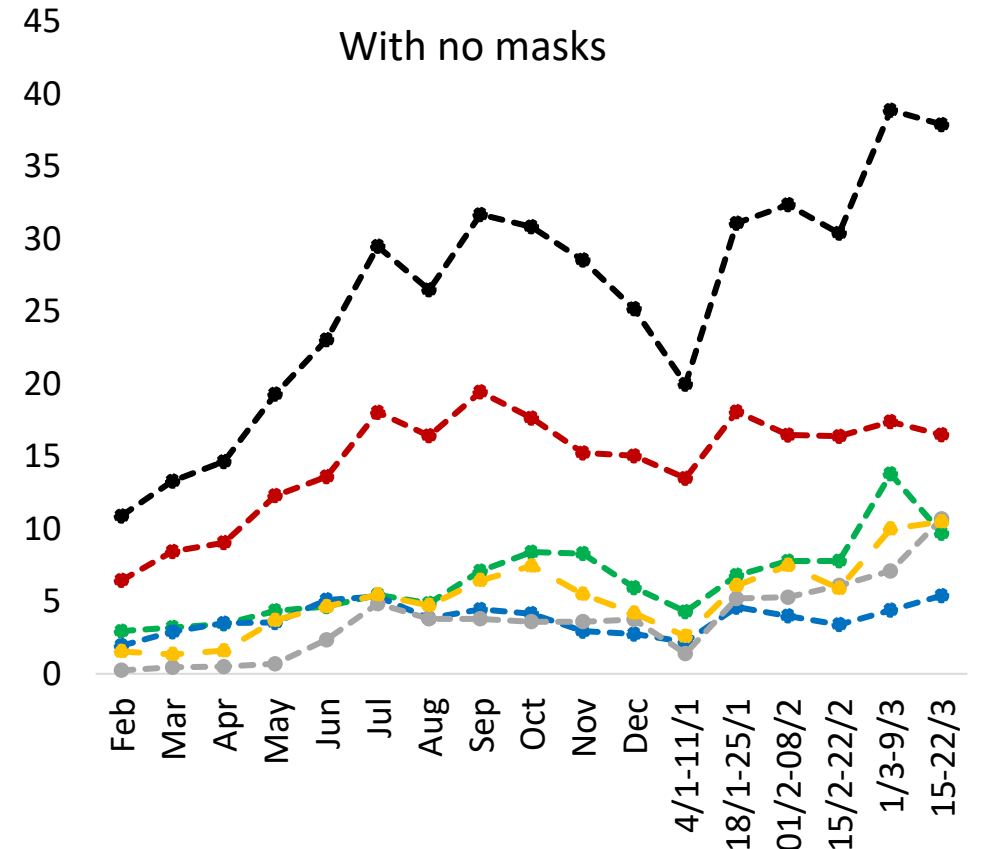
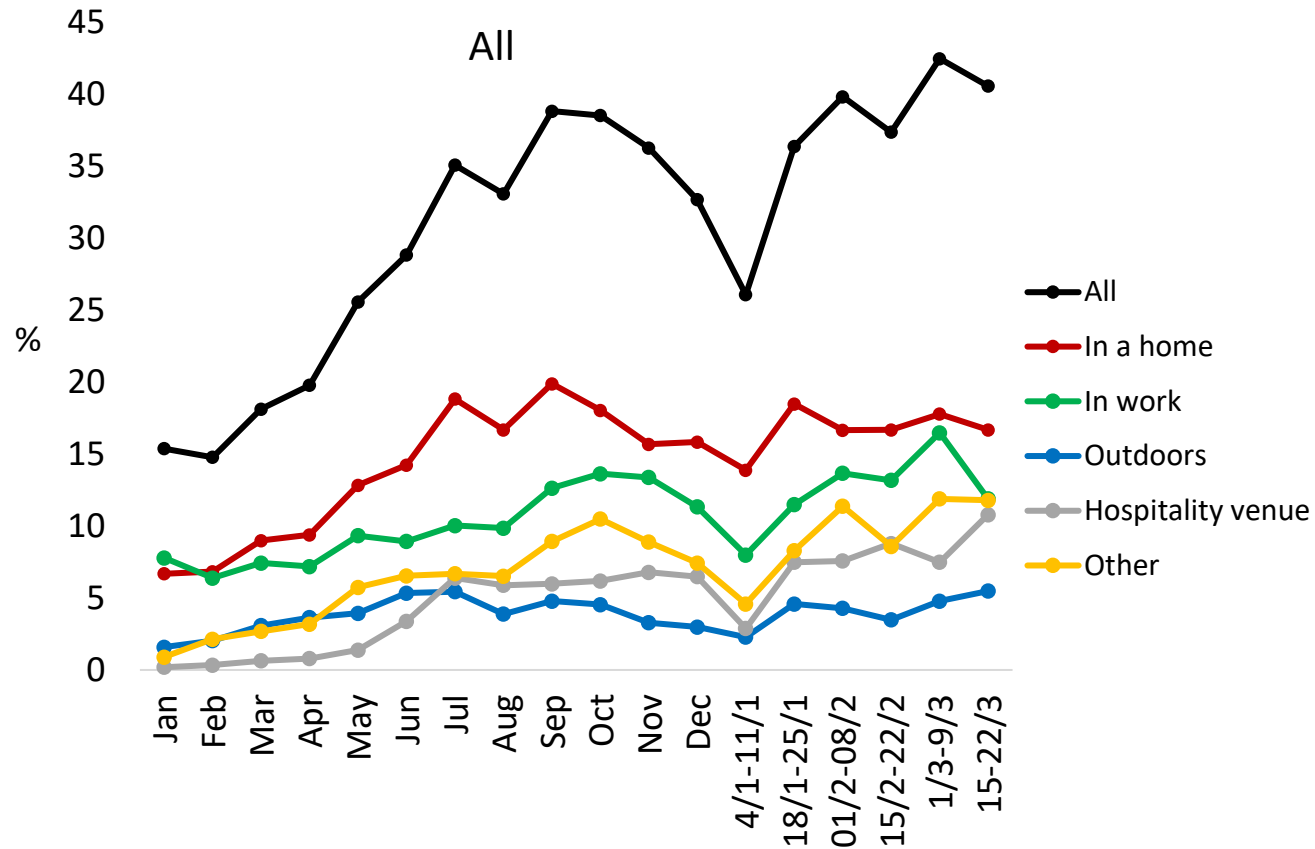


Mean number of close contacts among those with at least one



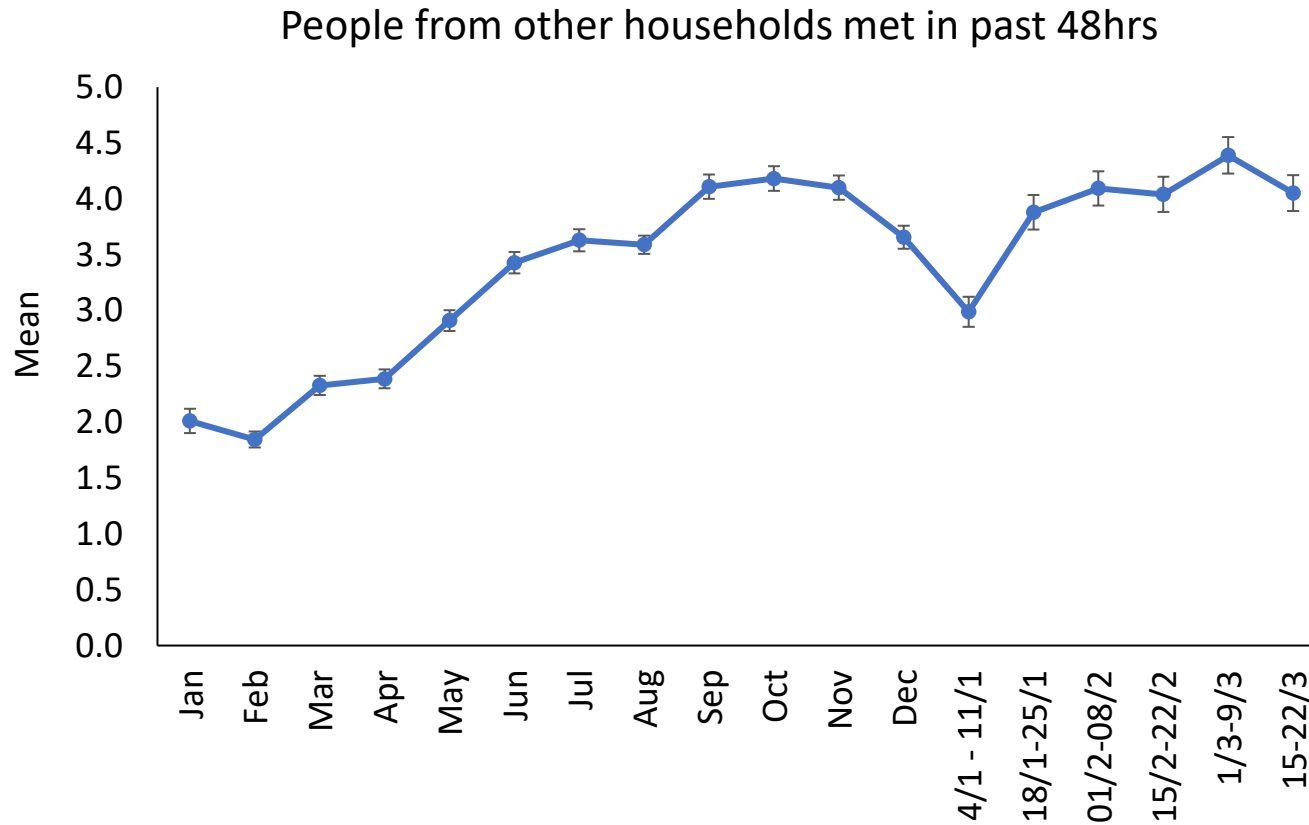
Among those who had a close contact the previous day, the mean number of close contacts increased to the highest level yet recorded by SAM. Almost all of these close contacts took place without facemasks.

Close contacts - locations



There were fewer close contacts in work, compensated for by more in hospitality venues. Almost all close contacts now occur between people not wearing masks.

Number of people met

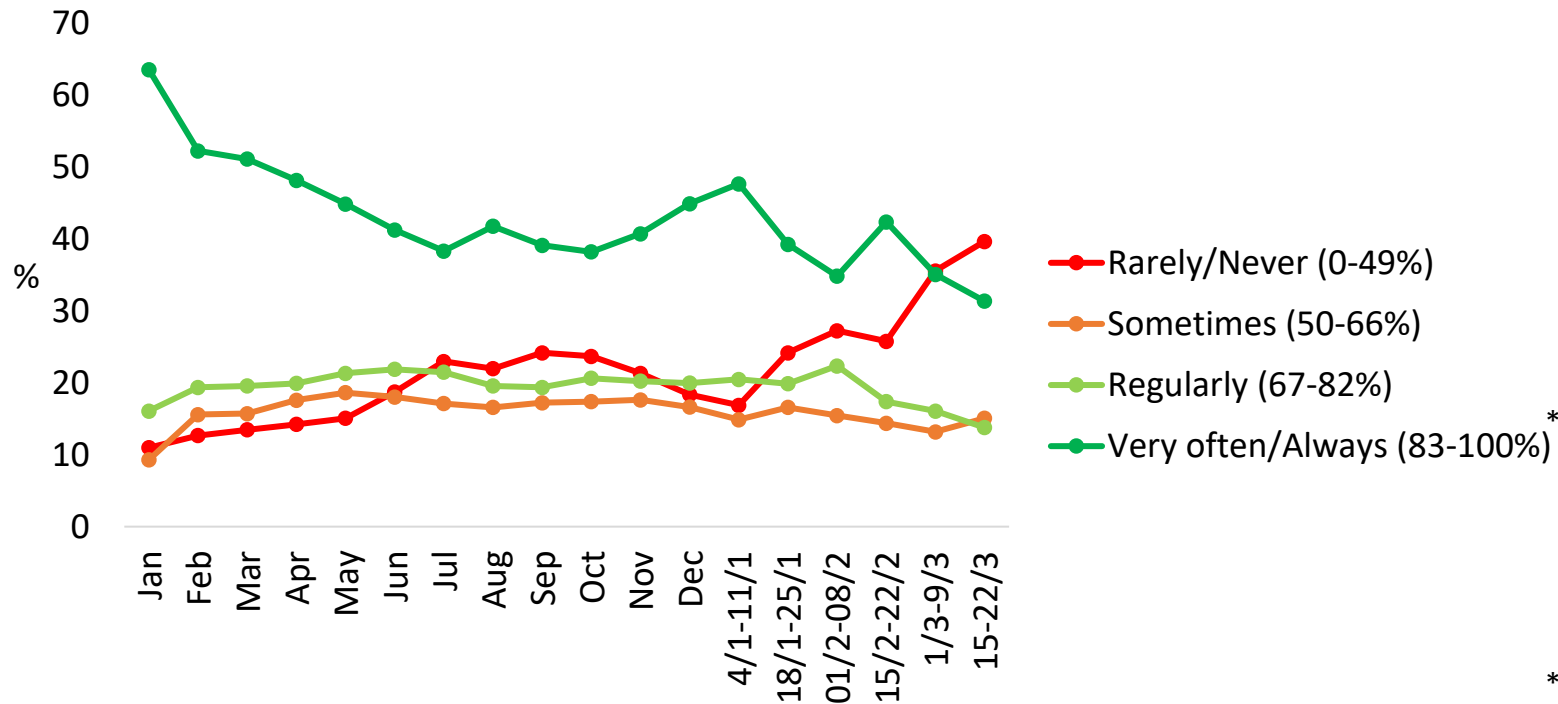


The average number of people met has remained broadly stable over the past two months.

Mitigation



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



There was a further significant change in mitigation. Around one-third of the population continued almost always to engage in mitigative behaviours when outside the home (keeping distance, washing hands, wearing masks). However, this proportion is now smaller than the proportion who rarely or never do.

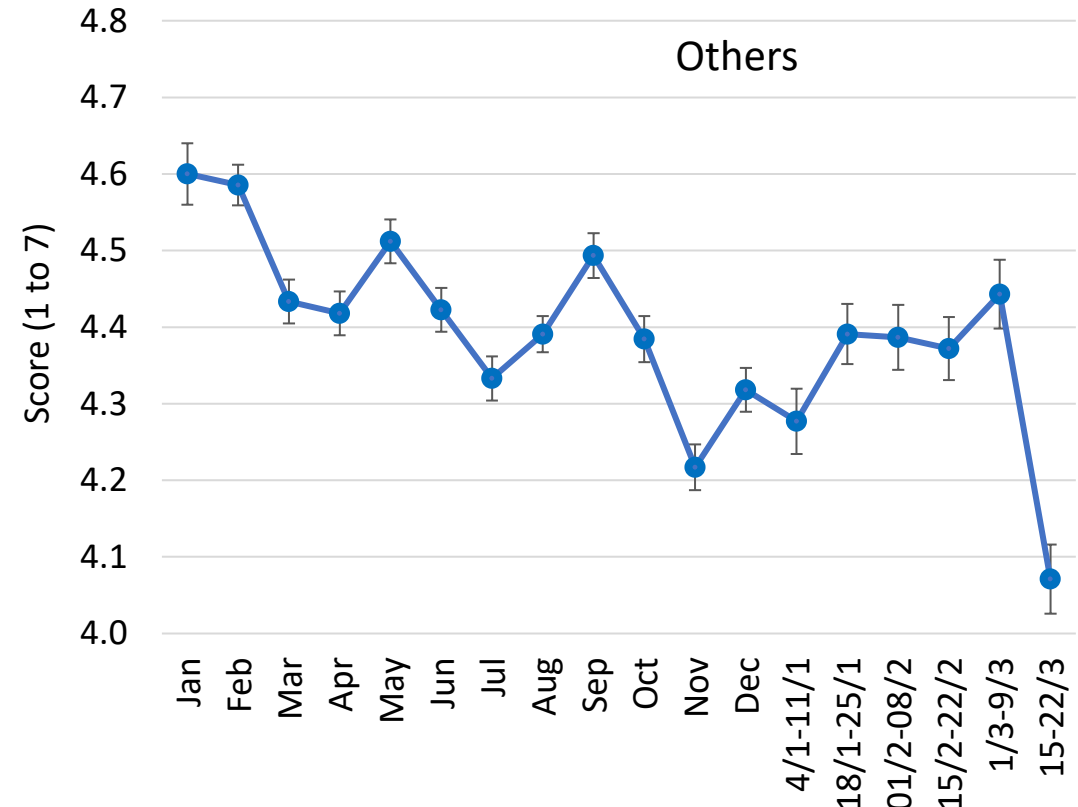
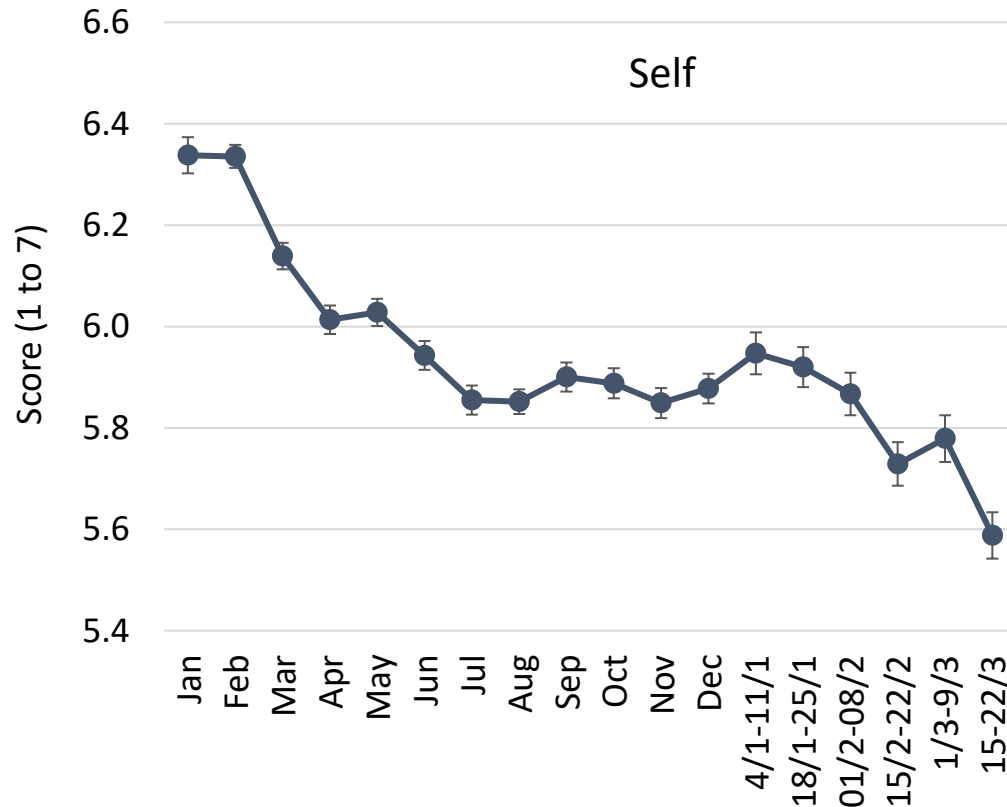
*included in this group are those who did not leave their home or have visitors the previous day.

Mask-wearing in key locations



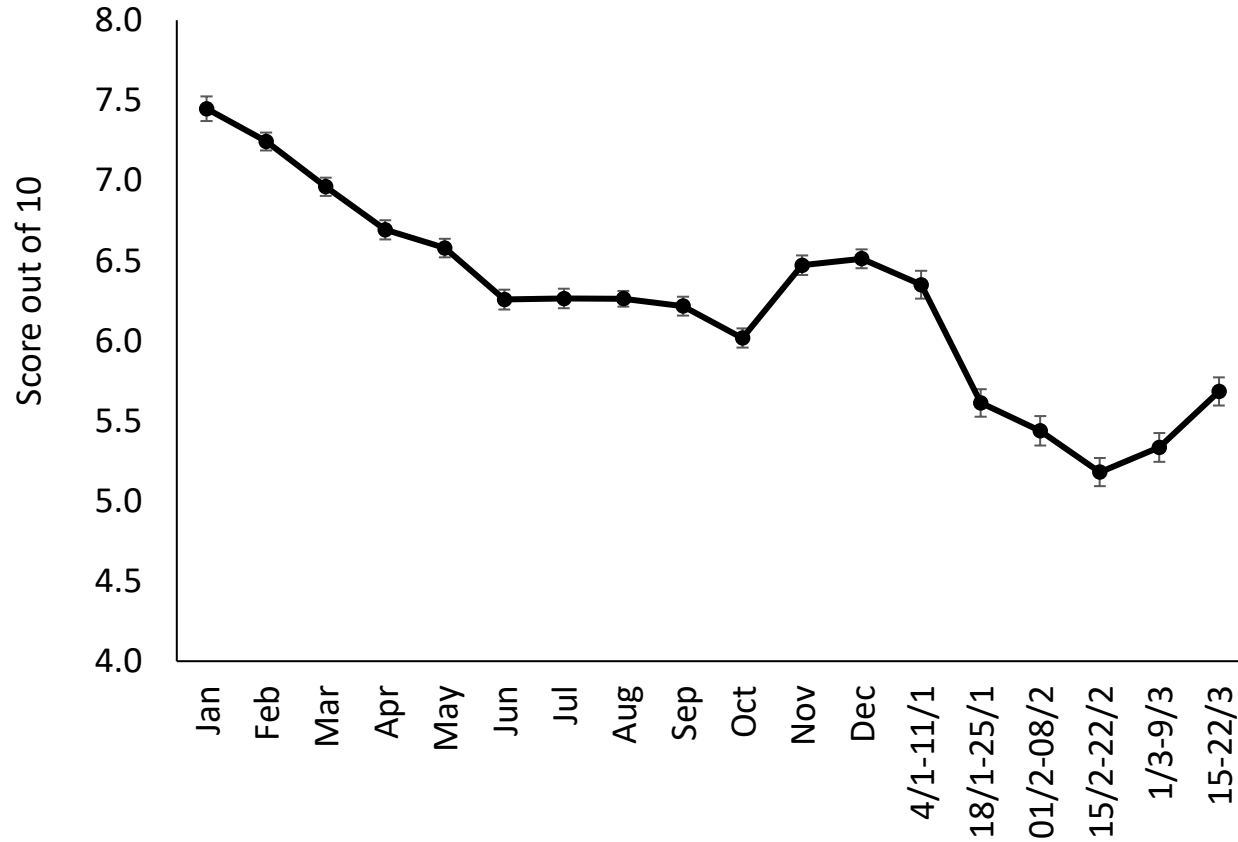
Although wearing a facemask on public transport, in healthcare settings and in crowded indoor locations remains advised, the lifting of legal requirements on 28 February was followed by a sharp fall-off in wearing masks. On average, people continue to state that they themselves wear a mask much more than other people do, including staff in shops.

Self-reported compliance



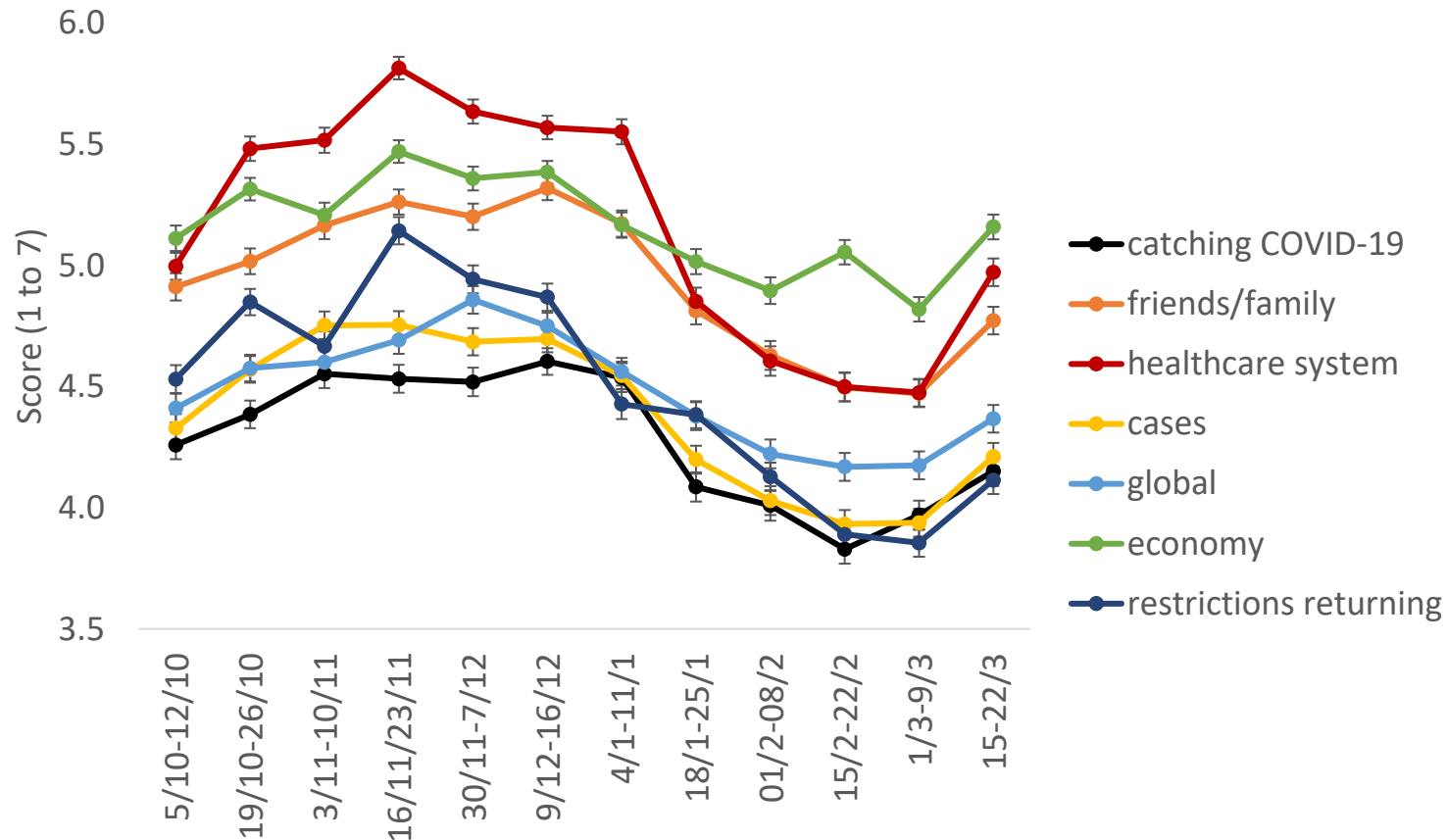
There were significant drops in self-reported compliance with public health guidance on COVID-19, with a larger fall in the perception that others are following advice.

Worry



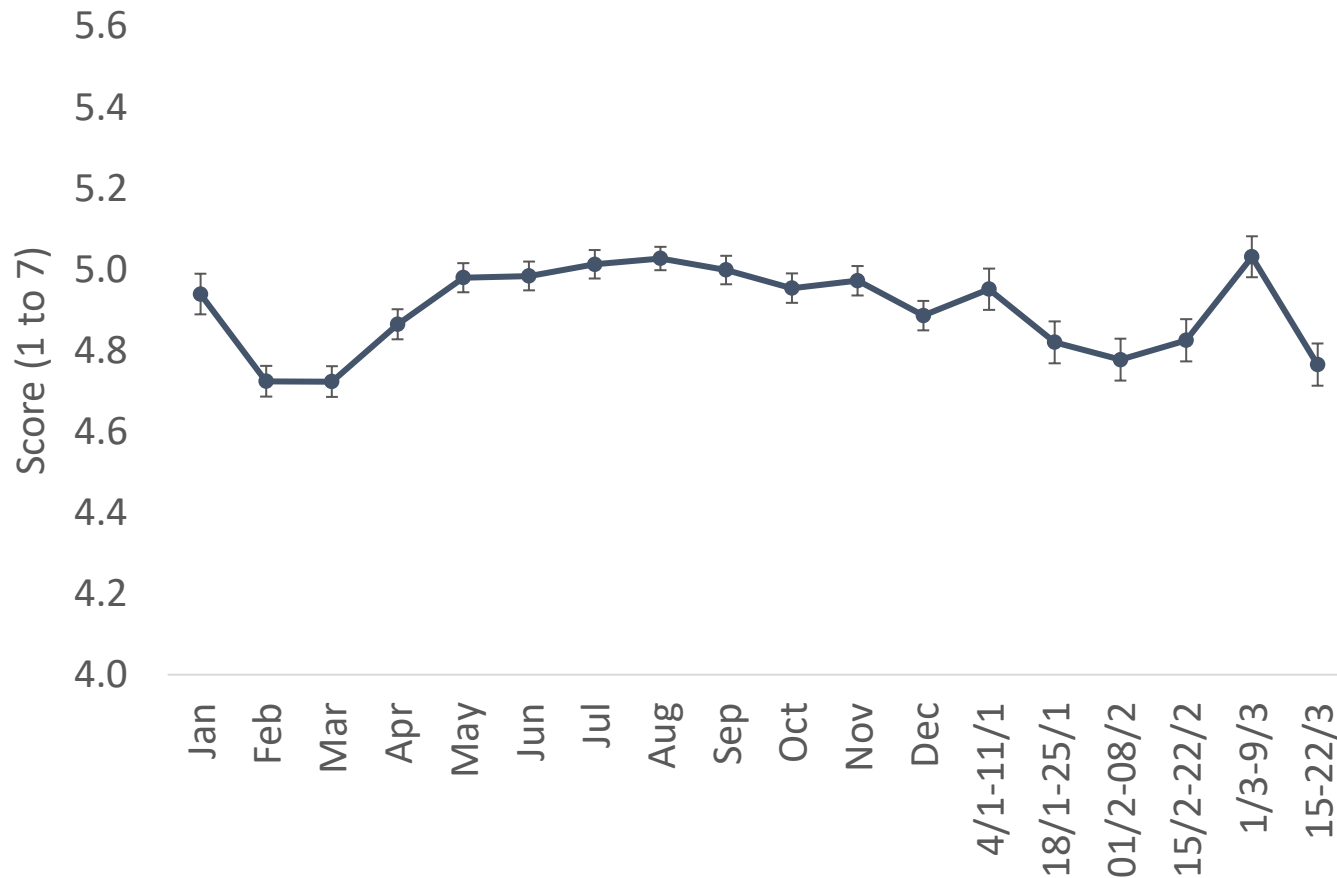
There was a statistically significant increase in overall worry, which returned to levels seen in January but still below the level throughout last year.

Components of worry



There were statistically significant increases in all individual components of worry, with the steepest increase occurring for worry about the healthcare system.

Wellbeing

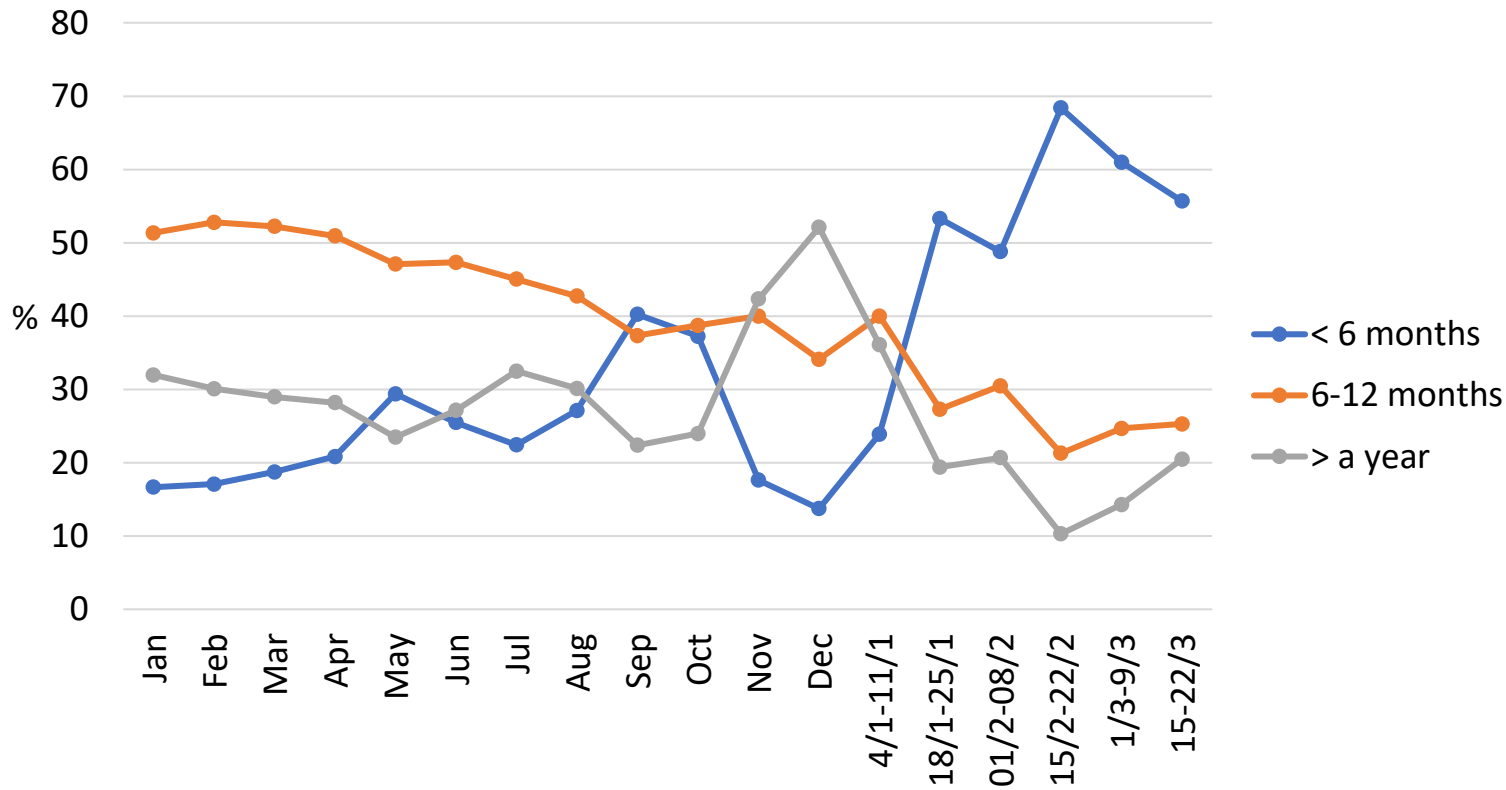


There was a large and statistically significant drop in self-reported wellbeing, which reached its lowest level since early 2021. While this change in mood is likely to be a response to higher case numbers and hospitalisations, it has not so far been accompanied by a change in behaviour.

Long-term expectations



When do you think all restrictions will be lifted for good?

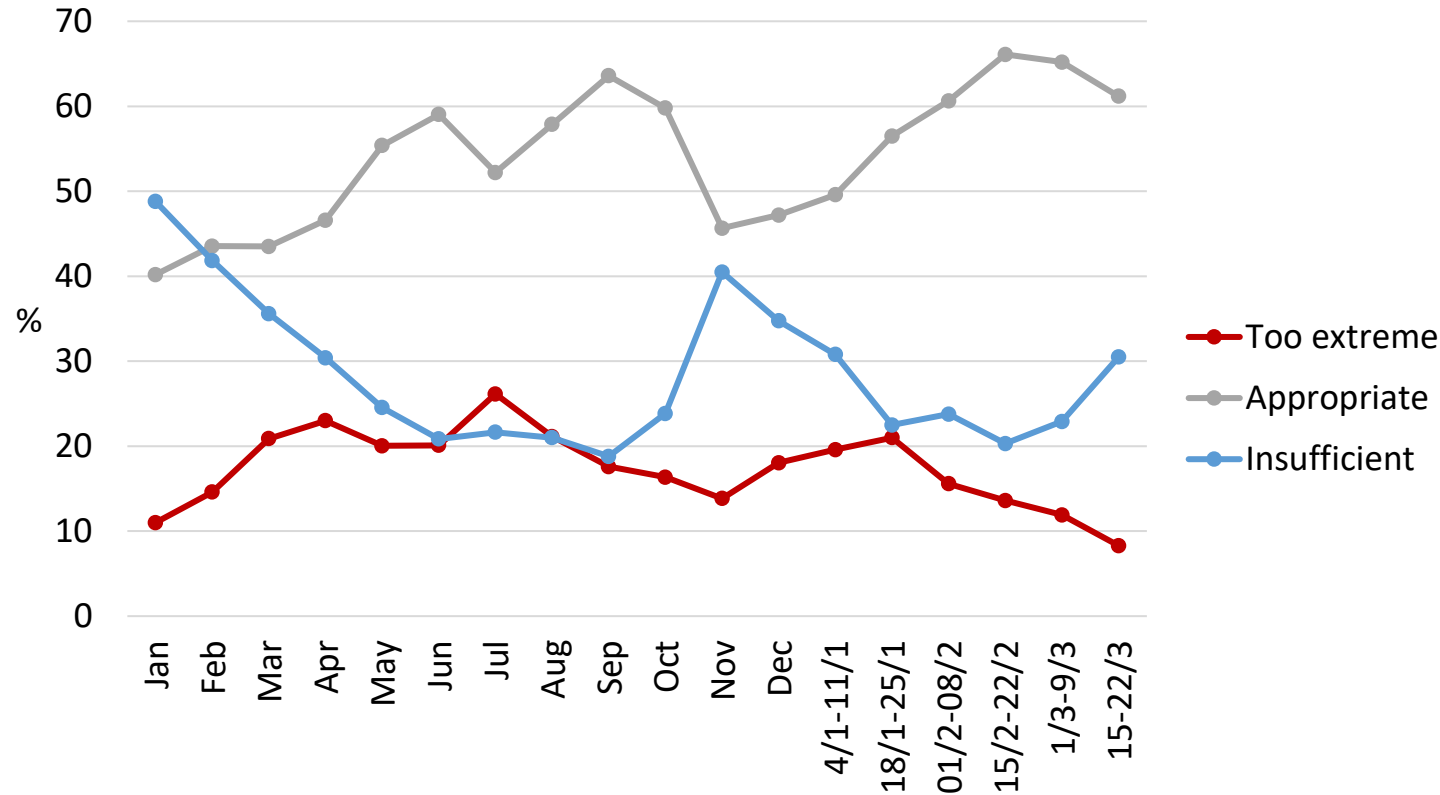


Long-term expectations became more pessimistic, although a majority of the population continues to believe that all restrictions will be lifted for good in the next 6 months.



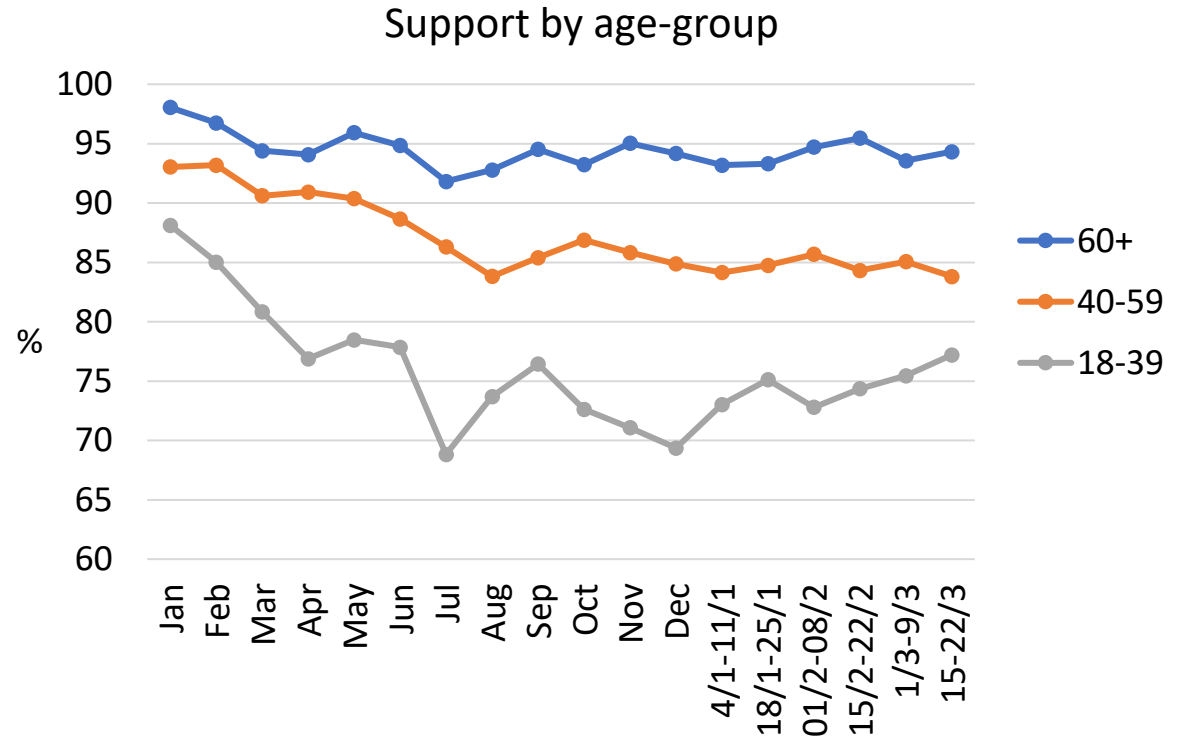
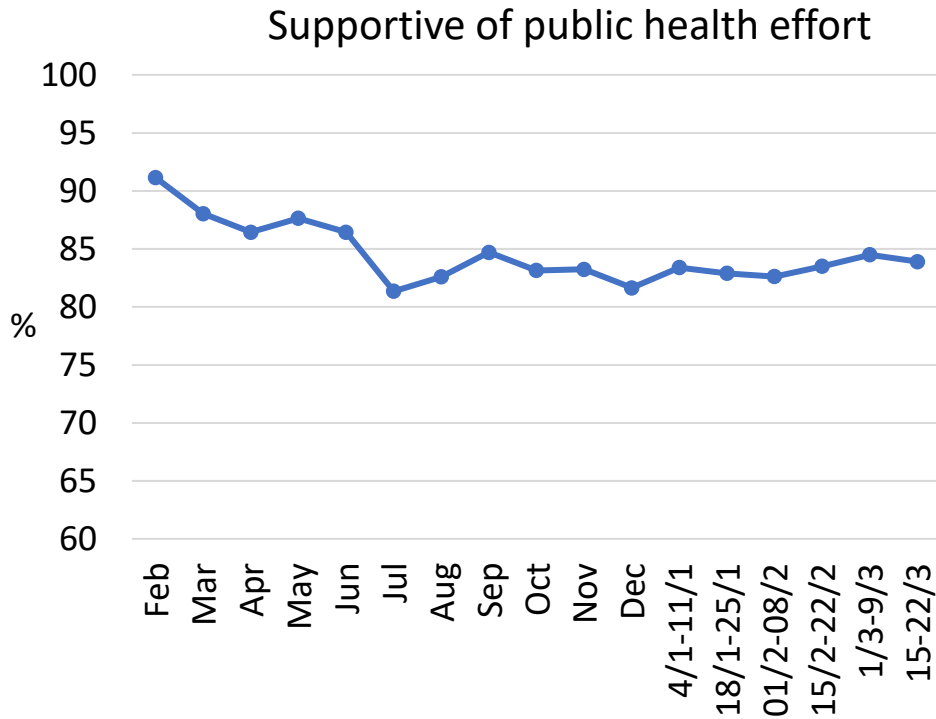
Government Response to the Pandemic

Government's reaction to the pandemic has been...



There was a statistically significant rise in the proportion of the population that views the Government response as insufficient, although the majority continue to view it as appropriate.

Overall support for the public health effort

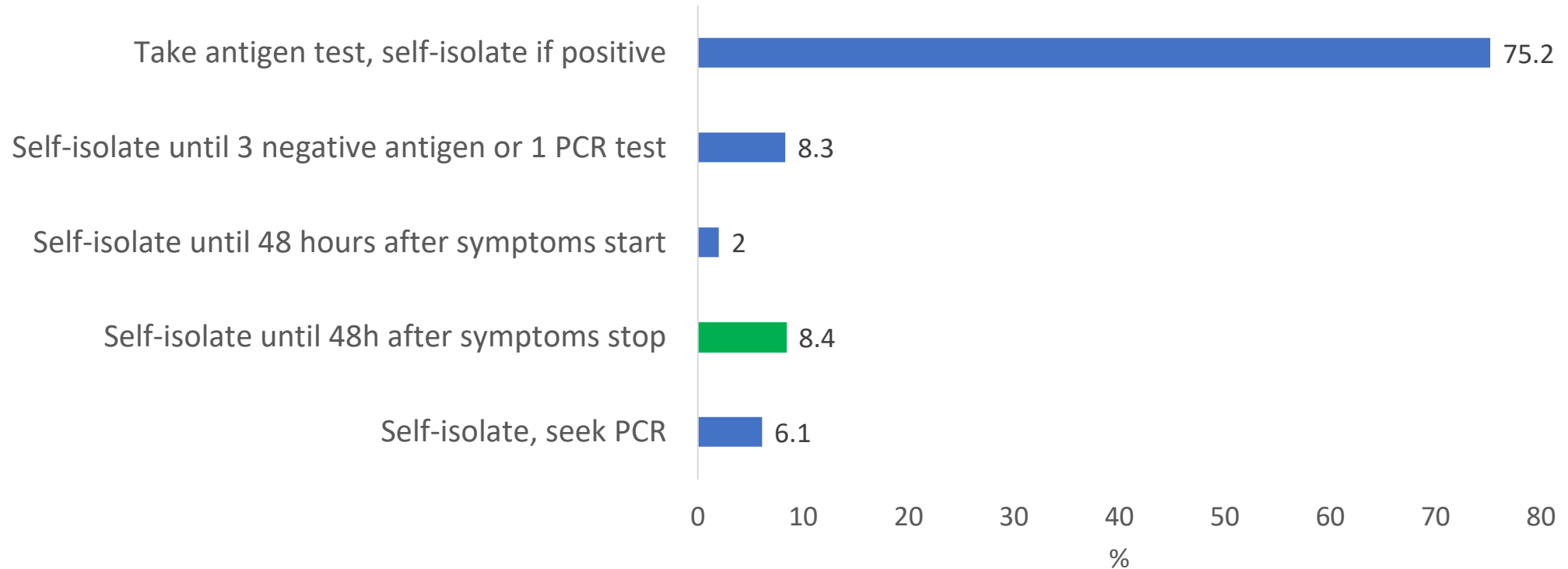


Overall support for the public health effort remains solid and has increased among younger adults so far during 2022.

Do people know what to do if they have symptoms?



You wake up tomorrow with typical cold and flu symptoms, what should you do?

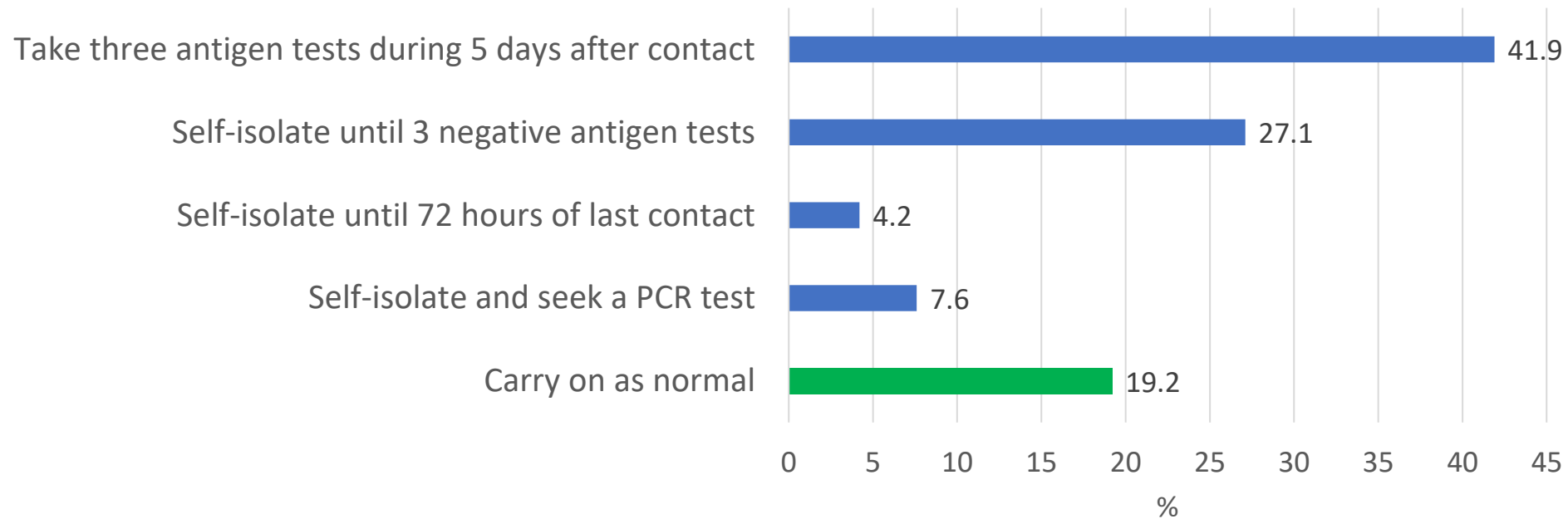


The large majority of the population thought that symptomatic people should take an antigen test and only self-isolate if it is positive. Fewer than 10% of the population selected the option that matched HSE advice to self-isolate until 48 hours after symptoms have gone.

Do people know what to do if they are a close contact?



You are told you are a close contact, what should you do?

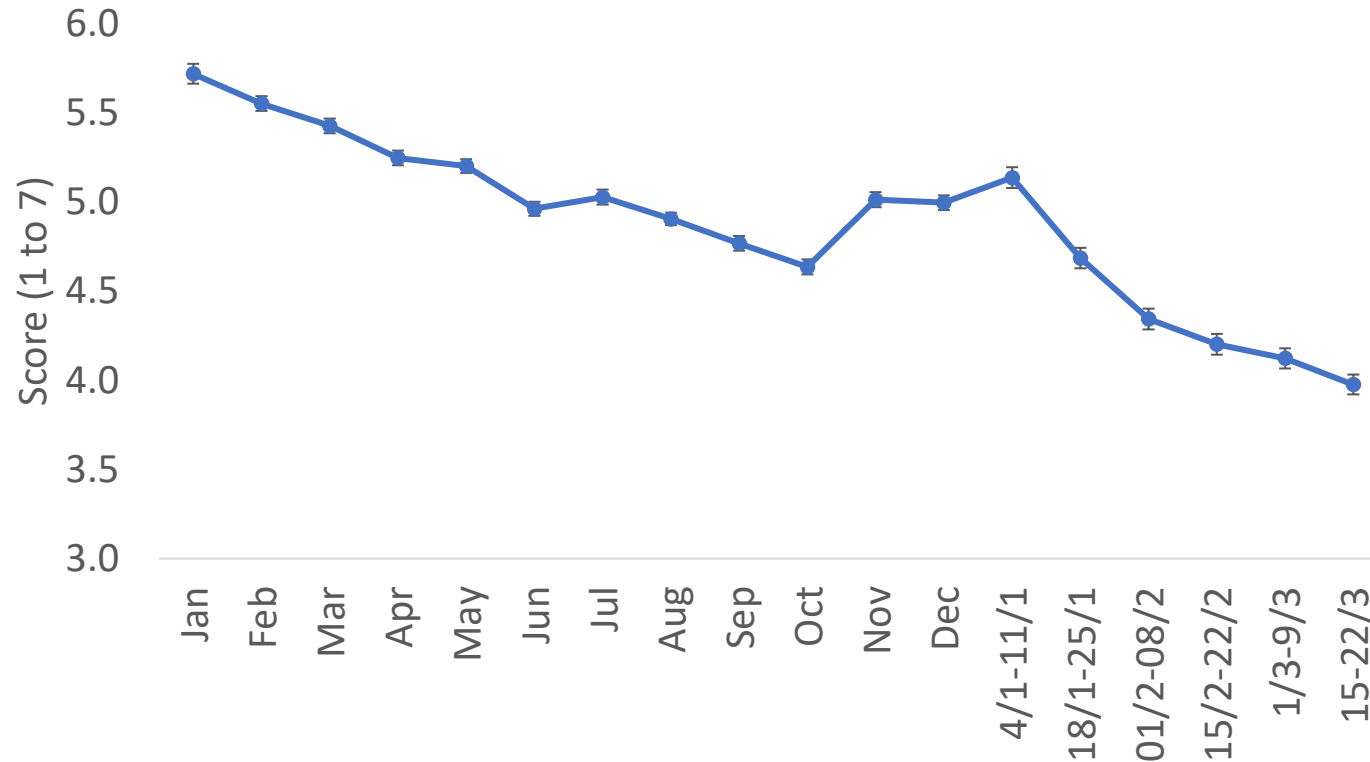


Fewer than 1-in-5 people have absorbed the changed advice on close contacts.



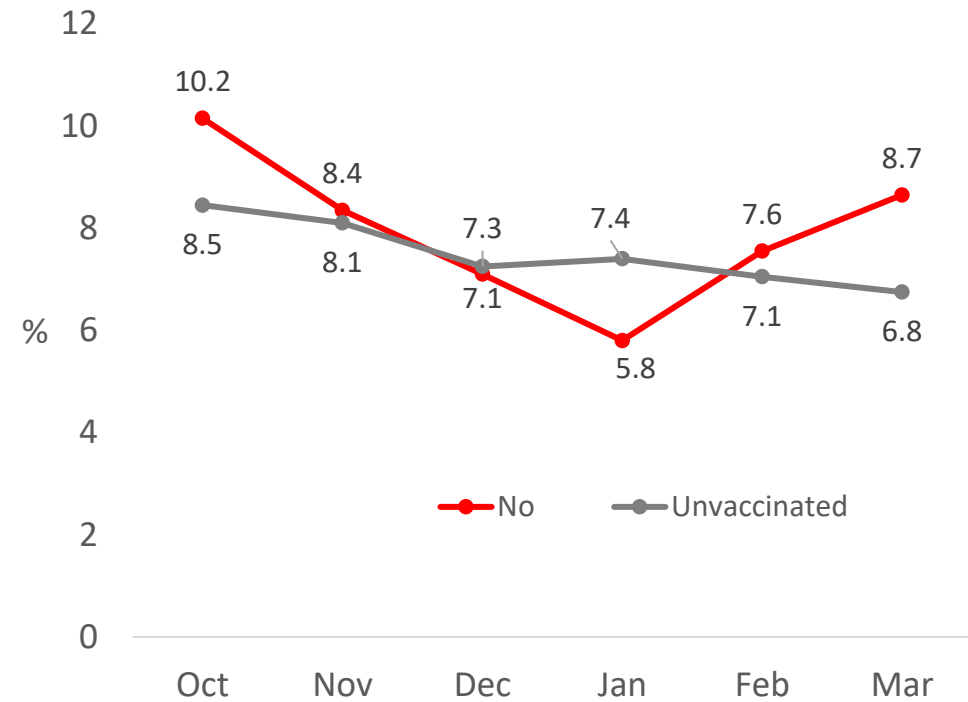
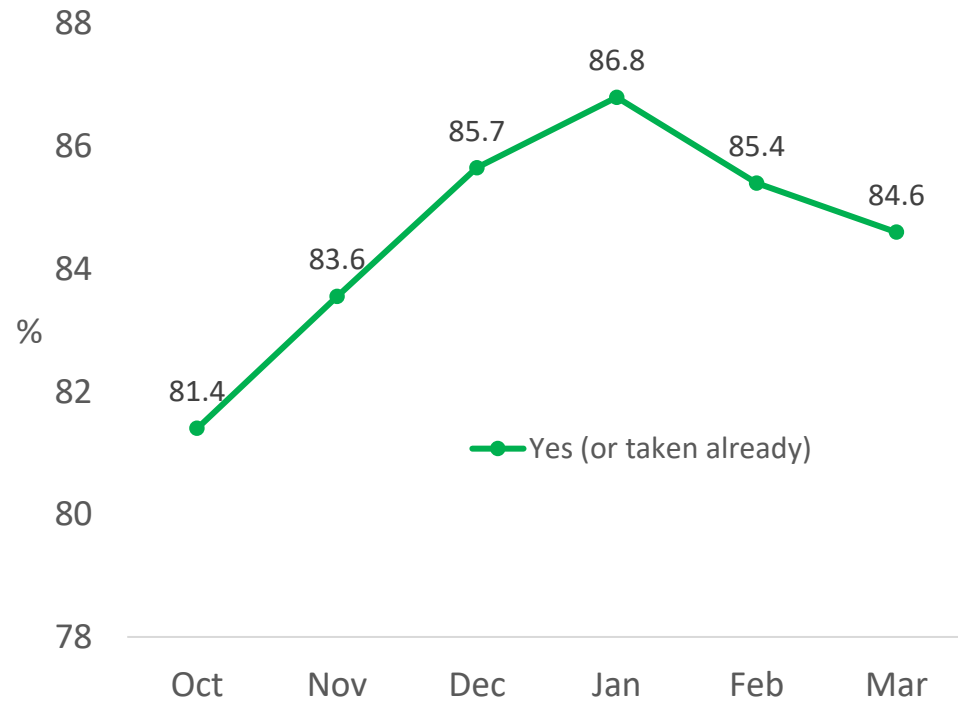
Following news coverage

How closely have you been following the latest news about COVID-19?



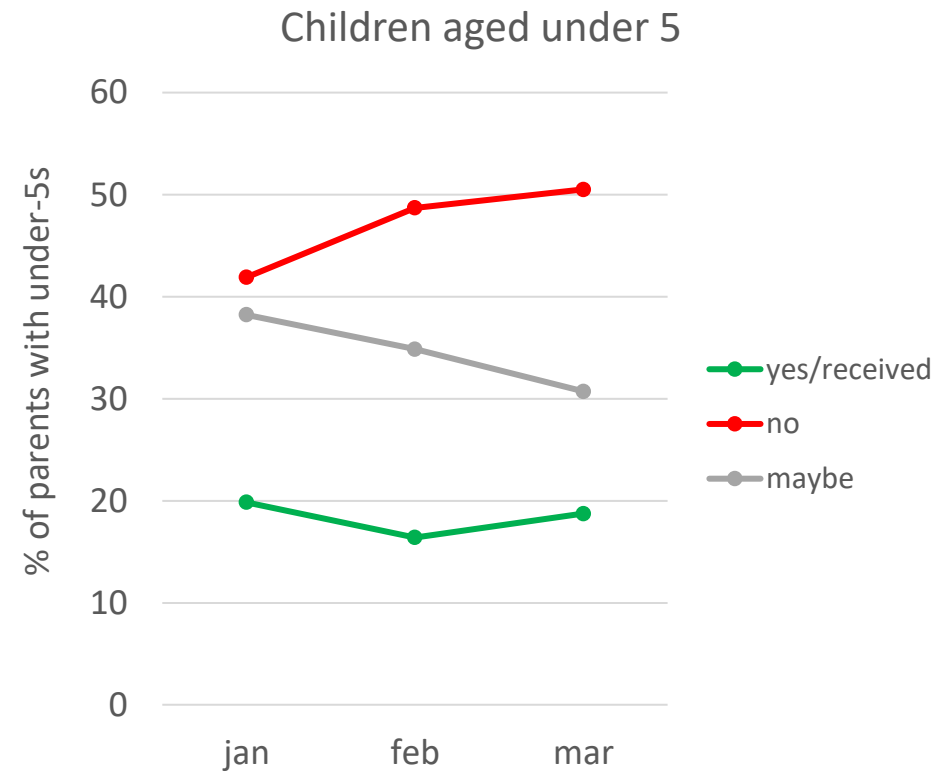
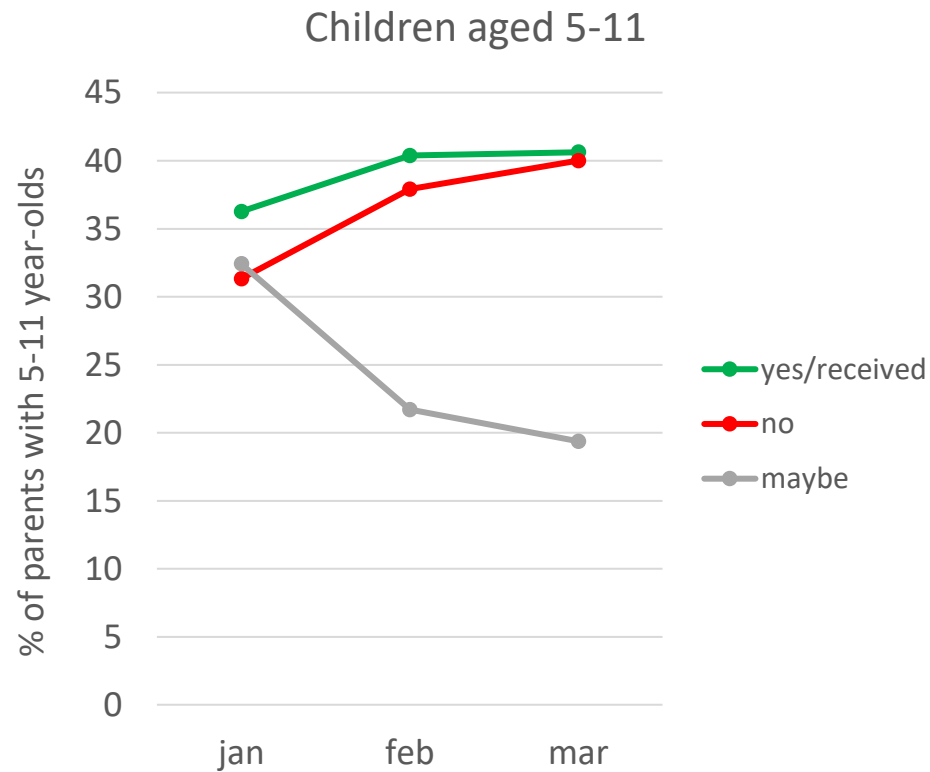
The strong downward trend in following the news about Covid-19 has continued. The mean score is now below the midpoint of the scale (from 1 = “not at all” to 7 = “very much so”) for the first time.

Booster vaccine



Since the lesser severity of the Omicron variant became apparent, willingness to take a booster vaccine has fallen.

Vaccinating children

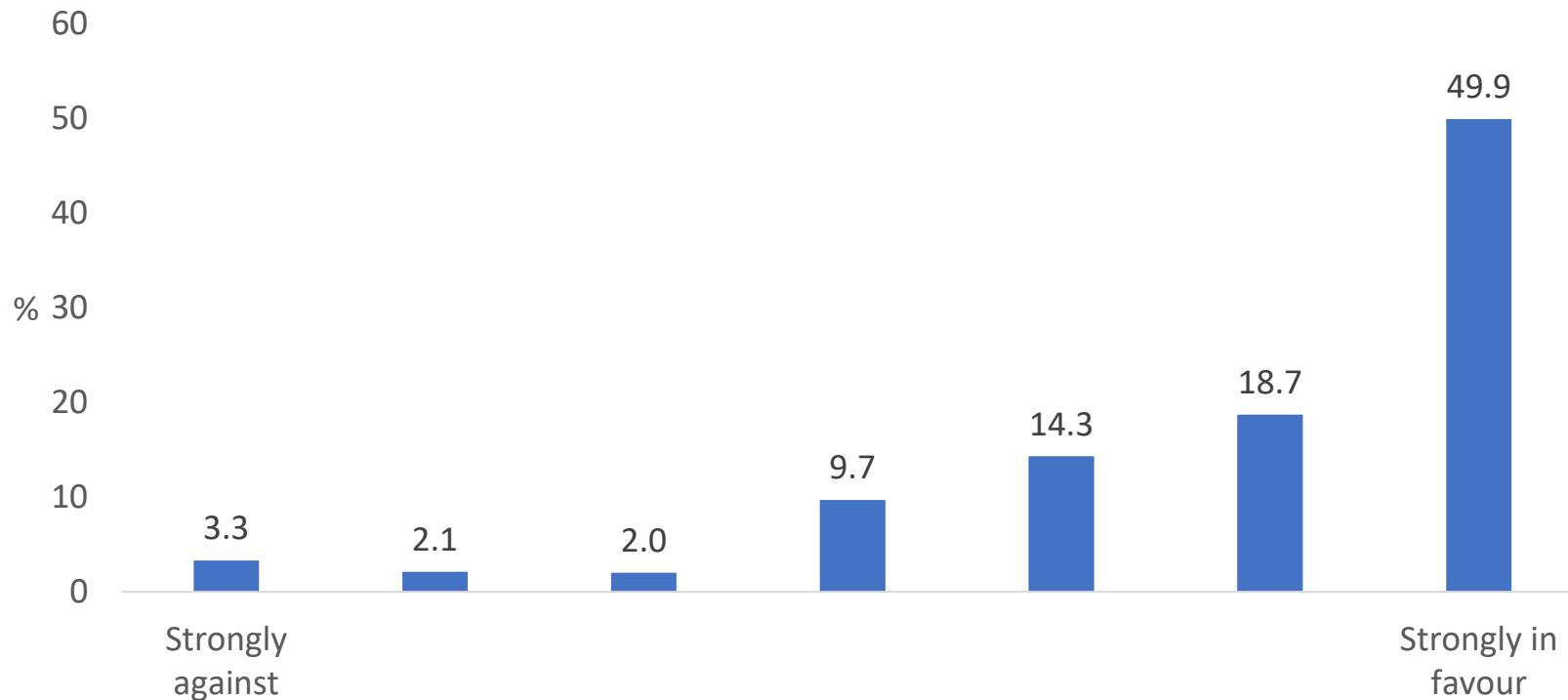


Of those parents who were undecided about whether to vaccinate children. more have decided against than in favour, although many remain undecided. Willingness to vaccinate under-5s is relatively low.

Support for continued mask wearing after the pandemic



Thinking about life after the pandemic, to what extent would you be in favour of general advice for anyone with cold and flu symptoms to wear a face mask when in public?



The large majority of people favour health advice for people with cold and flu symptoms to wear masks, in the context of life after the pandemic. Support is higher among older people, but strong in all age groups.