

Becoming “Covid-secure”: how the UK is getting used to wearing face masks and other precautionary behaviours

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Introduction

This report includes findings from a survey of 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75 by [King's College London](#) in partnership with [Ipsos MORI](#), conducted on 17-20 July 2020. Some of these are compared with results from previous surveys, including two others that were carried out during the coronavirus pandemic.

It finds that:

- There has been a significant increase in mask wearing, up to 70% from 19% in April.
- There is very widespread belief that face masks help reduce the spread of coronavirus, with 81% of the population thinking this is true and 9% thinking it is false.
- However, 10% think that face masks are bad for your health and 13% think they are just a way for government to control us. These beliefs are higher among the young, those who think they've had coronavirus, those who believe the virus is a low risk and particularly those who get their information on the virus from social media, such as WhatsApp.
- One in eight people (13%) have been confronted or reported to the authorities for not wearing face masks or have confronted or reported other people, but this increases to 31% for 16-24s and 40% for those who get their information about the virus from WhatsApp.

Support for easing lockdown measures is only increasing slightly, although there have been some bigger shifts:

- There has only been a marginal drop in the proportion saying the restrictions are being lifted too quickly, from 54% in May to 50% now.
- But 48% of parents now say they're comfortable with children returning to school, up from 33% in May.
- This likely reflects our continued prioritisation of reducing deaths over the wider economic impacts, and the fact that there has been very little change in the proportion of people who say they've experienced financial difficulties since the third week of May.

The survey shows that some "Covid-secure" behaviours seem to be sticking:

- We're particularly likely to say we're still staying 2m away from others (90%) and more regularly washing our hands (88%).
- Many are also still taking further precautions, including changing/washing our clothes when we get home (40%) and washing/disinfecting items we bring into our homes (52%).

Despite the easing of the lockdown measures, there has been little change in stated levels of increased anxiety and loneliness – and we continue to see similar levels of volunteering, helping others and receiving help.

We're mostly getting used to face masks – but they're a flashpoint and source of conspiracies for some

Use of face masks and acceptance of their benefits is high and increasing.

But some nonetheless believe in face mask conspiracies – that they're bad for your health, or that the government is only using them to control us.

These beliefs are higher among the young, those who think they've already had the virus, those who think it poses a low risk to the UK, and particularly those who get their information on coronavirus from YouTube and WhatsApp.

And while face masks are becoming normalised, they have been a source of tension for some, leading to confrontations and even reports to the authorities.

Nevertheless, over three-quarters of the population think it would be acceptable for us to be required to wear face masks in the very long term, if no vaccine or treatment is found.

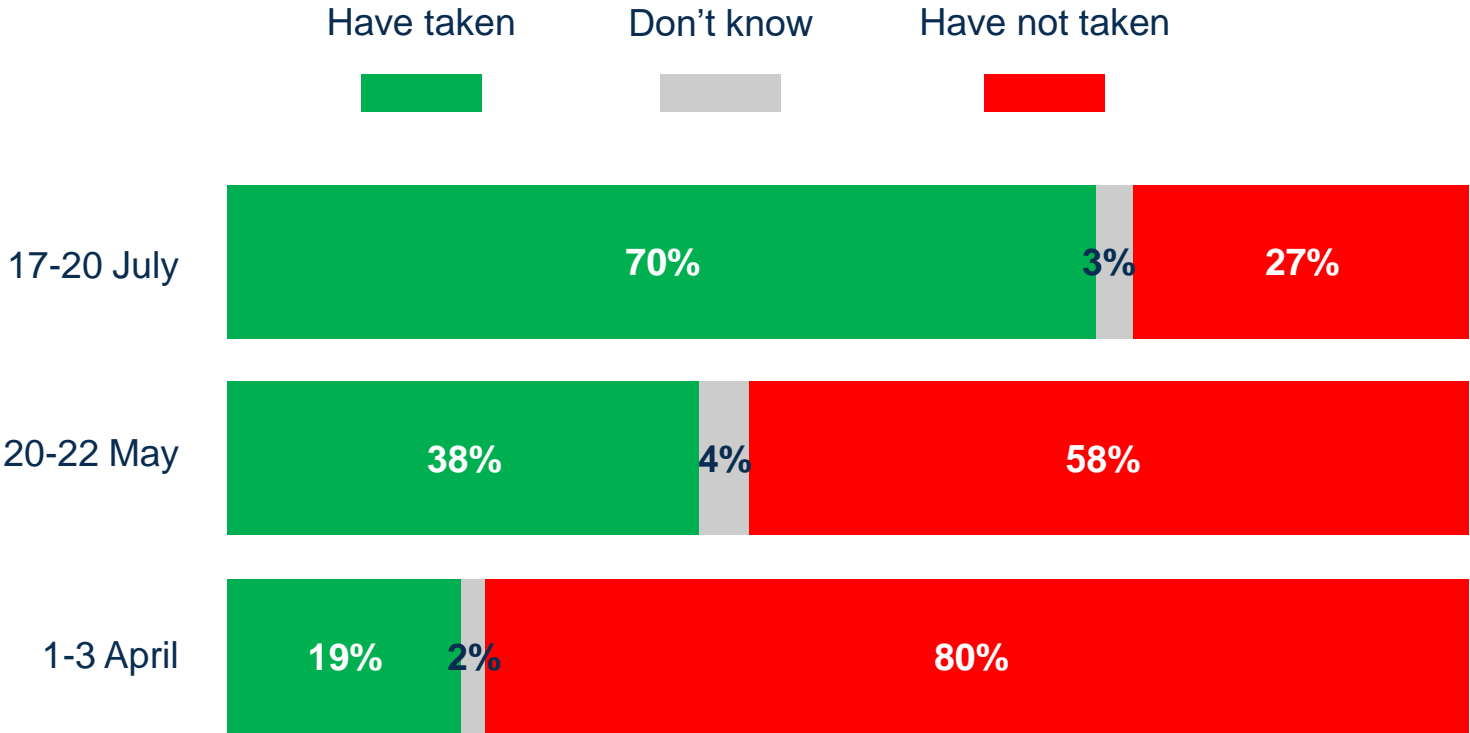
There has been a marked increase in face mask wearing, with 70% saying they have worn one in the last few weeks, up from 19% in April.

The level of face mask wearing is similar across demographic groups, and particularly high in London (82%) and Scotland (86%).

Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions did not specify “over the past two weeks”.

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Wearing a face mask or covering



There is also widespread belief that wearing face masks helps stop Covid-19 from spreading, with 81% agreeing and only 9% disagreeing.

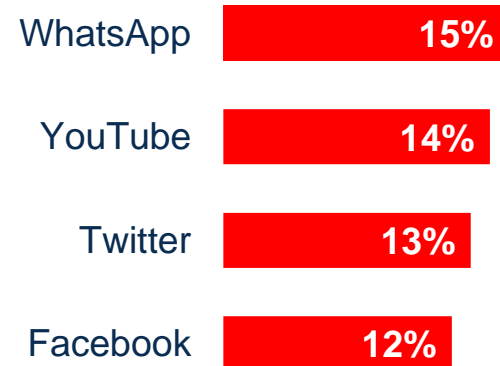
This is also a consistent view across groups, although those who think coronavirus is a low risk to people in the UK are nearly twice as likely to think this is false (17%). Those who get a great deal or fair amount of their information about the virus from WhatsApp are also more likely to believe this.

Are the following statements true or false?

Wearing face masks helps to reduce the spread of coronavirus



% who think statement is **false** among those who get a great deal/fair amount of info on coronavirus from...



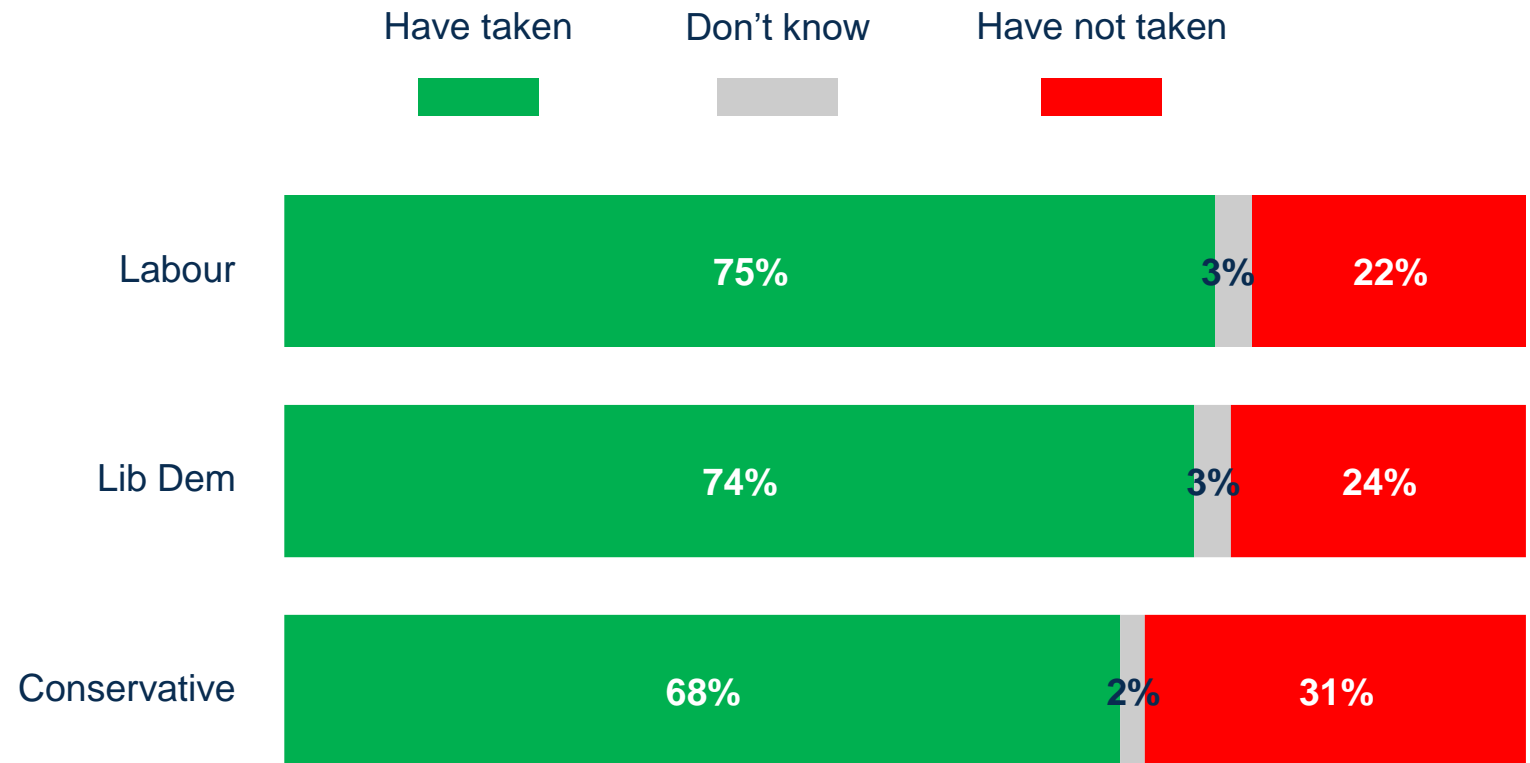
There is little evidence of the kind of politicisation of face masks that has been seen in the US, although by 31% to 22%, 2019

Conservative voters are more likely than Labour voters to say they haven't worn one in the past two weeks. But this is more likely to reflect the older profile of Conservative voters, which is related to how often people are leaving home.

In line with this, voters of all three main parties also report very similar levels of belief that masks help stop the spread of Covid-19.

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Wearing a face mask or covering

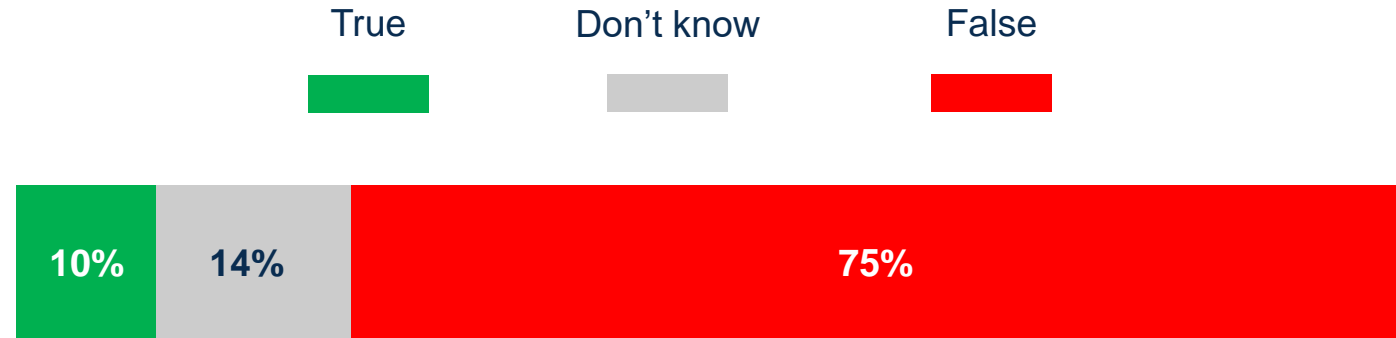


However, 1 in 10 people think wearing a face mask is bad for your health, which increases to 16% of 16-24-year-olds and 19% of those who think that coronavirus is a low risk.

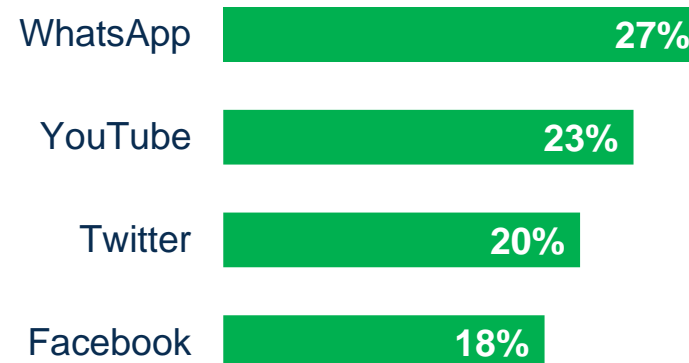
There are larger differences by reliance on social media: around a quarter of those who say they get a great deal or fair amount of their information about Covid-19 from WhatsApp (27%) and YouTube (23%) say wearing a mask is bad for your health.

Are the following statements true or false?

Wearing a face mask is bad for your health



% who think statement is **true** among those who get a great deal/fair amount of info on coronavirus from...

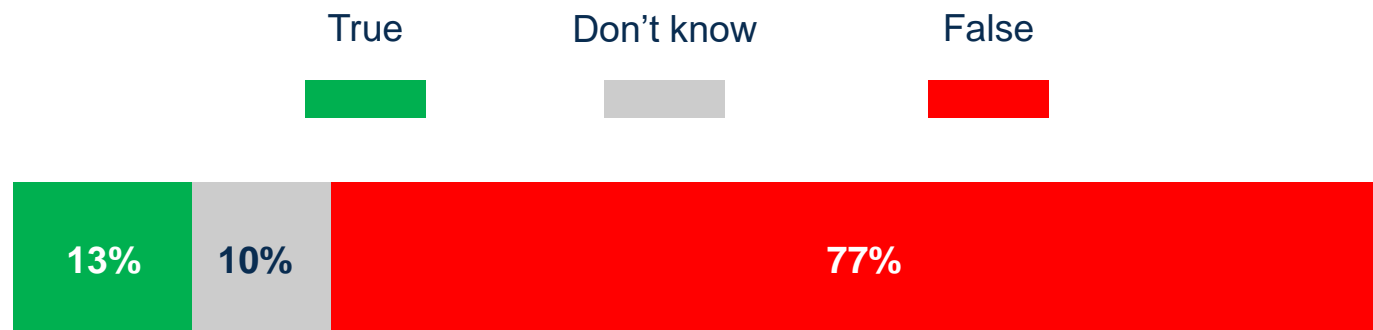


1 in 8 people (13%) think the government only wants us to wear face masks as a way of controlling us, which increases to 1 in 5 among 16-24s (21%) and a quarter among BAME groups (25%).

Again, there are even larger differences for those who draw on social media for information: a third (34%) of those who say they get a great deal or fair amount of their information from WhatsApp agree, as do 3 in 10 who rely on YouTube as a source.

Are the following statements true or false?

The government only wants us to wear face masks as a way of controlling us



% who think statement is **true** among those who get a great deal/fair amount of info on coronavirus from...



The vast majority of people haven't confronted others for not wearing a mask – but 1 in 12 people have (8%).

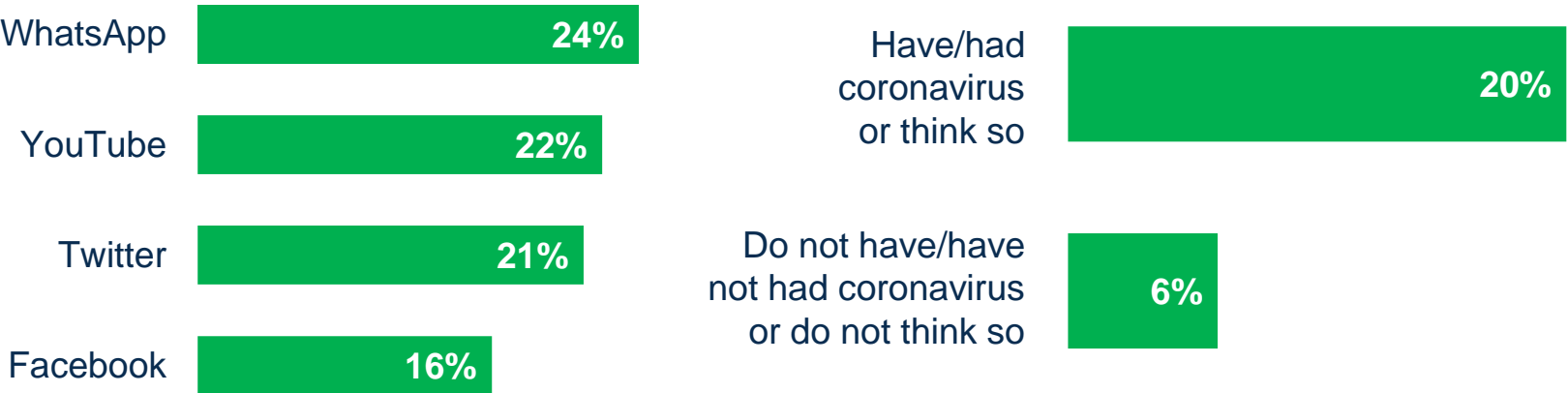
This increases to 1 in 5 people who think they've had coronavirus (20%), and a quarter of those who use WhatsApp as a main source of information about the virus (24%).

This will partly reflect the younger age profile of these groups, and their greater likelihood of leaving the home more regularly.

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?



% who have done

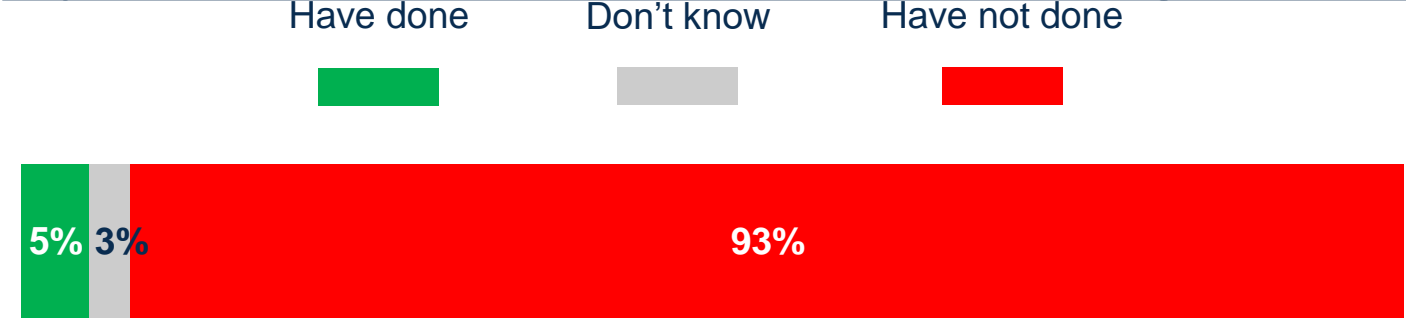


Even fewer people have reported someone to authorities for not wearing a mask, but 1 in 20 still have (5%).

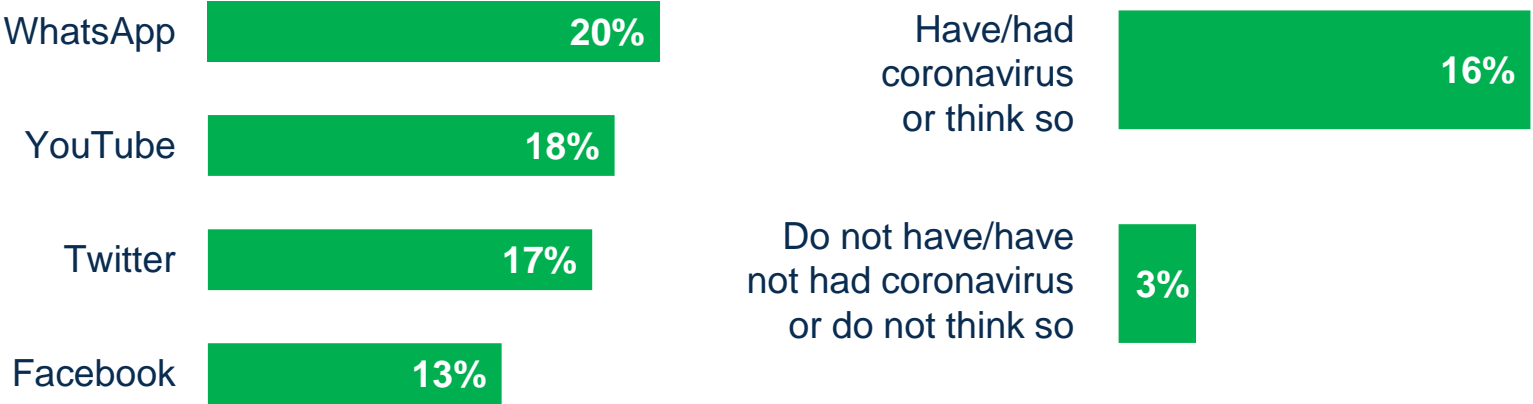
This triples to 16% among those who think they've had coronavirus, and is four times higher among those who get their information on coronavirus from WhatsApp (20%).

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?

Reported someone to the authorities for not wearing a face mask



% who have done

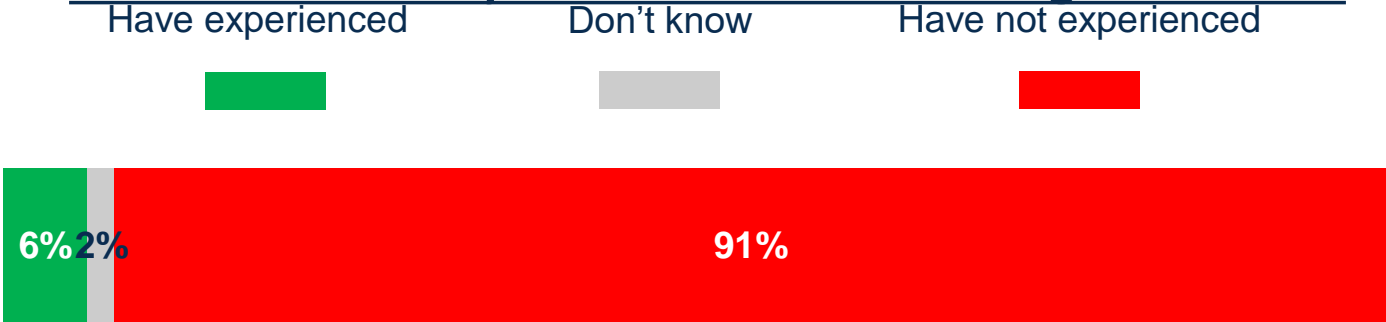


6% of the public say they've been confronted by someone for not wearing a mask.

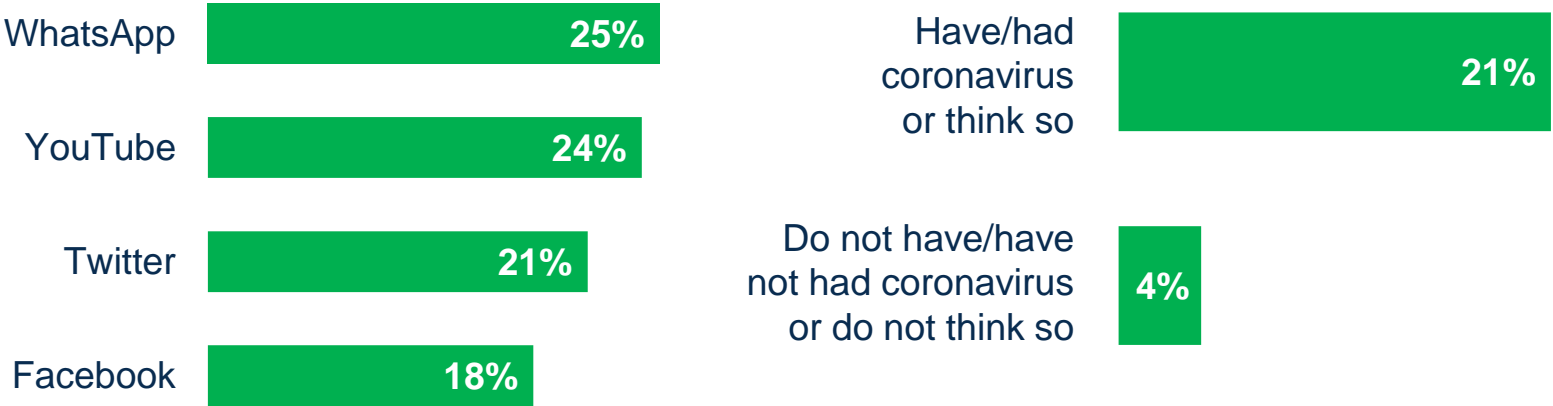
This again increases to around 1 in 5 of those who've had or think they've had coronavirus (21%), and a quarter of those who get their information from WhatsApp (25%) or YouTube (24%).

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?

Been confronted by someone for not wearing a face mask

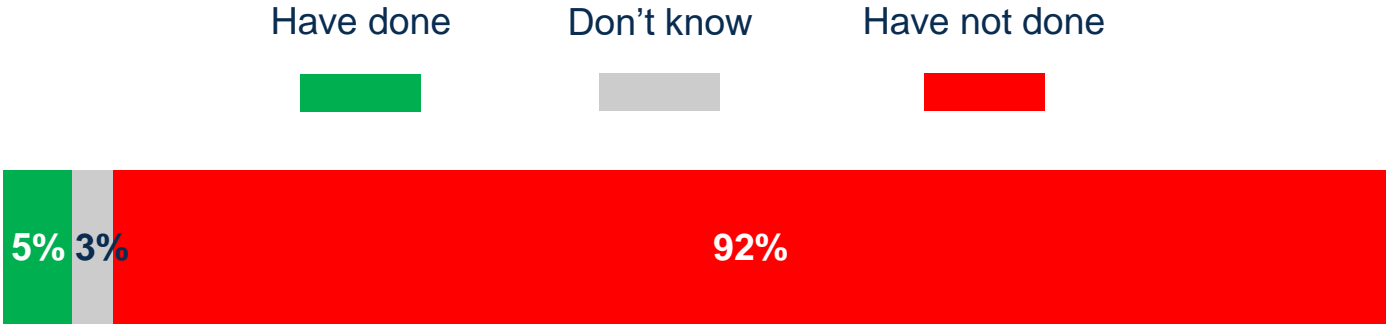


% who have experienced

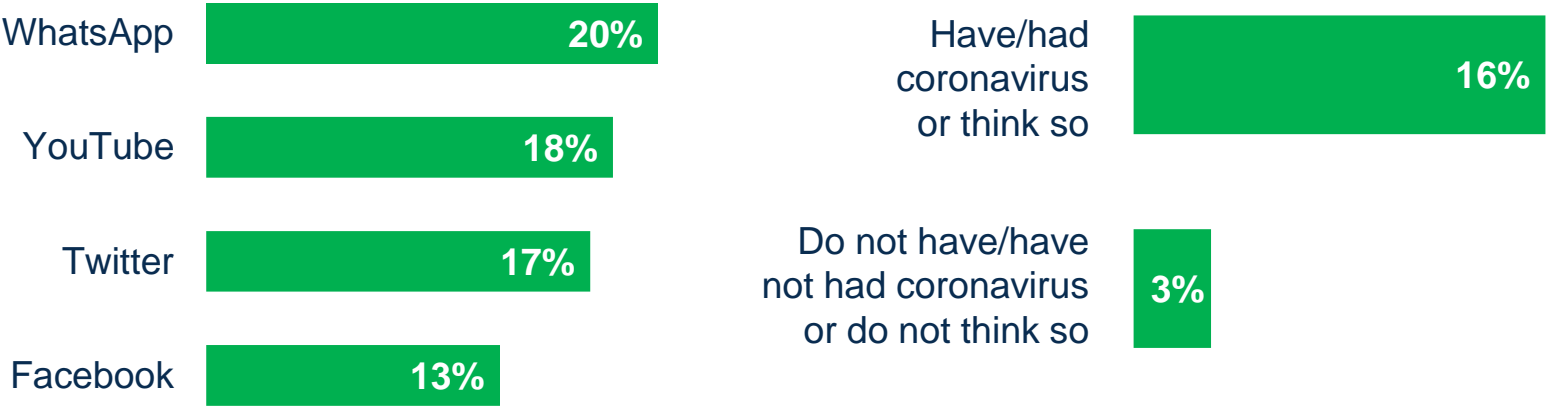


1 in 20 people have been reported to the authorities for not wearing a face mask, which increases to 16% of those who think they've had coronavirus, 18% of those who get their information on the virus from YouTube and 20% of those who get their information from WhatsApp.

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?
Been reported to the authorities by someone because you were not wearing a face mask



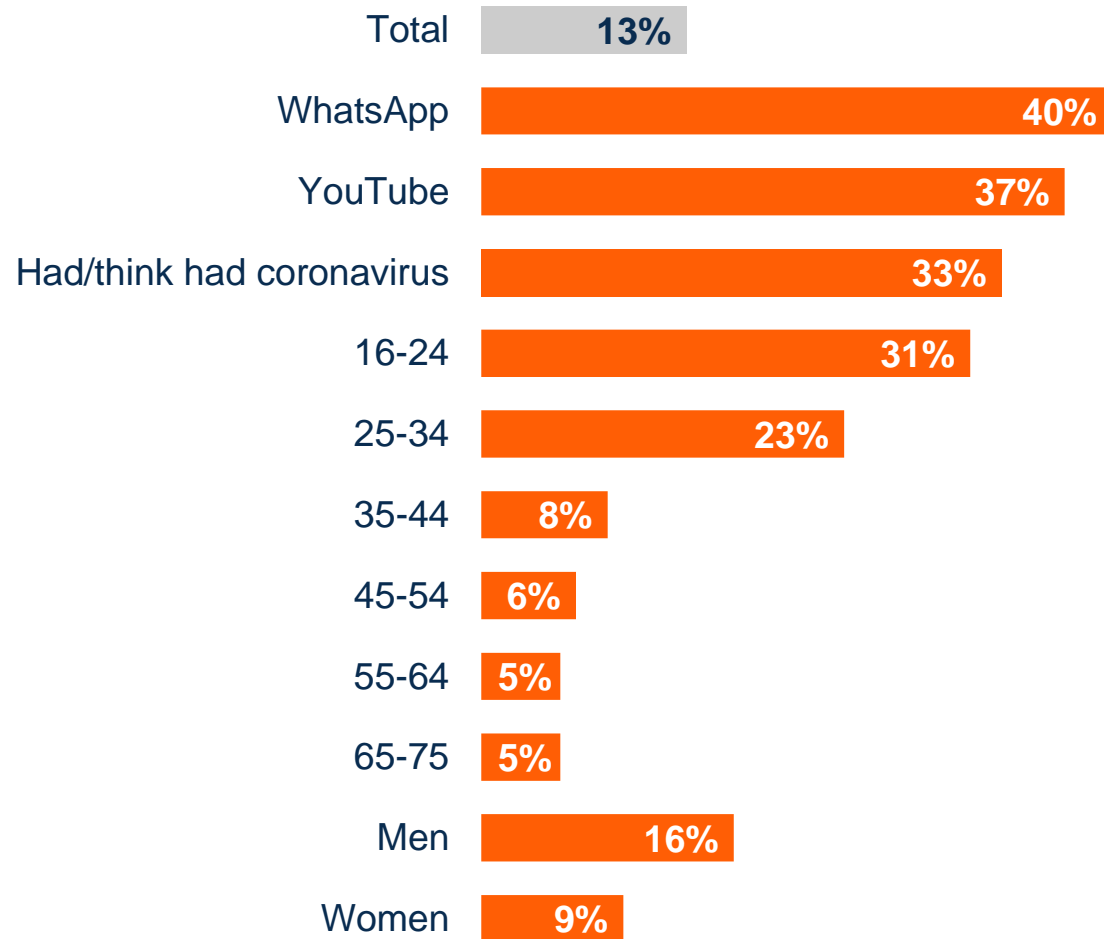
% who have done



Overall, 13% of the population have either confronted or reported people about not wearing face masks, or been reported or confronted themselves.

But this varies hugely across the population, with 31% of 16-24s being involved in confrontation/reporting, 40% of those who rely on WhatsApp as a source of information on coronavirus, and 33% of those who think they've had the virus.

Face mask confrontation and reporting: % within each group who've confronted/been confronted, reported/been reported for not wearing face masks



If a vaccine or treatment does not become available, 77% consider it acceptable for people to be required to wear face masks outside their home over the very long term – an increase from 67% in May.

However, half (47%) also say it would be acceptable for people to choose whether to wear face masks – although this is down significantly from 67% in May.

Views are fairly consistent across groups, though only 58% of those who think coronavirus is a low risk in the UK think it is acceptable to require people to wear them in the very long term.

If it became clear over the next year or two that it is not possible to produce a vaccine or a treatment that deals with the threat of coronavirus, how acceptable or unacceptable would you find the following options being in place for the very long term?

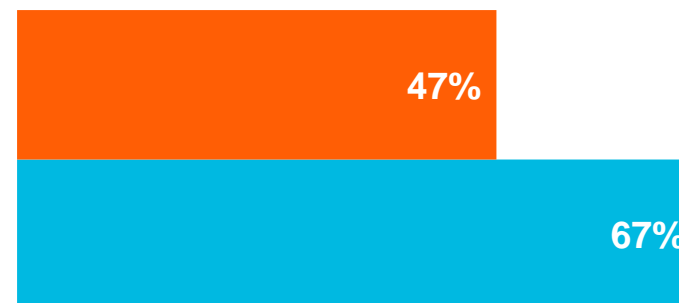
% who find it either completely acceptable or acceptable

■ 17-20 July ■ 20-22 May

People being required to wear face masks outside their homes



People being able to choose whether to wear face masks outside their homes



There are signs that people might *gradually* be feeling more comfortable about easing the rules

There is still a great deal of caution about lifting restrictions, with people more likely to think we're going too fast.

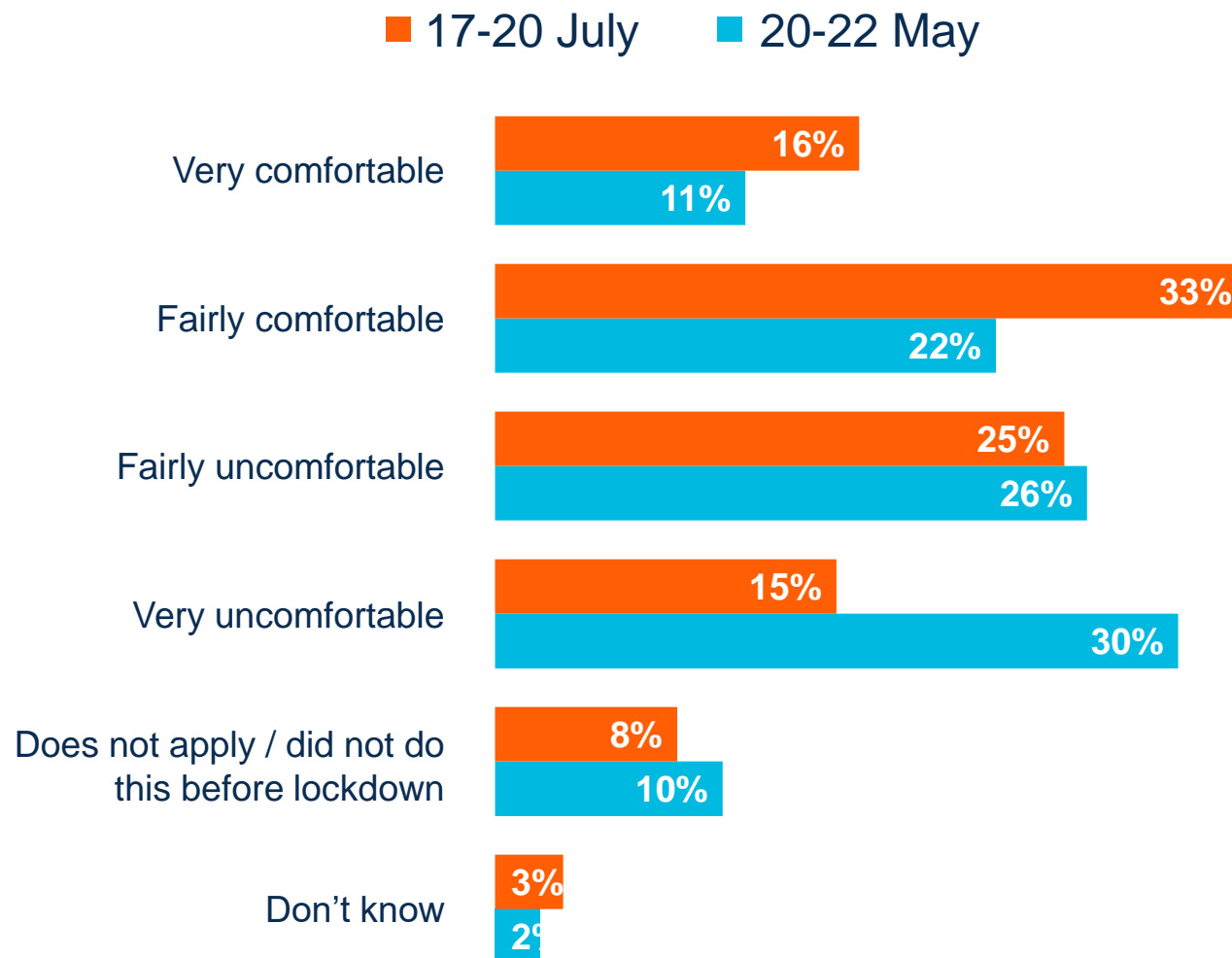
But there have been some slight shifts to greater comfort with lifting restrictions generally, and a much bigger shift among parents in being comfortable with children returning to school.

We are more focused on fighting coronavirus than protecting civil liberties, and reducing deaths remains the clear priority over wider economic effects.

This may partly reflect a stable level of negative economic consequences being felt: significant proportions have had reductions in their income, and smaller minorities have experienced more drastic impacts, not being able to afford bills or essentials – but this has not changed from May.

There has been a big shift among parents in comfort with sending their children to school: in May, only 33% said they'd be very/fairly comfortable with this, but 49% now say they are – and the proportion who say they're very uncomfortable with doing so has halved, to 15%.

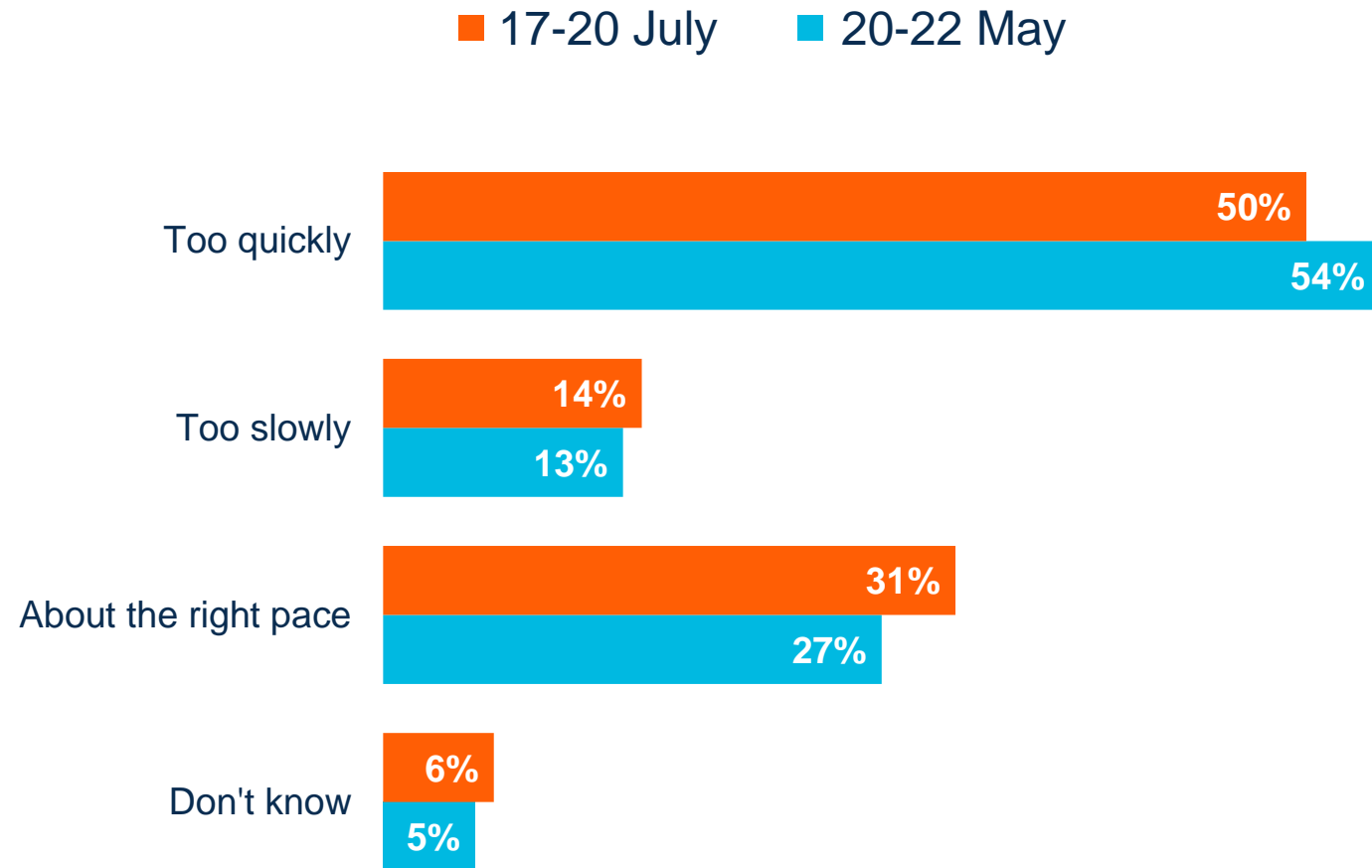
How comfortable or uncomfortable do you think you will feel about sending your child to school?



Base: 609 adults aged 16-75 in the UK who are parents/guardians, interviewed 17-20 July, and 590 adults aged 16-75 in the UK who are parents/guardians, interviewed 20-22 May 2020

More generally, there has been a small decline in the proportion thinking the UK government is relaxing the control measures too quickly – but 50% still agree with this.

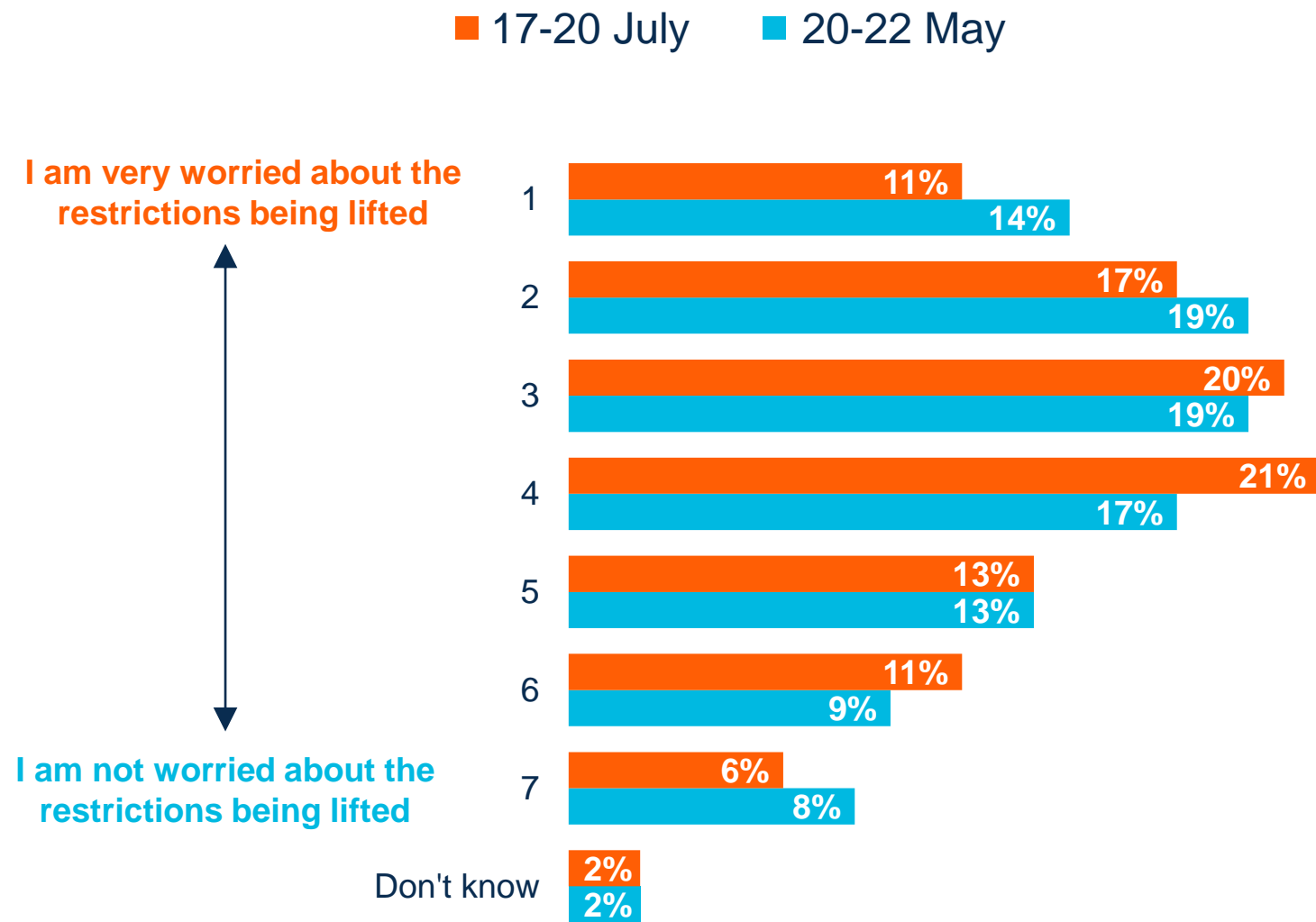
Do you think the UK government is relaxing the measures to control coronavirus too quickly, too slowly, or at about the right pace?



Similarly, the proportion giving the top two highest scores in worry about the restrictions being lifted has fallen, from 33% in May to 28% in July.

But there remain only a minority who give the two lowest scores (17%).

Which of these is closest to your view...?



And people are still very focused on taking measures to reduce the number of deaths from coronavirus, rather than believing the restrictions are doing more harm than good.

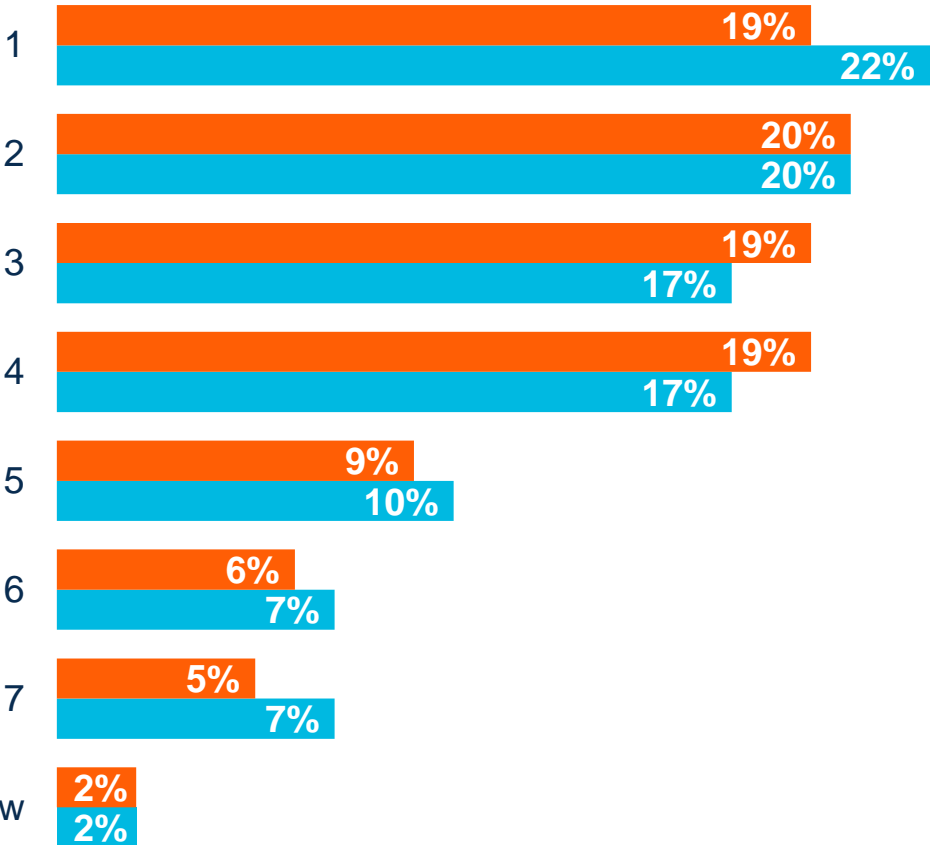
Which of these is closest to your view...?

■ 17-20 July ■ 20-22 May

We need to take whatever measures are necessary to control the spread of coronavirus and reduce the number of deaths

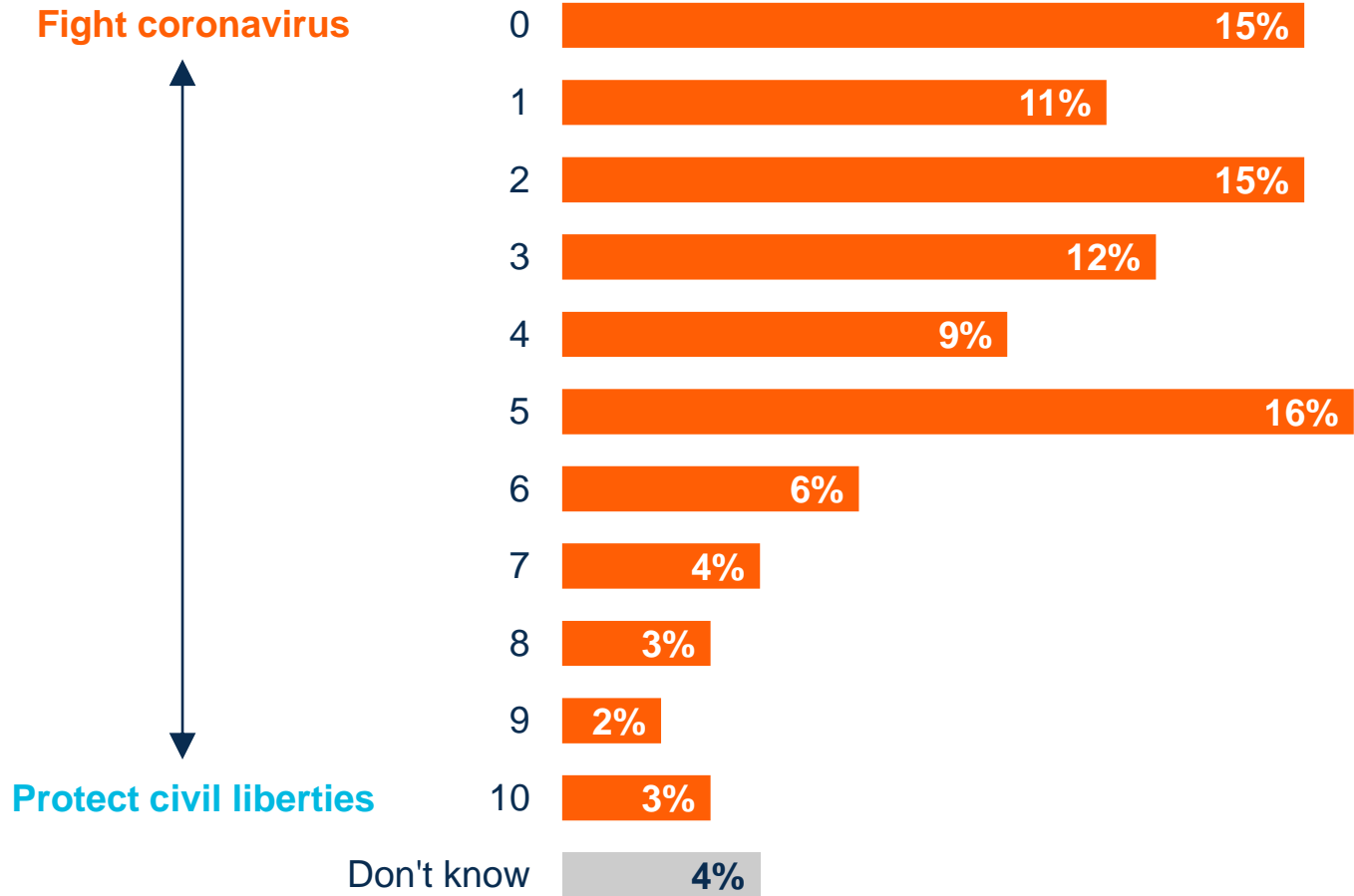


We need to relax the measures to control coronavirus now, they are doing more harm than good



On a trade-off between fighting coronavirus and protecting civil liberties, the majority of the population (62%) give more emphasis to fighting coronavirus, while 18% are more focused on protecting civil liberties.

Some people feel that, in order to fight coronavirus, we have to accept limits on civil liberties; others feel that civil liberties are to be protected at all costs. Where would you place yourself on this scale?



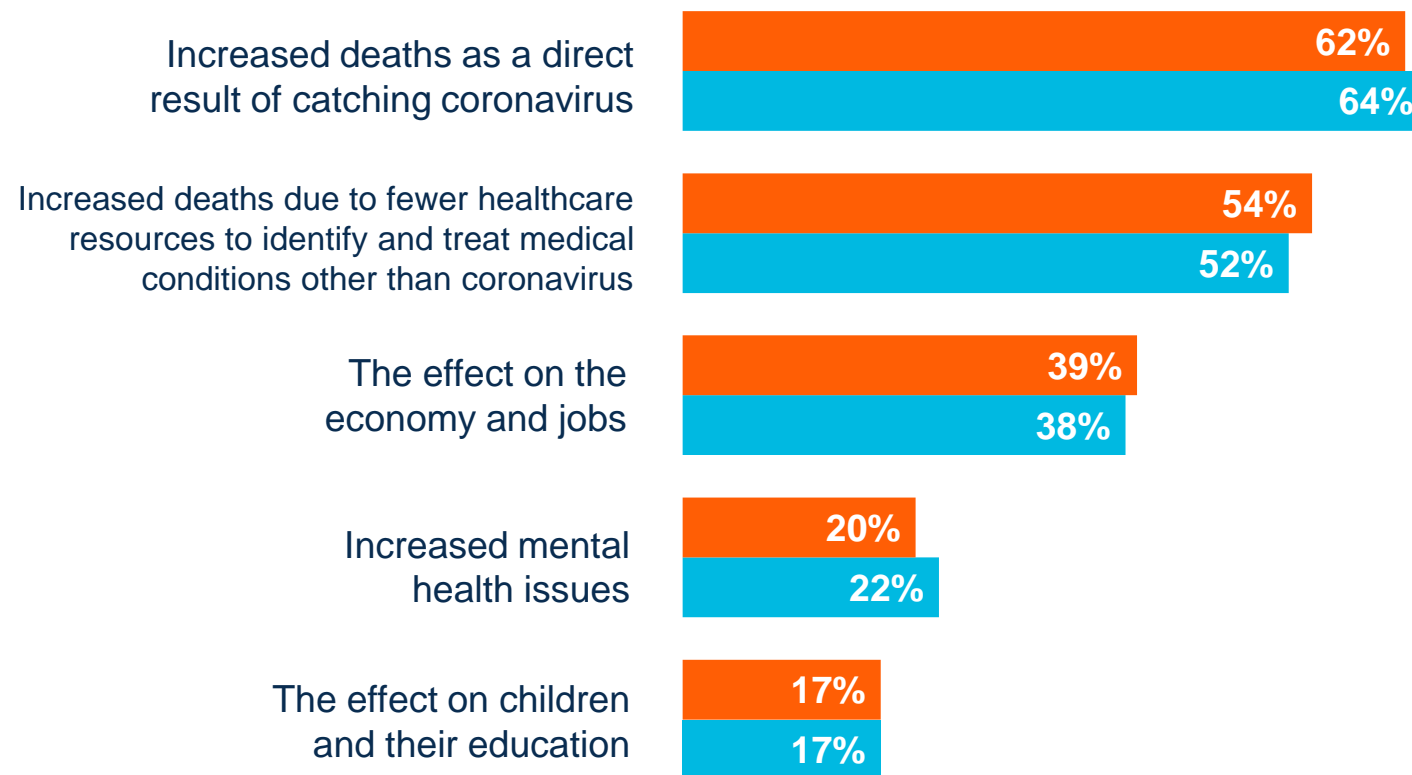
Reflecting the focus on reducing deaths that directly result from coronavirus, this is seen as the most serious or second-most serious problem of the crisis for 62% of the population, followed by indirect deaths due to fewer healthcare resources being available (54%).

The economy comes next – but there has been no shift in priorities towards these longer-term effects since the last survey in May.

Looking at these effects from the coronavirus crisis, please could you rank them in order of how serious a problem you think each is for the country, where 1 is the most serious and 5 is the least serious?

% who rank each as 1 or 2

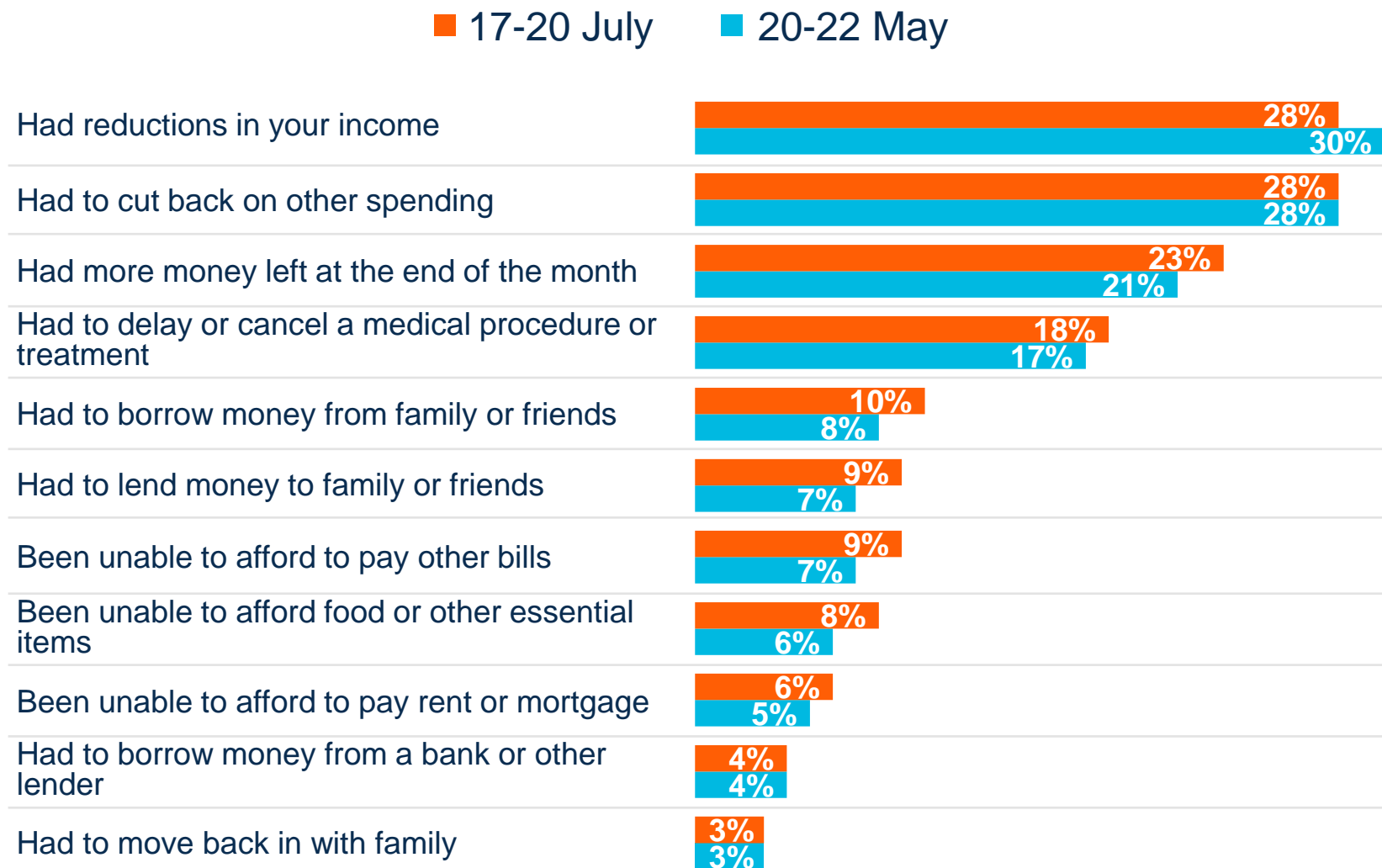
■ 17-20 July ■ 20-22 May



This stable picture in concerns may reflect largely unchanged financial experiences across the population: around 3 in 10 have either had reductions in their income or had to cut back on spending, very similar to the survey in May.

As in May, some have even had more money left at the end of the month (23%) – but at the other end of spectrum, minorities have seen severe consequences in not being able to afford to pay bills or buy essentials.

Which of these, if any, have you experienced as a result of the changes caused by the coronavirus – have you...?



Our precautionary behaviours are sticking

Reflecting our continued focus on controlling the virus, very large proportions say they are sticking with precautionary behaviours on handwashing and social distancing.

And many are still going further, by washing items they bring into their home and changing their clothes when they come in.

Some elements of a more normal life are clearly returning: there have been significant falls in the number of adults and children who are staying at home all week – but a quarter of adults and 30% of children are still not leaving home at all for five or more days a week.

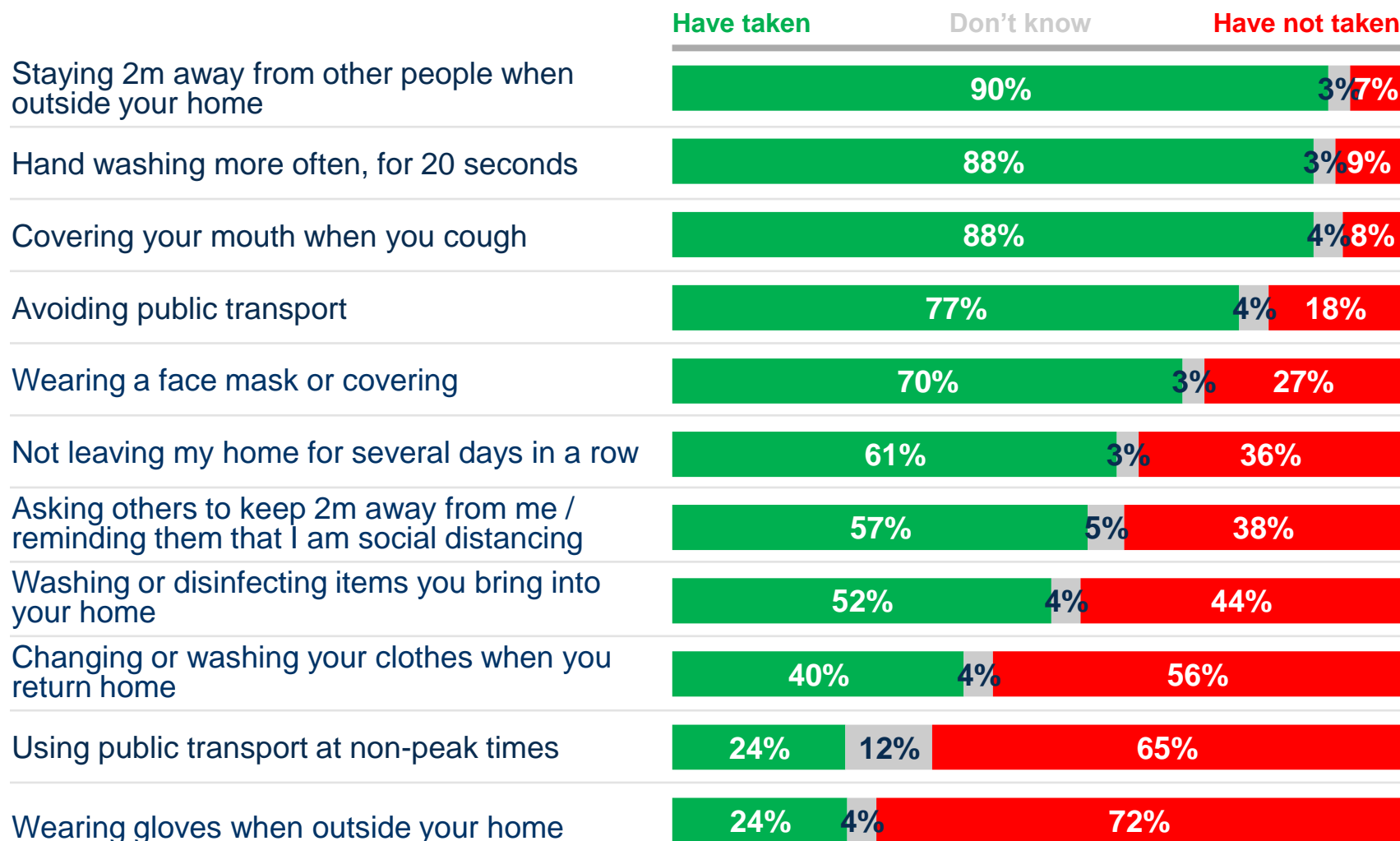
Despite the easing of the restrictions, there are still high and consistent proportions who say they are more anxious or depressed and more lonely than normal.

However, we are also maintaining our high levels of pro-social behaviours, with large proportions offering help and receiving help from others.

Reported adherence to guidelines and advice remains very high, particularly on social distancing, hand washing and covering mouths when coughing.

Significant proportions are also staying at home for several days in a row (61%), washing or disinfecting items they bring home (52%) and changing or washing their clothes when they return home (40%).

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?



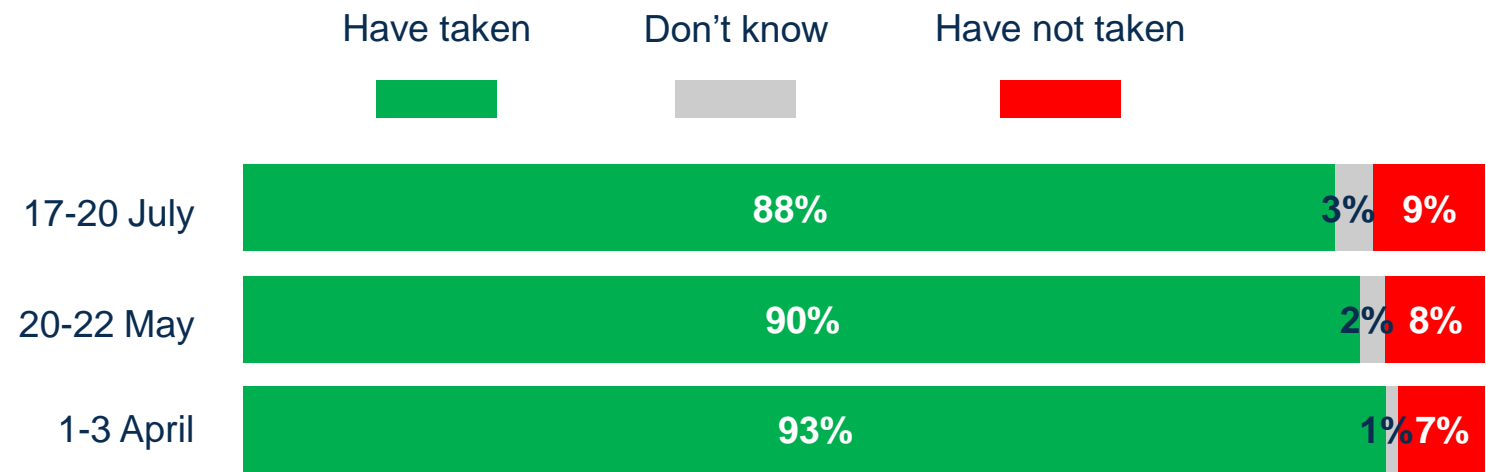
Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020

Claimed levels of regular handwashing and covering mouths when coughing have barely changed since April, with 9 in 10 still doing both.

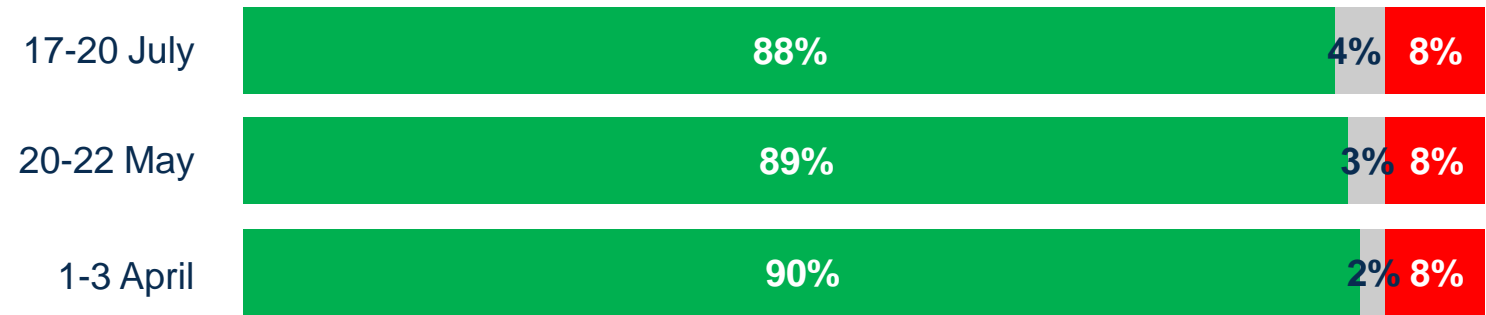
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions did not specify “over the past two weeks”

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Hand washing more often, for 20 seconds



Covering your mouth when you cough

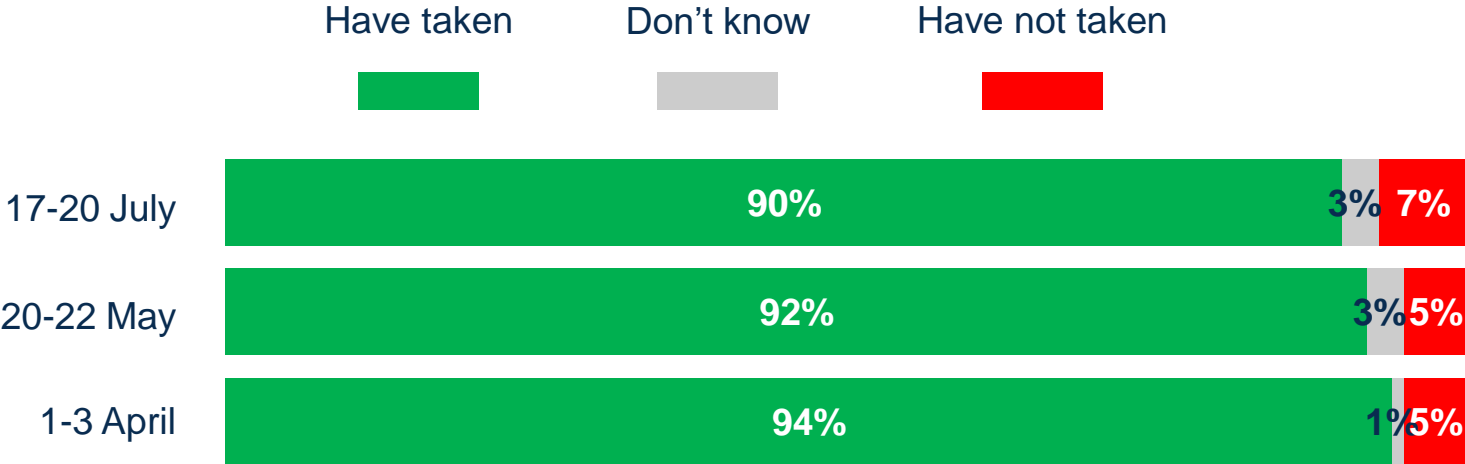


Similarly, people say staying 2 metres away from others is still widely adhered to – although as the lockdown measures have been eased, fewer report not leaving their home for several days in a row (down to 61% from 76% in May).

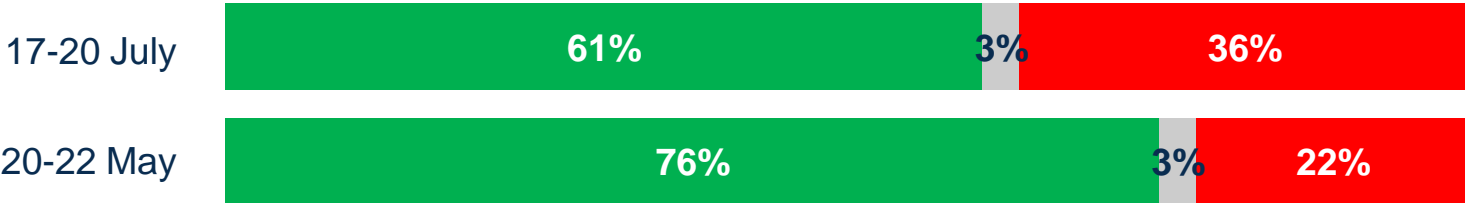
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions did not specify “over the past two weeks”

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Staying 2 metres away from other people when outside your home

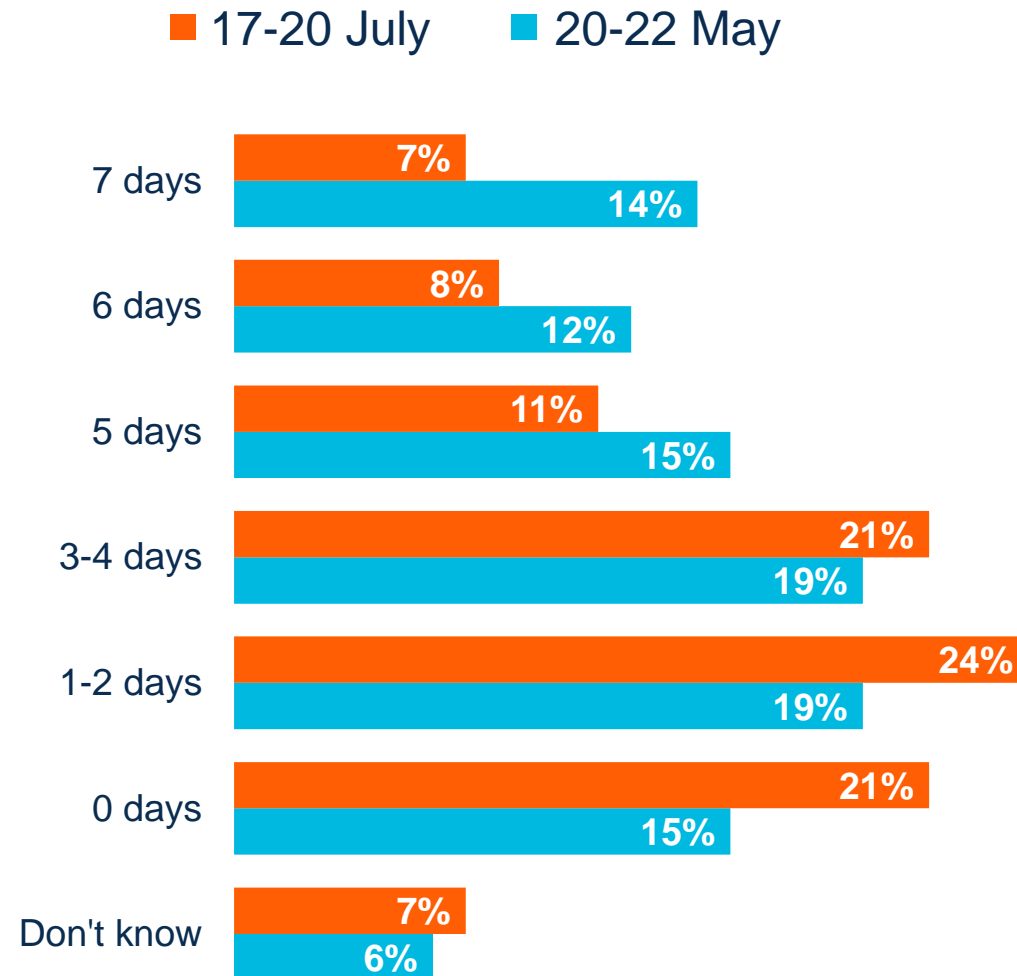


Not leaving my home for several days in a row



Reflecting this higher level of going out, the proportion who say they've not left their home in the last 7 days has halved from 14% to 7% – although there are still a quarter of people (26%) who are staying at home for five or more days a week.

Thinking about the last 7 days, on how many days did... ...you not leave your home at all?

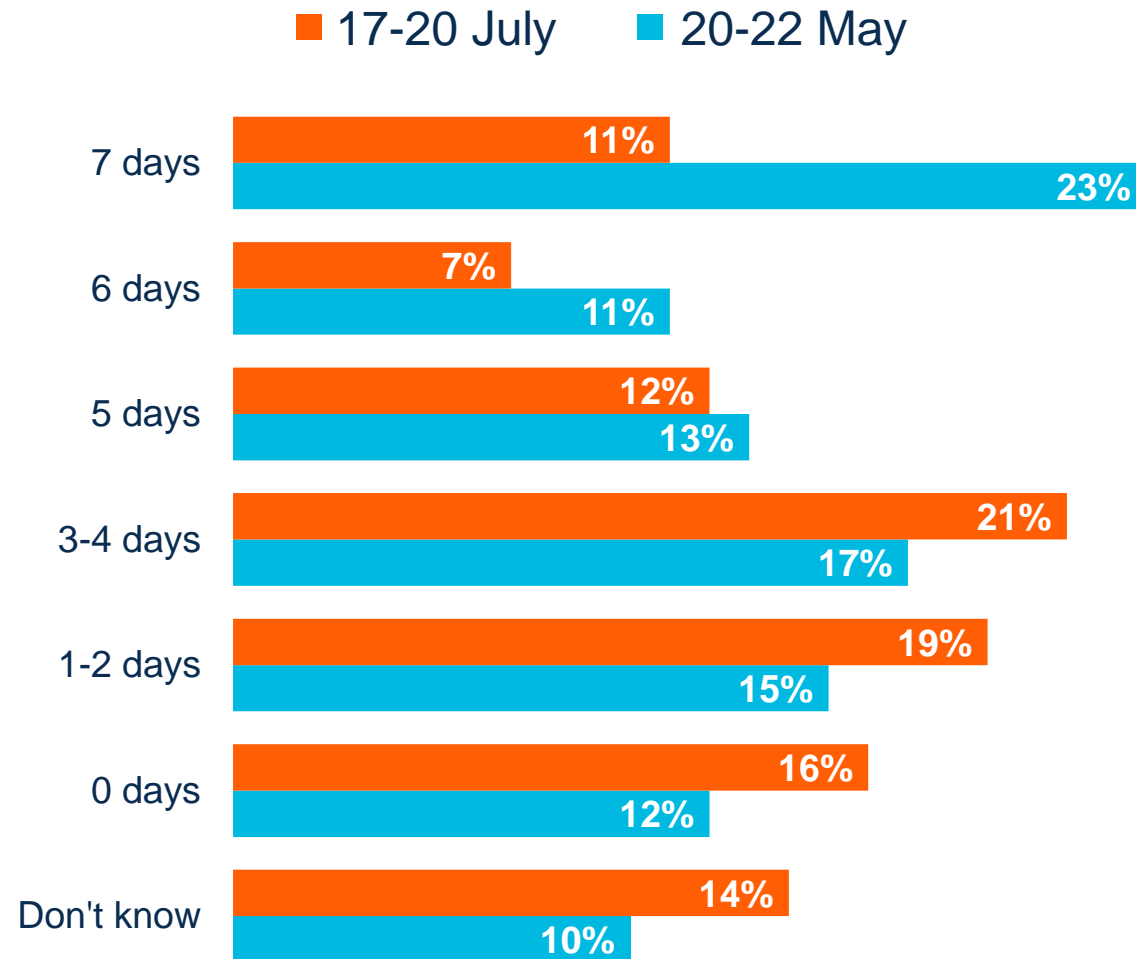


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020 and 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020

There has been a more dramatic shift in children leaving the home, with 11% of parents now saying their child has not left home at all in the past week, compared with 23% in May.

Still, 30% of children are not leaving home on five or more days a week, down from 47% in May.

Thinking about the last 7 days, on how many days did... ...your children not leave your home at all?

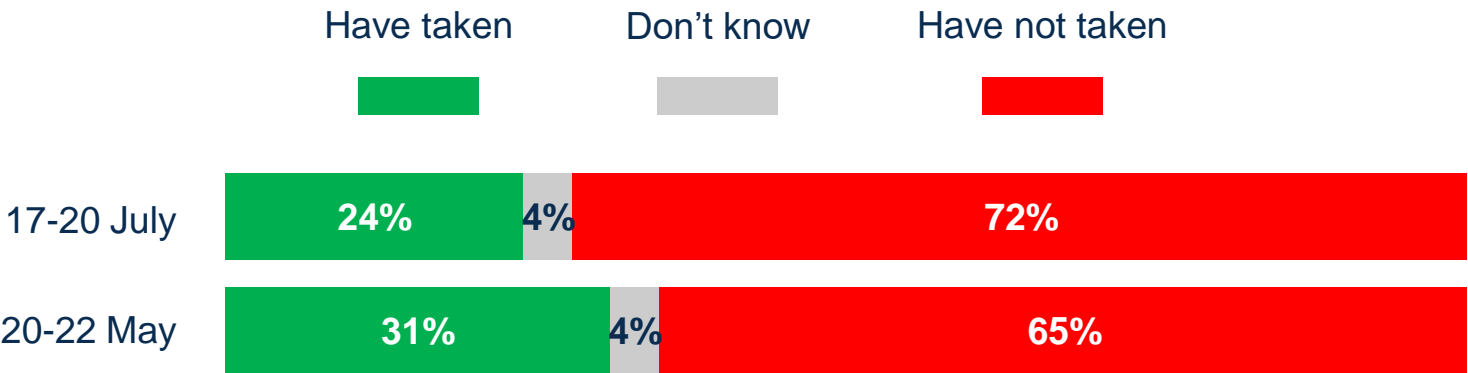


Base: 609 UK residents aged 16-75 who are parents/guardians, interviewed 17-20 July 2020; 590 UK residents aged 16-75 who are parents/guardians, interviewed 20-22 May 2020

Glove wearing has also declined slightly – although a quarter of the population say they’ve done this in the last 2 weeks (24%), down from 31% in May.

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Wearing gloves when outside your home



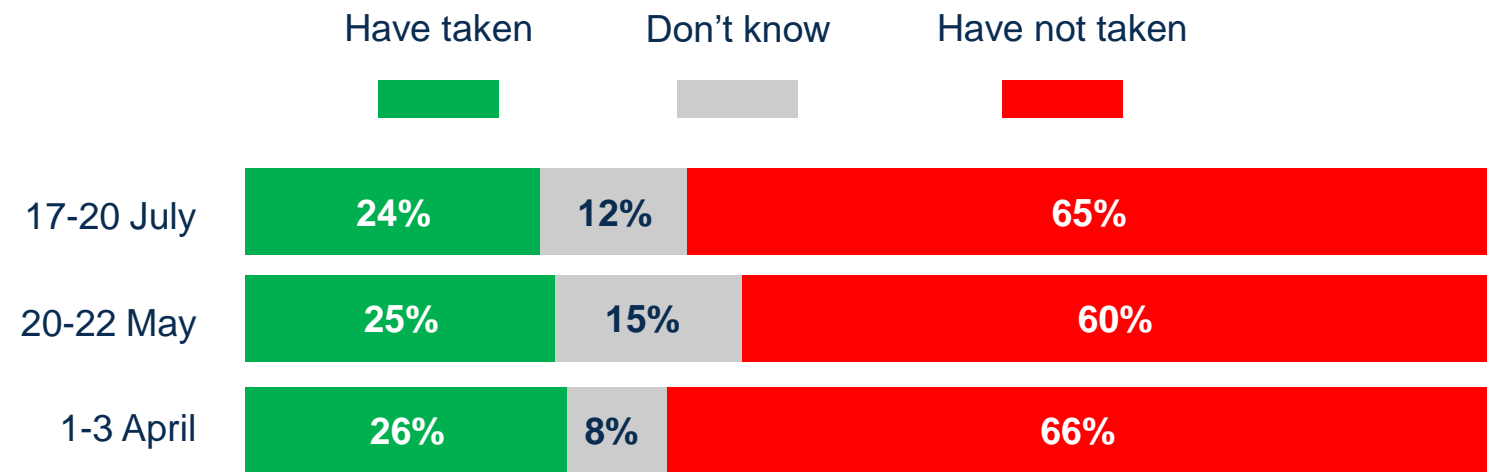
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions did not specify “over the past two weeks”.

Despite the encouragement to return to more normal life, there has been little change in our avoidance of public transport, with still around a quarter (24%) avoiding it at peak times and three-quarters (77%) avoiding it all together.

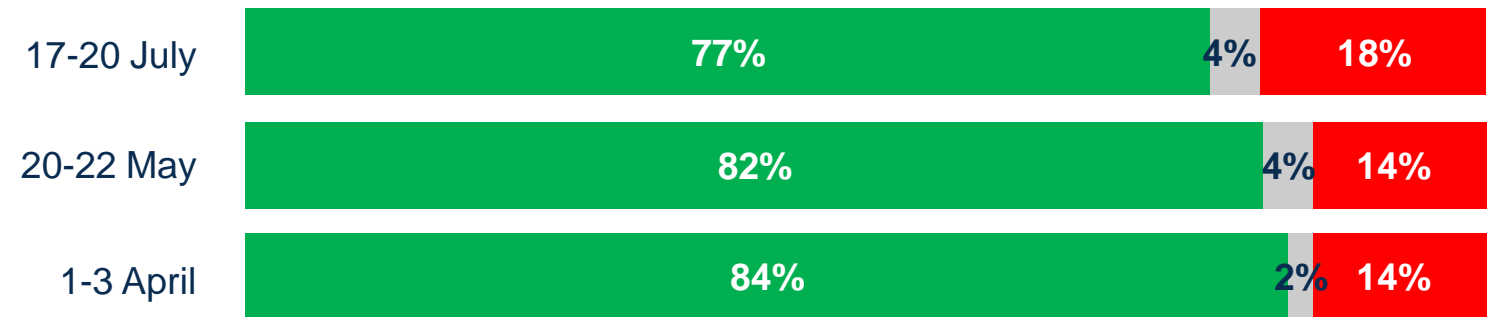
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions did not specify “over the past two weeks”.

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Using public transport at non-peak times



Avoiding public transport

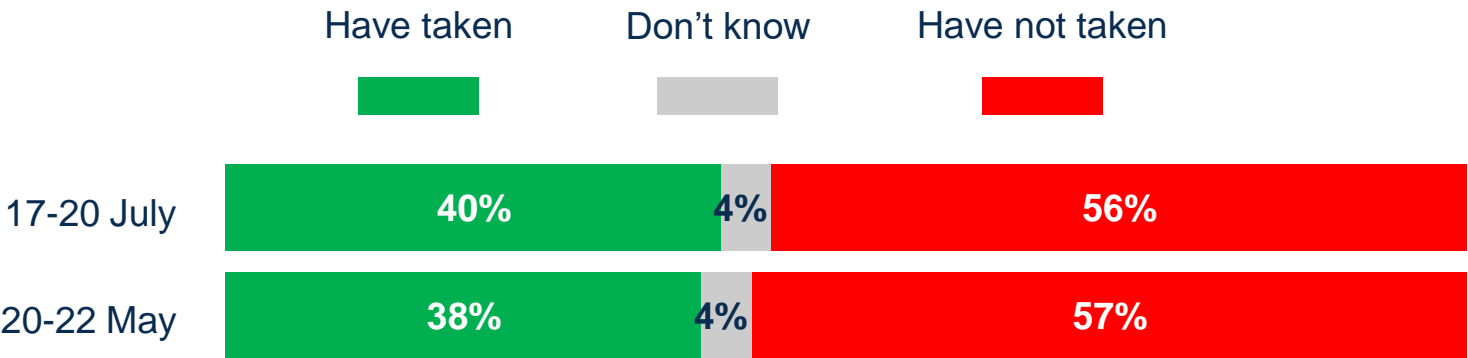


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020; 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020; and 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

Cautionary behaviours such as changing or washing your clothes when you return home or washing, or disinfecting items you bring into your home, are sticking with large proportions of people (40% and 52% respectively).

Which of the following measures, if any, have you personally taken over the past two weeks because you believe they may prevent the spread of coronavirus?

Changing or washing your clothes when you return home



Washing or disinfecting items you bring into your home



Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions did not specify “over the past two weeks”.

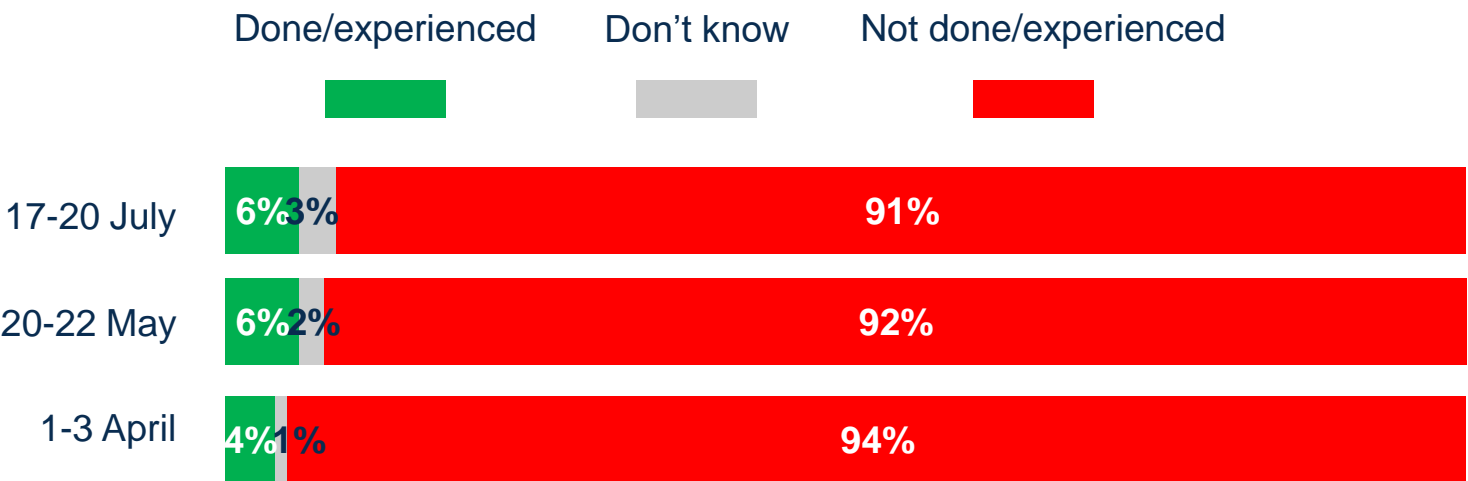
There has been little change in the proportion who say they've gone to work or outside with symptoms that could be coronavirus since April (now 6%).

Around a quarter (26%) now say they have drunk more alcohol than normal in the last two weeks, similar to a previous measure in May.

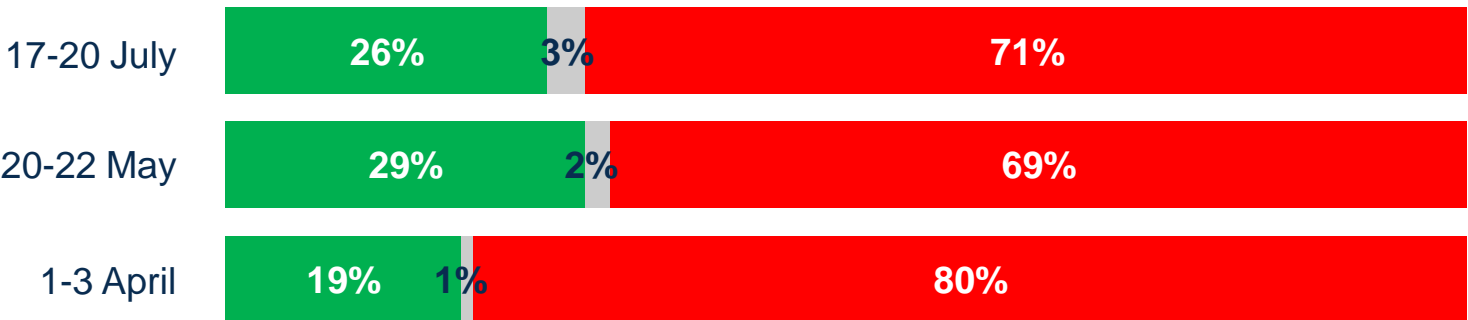
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions asked whether actions had been done/experienced since start of lockdown.

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?
Please answer honestly, all answers to this survey are anonymous.

Gone to work or outside despite having symptoms that could be coronavirus



Drank more alcohol than you normally would

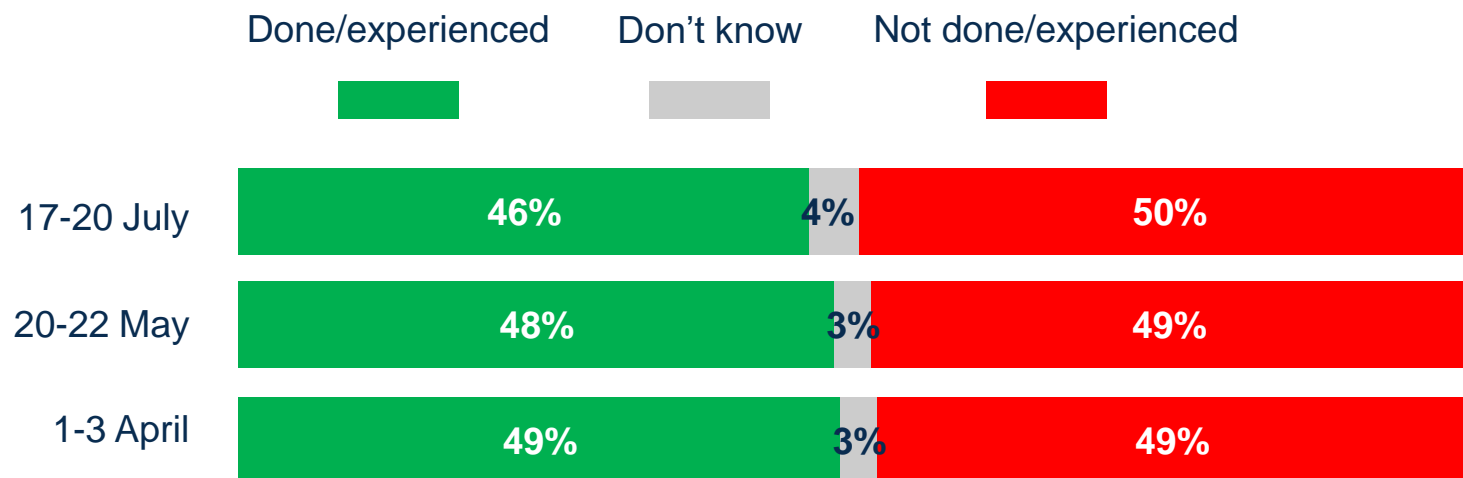


Despite the easing of the restrictions, there has also been little change in the proportions who say they've felt more anxious or depressed, or more lonely than normal, at 46% and 39% respectively.

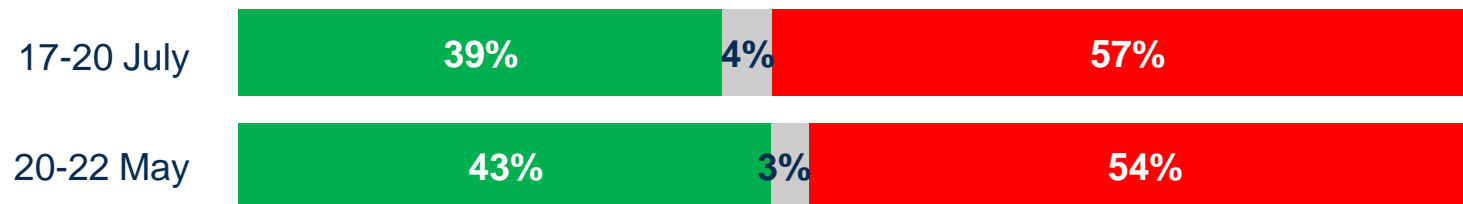
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions asked whether actions had been done/experienced since start of lockdown.

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?
Please answer honestly, all answers to this survey are anonymous.

Felt more anxious and depressed than normal



Felt more lonely than normal

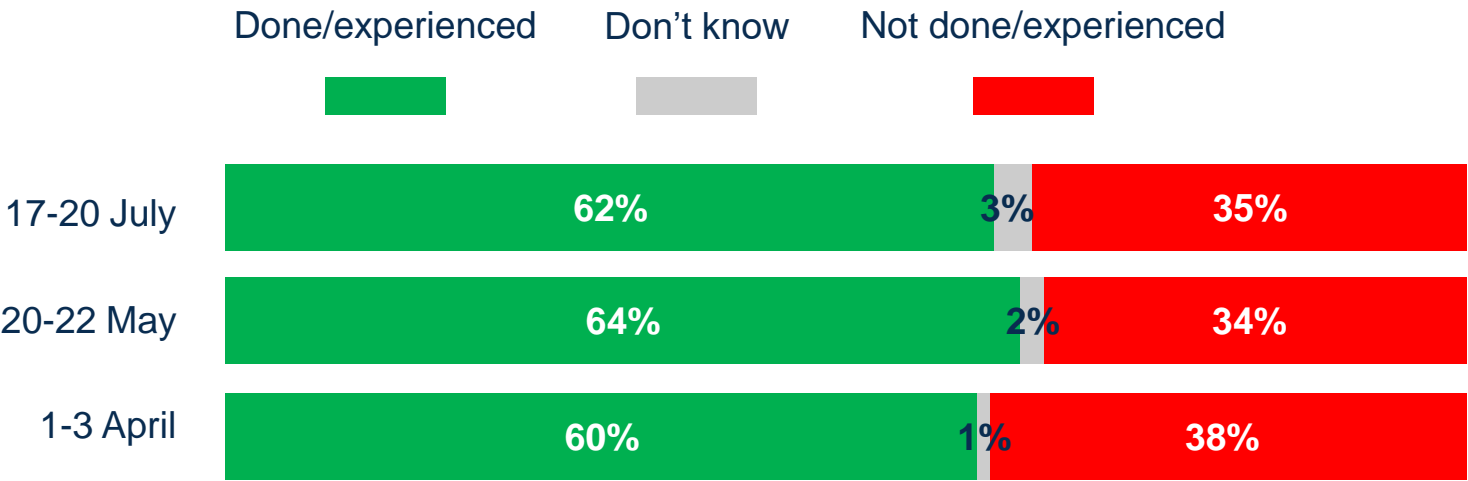


There is still a high level of offering help to (62%), or receiving help from (39%), others – although the latter is down from surveys in April and May, perhaps reflecting the relaxing of the restrictions and people needing to rely less on friends, family and neighbours.

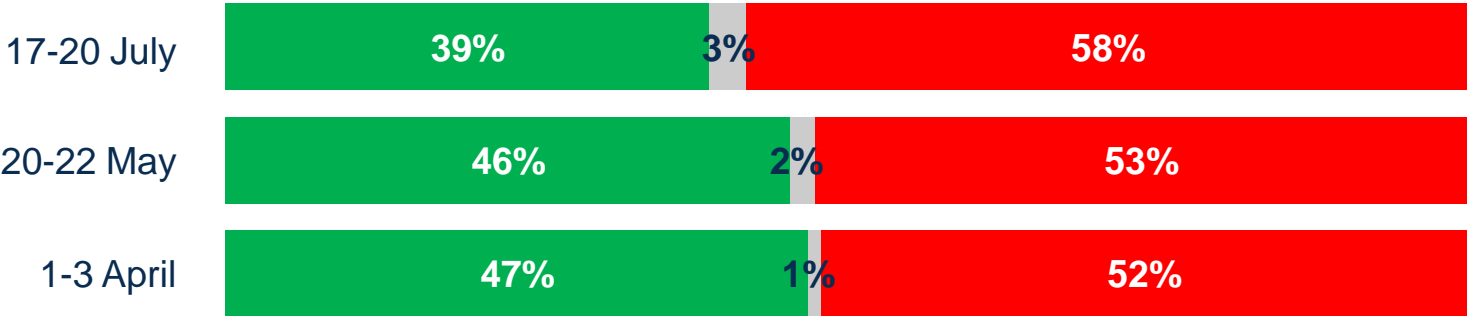
Note: 20-22 May and 1-3 April questions asked whether actions had been done/experienced since start of lockdown.

Have you personally done or experienced any of the following in the past month?
Please answer honestly, all answers to this survey are anonymous.

Offered help to friends, family and neighbours



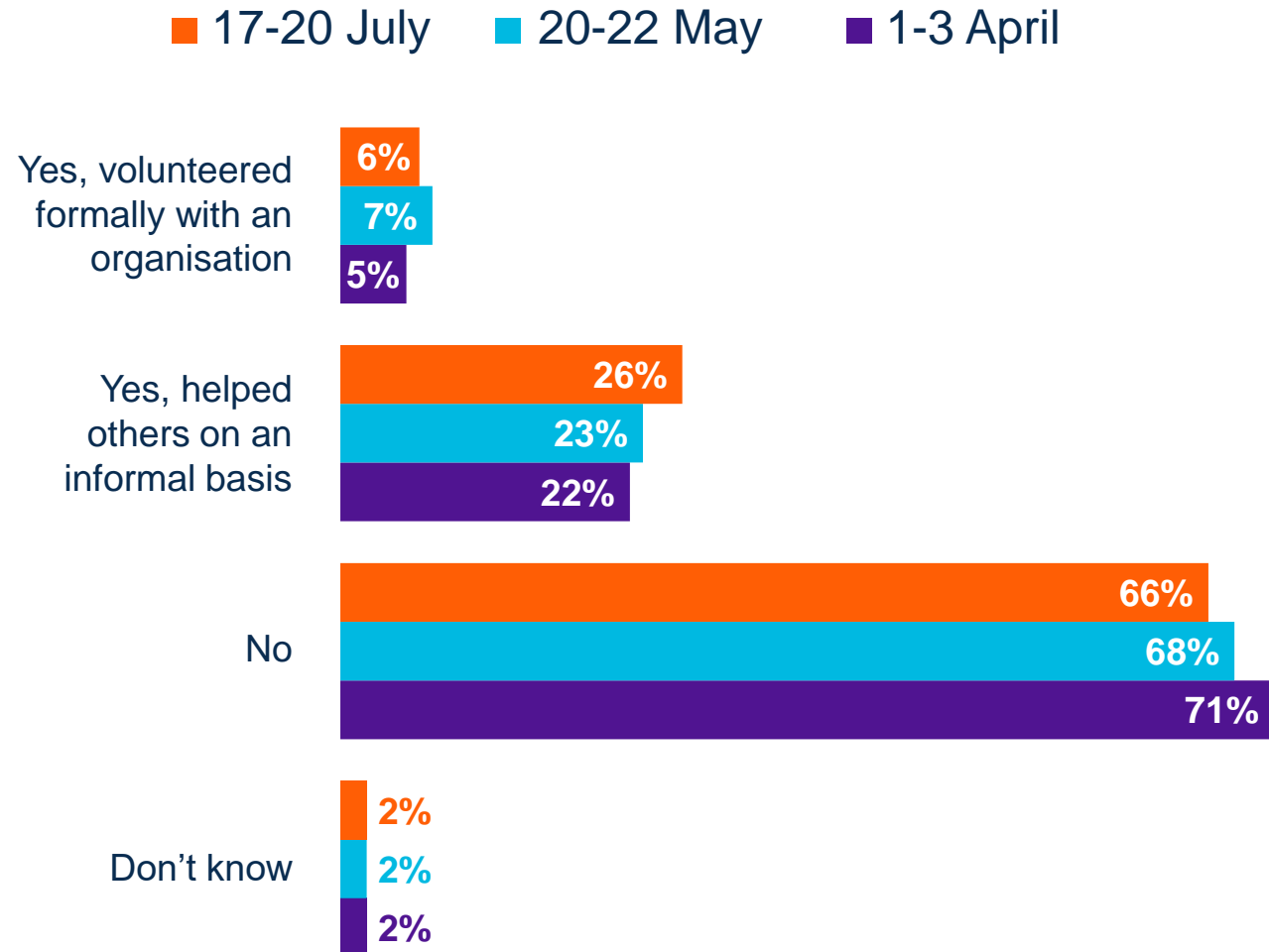
Received offers of help from friends, family and neighbours



Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July 2020; 2,254 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 20-22 May 2020; and 2,250 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 1-3 April 2020

Reflecting this relative stability in pro-social behaviour, significant minorities have volunteered formally to support others in the crisis (6%) or helped on an informal basis (26%).

Have you volunteered formally with another organisation to support people during the coronavirus crisis, or have you helped others on an informal basis, or not?



THE POLICY INSTITUTE

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