

Disabled people's levels of concern about the Covid-19 pandemic over time

Starting point

Pre-pandemic public transport was already inaccessible for a lot of disabled people.



First Lockdown

Reflecting back on the first lockdown in March 2020 – participants' levels of concern were **10/10**.



We'd got over that first wave and I was allowed out again – we were shielding for so long!



Infections are skyrocketing again this week. I am definitely feeling more anxious.



It feels like a free for all out there. I still have clinical vulnerabilities that haven't changed.



As long as I keep sanitised and wear a mask in certain environments, overall, I don't feel too concerned.

Phase 1

DECEMBER 2021 – JANUARY 2022

While concern had decreased since the first lockdown, the emergence of the Omicron variant saw concern levels rise again (**6/10** across participants).

Phase 2

MARCH – APRIL 2022

Levels of concern decreased to **5/10**. However, views became more polarised – with the most common ratings being **3** and **8** on a scale of 0-10.

Phase 3

JUNE – JULY 2022

Concern levels dipped again to **4/10** – the lowest point since the start of the pandemic. Notably, concern levels remain varied with no consensus across participants.

Present

This new-found assurance regarding Covid-19 transmission is not unshakeable. Future rises in Covid-19 cases, compounded with the cost-of-living crisis, threaten the 'new normal' for many.

Newer barriers



To be more Covid-safe is to be more inclusive.

Participants who are yet to return to their new normal want to see more mask-wearing and social distancing

When surveyed in February 2022, disabled people were more likely to say they had to make significant changes to the way they travel (41%), compared to non-disabled people (30%).

Kate - carer for her partner who is disabled

Kate is 68 and lives in the Wirral. Her husband Kevin is deafblind as the result of a long-term degenerative visual and hearing impairment. Even when travelling together, they have found public transport difficult and stressful, so tend to travel in the car.

During the early stages of the pandemic, Kate and Kevin were very anxious about the transmission of Covid-19 and continued to curb their travel behaviours beyond the lockdown period to minimise contact with others. However, after catching Covid-19 in Spring 2022 and recovering they became much more confident travelling.

Kate and Kevin are now back to all of their pre-pandemic travel behaviours, which involves primarily travelling by car and occasionally active travel, when they can walk to a destination that is not far. At this stage, Kate says she is “fairly relaxed” about Covid. She has noticed, however, that family members are still concerned and don’t visit as much as they did pre-pandemic.



“Kevin is much happier now. Lockdown closures and restrictions really impacted his quality of life and independence.”

Lucia - mobility condition, uses a walking stick

Lucia is 34 years old and lives in Long Eaton, Derbyshire. Lucia has difficulties with balance and confusion related to a head injury and uses a walking stick to help with her balance. Lucia has made significant changes to her travel habits since the onset of the pandemic. She avoids many journeys altogether, has very rarely taken public transport and pre-plans any journeys to minimise exposure to others, eroding her sense of spontaneity.

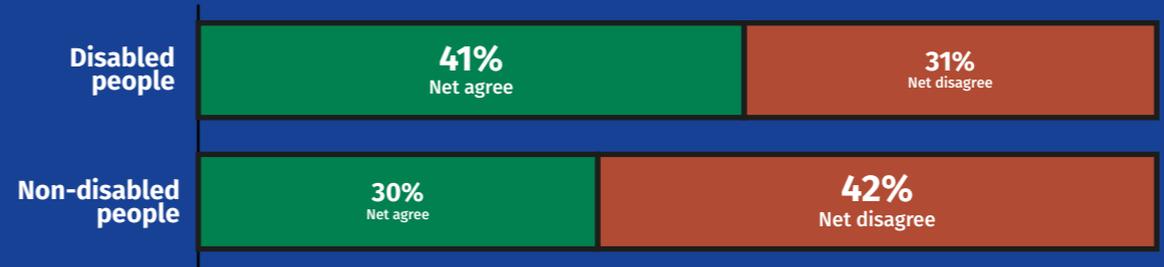


“I’d like to see more people take into consideration that there are disabled people using public transport and for other people to be more kind and give up their seat for a disabled person and to be more Covid-friendly.”

As of July 2022, Lucia’s concerns about Covid-19 had not ebbed. She is frustrated by people “acting like it’s disappeared” while transmission continues.

Looking to the future, Lucia feels unsure when she will be able to return completely to her pre-pandemic travel behaviours. However, she is optimistic that this will occur at some point and hopes to regain her confidence in using public transport especially.

“I feel like I have had to make significant changes to the way I travel due to the pandemic”



In February 2022, we conducted a survey to better understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on disabled people's experiences of travel.

We conducted a statistical analysis on the survey data to create six different audience groups, based on disabled people's levels of motivation for travel.

