



COVID-19 & COMMUNITY LIFE

SNAPSHOT 2:

**WHY ARE
CASES RISING?**

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COVID-19 & COMMUNITY LIFE

Covid-19 & Community Life is a study run by The Young Foundation and generously supported by the Wellcome Trust. The project is exploring how Covid-19 is changing our relationships, interactions and experience of community in real-time. Using both a digital platform, whereby around 140 participants share their stories and experiences online, supplemented with phone interviews with 30 people who do not have access to, or feel comfortable using, digital devices. We are focusing on three key themes:

- how the Covid-19 pandemic is affecting interactions between individual in society;
- how the role of the digital realm plays a role in community response; and
- how individuals and communities relate to science and research.

A more detailed summary of the methodology is at the end of this report.

This snapshot report is based on the findings of 132 online participants. It represents an interim, top-line analysis. A more detailed report will be published later in the project.



SNAPSHOT 2:

WHY ARE CASES RISING?

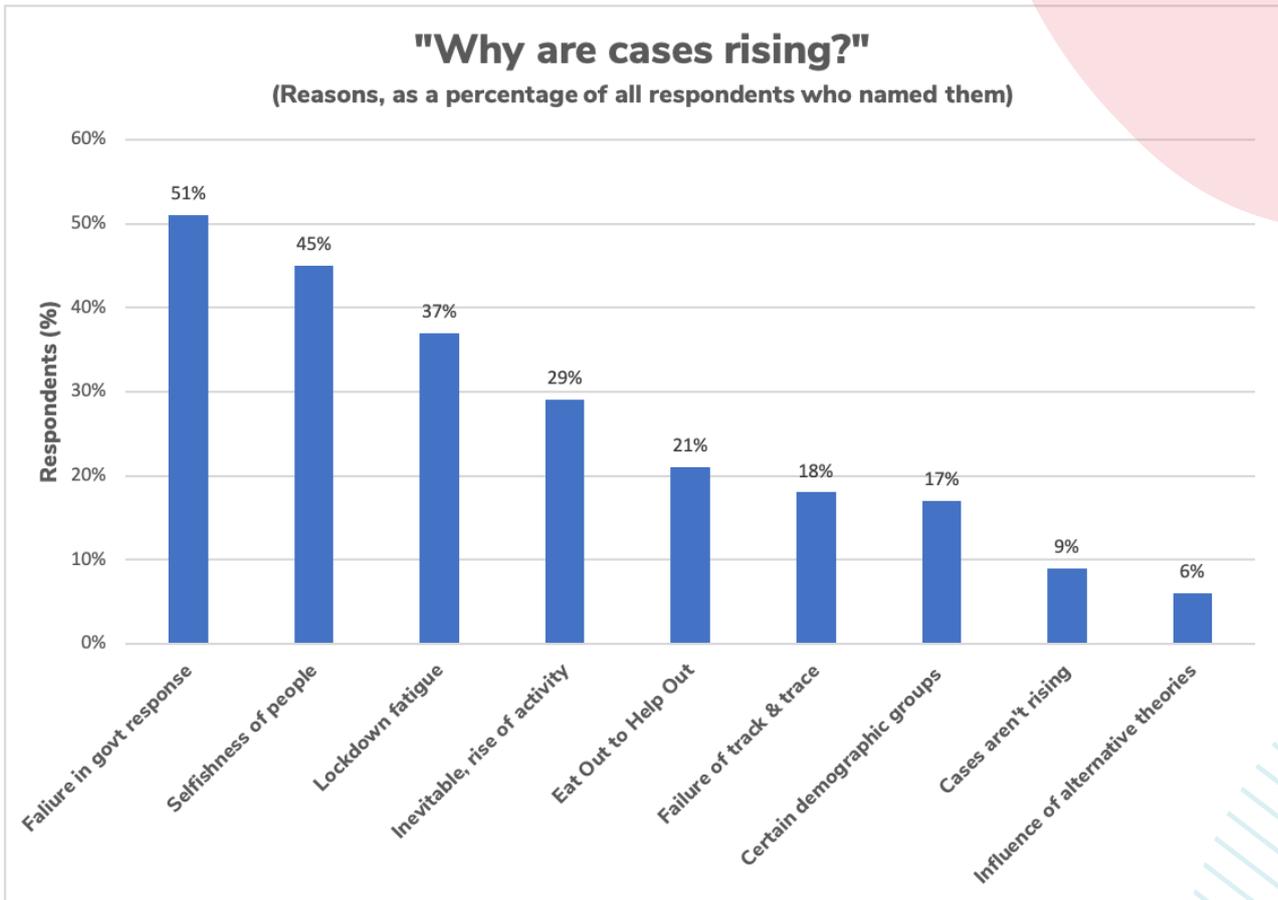
As Covid-19 cases are rising again, restrictions are tightening and the 'second wave' hits, the course of the pandemic has reached another turning point. Whilst commentators are forming narratives to explain this change, we wanted to find out whether this reflected wider perceptions from everyday experiences across the country. We asked our nationally representative sample of online diary-keepers: 'Why do you think cases are rising?'. The response was a lot more complex than a simple 'blame-game'.

The graph (overleaf) summarises our analysis to show the prevalence of different types of reasoning. This snapshot report considers each of these perceived causes, in order of popularity, to provide an insight into the experiences and viewpoints out of which they are borne. It finds that blame most often falls upon the government- with accusations of incoherent messaging and failure to enforce sufficient restrictions. A large proportion also blame individual behaviours, seeing that people have selfishly not been following the guidelines; but others are much more understanding of the situation. The general public are sympathetic to 'lockdown fatigue' and see that it was inevitable that activity (and hence transmission) had to increase. Overall, the response to why people think cases are rising is multifaceted: whilst some people think it's simple, aggregating experiences from across the country creates a much more complicated picture.

DETAILS OF CODES

All responses were coded according to following categories. Many responses fell into more than one category and so, percentages will not add up to 100%.

- Failure in govt response/enforcement/messaging/lack of trust in guidelines
- Selfishness of other people (not following guidelines)
- Lockdown fatigue/complacency
- Inevitable increases in activity (schools, university, work, pubs, holidays)
- Specific schemes (Eat Out to Help Out)
- Failure of track & trace
- Blame/scapegoat certain demographic groups (young people)
- Believe the stats have been overblown (flu season, more tests, virus doesn't exist)
- Influence of alternative theories (media/ social media)



FINGERS POINT TO FAILURES IN GOVERNMENT

More than half of our respondents pointed towards the government and poor leadership as a main reason for the current rise in Covid-19 cases. Eroded trust due to irresponsible and inconsistent behaviour from political leaders, incoherent messaging, government U-turns and a lack of enforcing mitigation measures were identified as some of the reasons within this overarching theme.

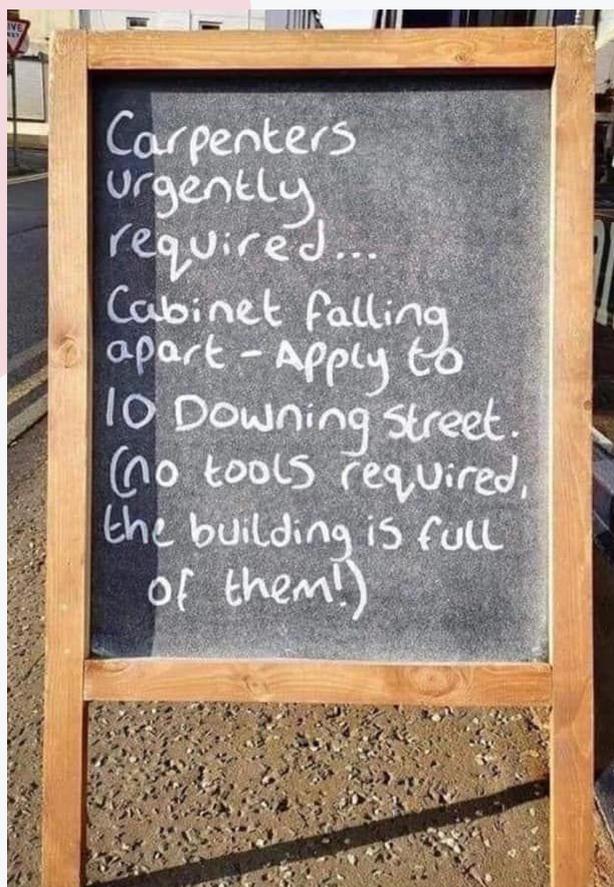
We haven't brought in the correct measures soon enough - such as mandating the wearing of masks. Encouraging people to eat out, not enforcing the rules when there were huge crowds outside pubs and in city streets and parks. This was bound to have an effect. (Male, 25-34, Northern Ireland)

I believe that the government are more interested and concerned about their economy rather than human lives in relaxing the rules so quickly (Male, 35-44, North West)

Government have lost the confidence of the majority of the people in terms of their ability to deal with the pandemic - hence people are looking for excuses NOT to follow advice, the rules, etc. (Male, 65-74, South East)

Of the government's perceived failings, the 'Eat out to help out' scheme and the 'Track & Trace' system are seen to have contributed massively to this spike. There are frustrations around the contradictions of encouraging people to go out and get the economy moving again, whilst at the same time advising people to continue distancing where possible. Many feel that this messaging signalled that Covid-19 was no longer a serious threat and people were more relaxed as a result.

Schemes such as Eat Out to Help Out, I think, were a major cause of the increased cases. Such schemes told the public that it was okay to go out into public and get back to some sort of normality. With this kind of message, I assume many of the community relaxed in following the guidelines, possibly assuming the virus was gone. (Female, 18-24, Northern Ireland)



A photo uploaded by one of our digital diary keepers in response to the question: "Why are cases rising?"

I think the "eat out to help out scheme" in August made people think it's not a problem anymore to go out and socialise. I also feel like that people simply got so used to having the coronavirus around that it lost some of its "threatening character" - society just didn't take it serious anymore. (Male, 18-24, Wales)

The government's record around track and trace is another major point of criticism. Many people doubt its effectiveness and reliability, and others comment on the continued lack of testing capacity and the ineffective approach of only making test available to symptomatic people, despite the high rates of people who remain asymptomatic after contracting Covid-19.

The failure of track and trace (no shock there) and the testing debacle have further undermined people's ability to work and go to school, all this was promised but not delivered. I started off the crisis really wanting to believe that the government would try their best for all of us, there was no route map and that mistakes would be understandable. I don't feel that way now - they have used the crisis as a screen for dodgy dealing, lied, shown unforgivable bias and ignorance and played party political games that have cost lives. (Female, 45-54, West Midlands)

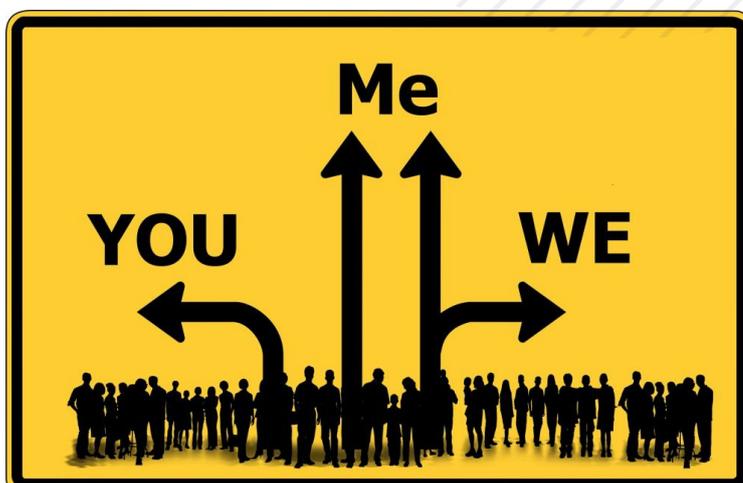
THE SELFISHNESS OF OTHERS

For nearly every other person, the rise in Covid-19 cases is down to others acting selfishly and not adhering to the government guidelines (1). There is anger over people not wearing masks, not socially distancing and generally acting with only their own interests – rather than those of others, or the entire community – in mind.

Cases are rising because people chose to ignore guidelines and carry out their selfish desires (Male, 18-24, North East)

It seems that it's not only the youngsters, who to a certain extent can be forgiven, but older people, including my 92 year old father, whose attitude to Covid, my vulnerability, and 'I've lived my life' selfishness, absolutely disgusts me. He has people in and out of his

flat. One of them, for example, my niece, his granddaughter, is a sex worker, and I'm sure she doesn't operate socially distanced! (Female, 55-64, North West)



"Some people do not get it that we're all in this pandemic together"

LOCKDOWN FATIGUE

Others are more sympathetic to the behaviour of others, describing it as the natural result of 'lockdown fatigue', following months of adhering to social distancing. They feel that with Covid-19 becoming part of everyone's reality, people are less fearful of contracting the virus and thus, more relaxed when it comes to flouting the rules.

I think cases are rising because people have become more nonchalant and seem to care less about COVID. I think the effect of lockdown and social distancing and rules are being followed less and less. I think people are numb to the various changes and rules and are often ignoring them to just go about their way. I think people are not really scared of the disease anymore and believe there will be no real repercussions for breaking lockdown or rules. (Male, 25-34, West Midlands)

I think people are cynical, fed up and desperate to get back to normal, meaning they sometimes just want to do what they want to do and not constantly worry about social distancing (Female, 35-44, North West)

“A normal afternoon at a seafront bar ... sometimes hard to believe there is a pandemic”



THE INEVITABILITY OF A SECOND WAVE

One in three people reflect on the rise in Covid-19 cases as being inevitable and always bound to happen. As schools, universities and work pick up again and social contact increases, a higher transmission rate is unavoidable and predictable from the get-go. Rather than blaming certain behaviours, groups or the government, they are of the belief that permanent restrictions were never a viable option so an increase cases is the price that has to be paid.

It's inevitable as we allow increasing social contact. The less social contact, the less transmission. I think it's an awful balancing act, we can't all self-isolate for long periods of time because of the social, psychological and economic consequences. (Female, 35-44, South West)

I don't blame anyone - there's not point. We need to just accept it's here to stay and get on with life. Protect the elderly and distribute the knowledge and tools of prevention: vitamin C, sunshine, exercise, propolis, Himalayan mineral salts (inhaled), humming, singing, social cohesion and support. Ditch the fear, messages of lack and shame. (Female, 55-64, South East)

SCAPEGOATING OTHERS

However, one in five respondents pointed towards specific demographic groups as the reason for increased infection rates – young people being the predominant group to be scapegoated. This group is perceived to have acted particularly recklessly, with a lack of compassion, the sense that they are at no real risk from the virus, and their desire to socialise are all seen as reasons driving their behaviour.

Plus the young have had illegal raves and young people are more likely to be employed in public facing jobs while older adults might be taking extra precautions or even still shielding. (Male, Yorkshire, 65-74)



“A party with a lot of people in attendance”

I think it's a combination of young people being fed up, young people realising that they are at low risk of dying and young people believing in conspiracy theories on social media that are preventing them from taking the necessary precautions and following government rules. When I say young people I mean under 35's. (Male, 25-34, East Midlands)

DON'T BELIEVE THE HYPE

Indeed, a small number of people (9%) believe that the numbers are an exaggeration and that cases have not been on the rise as is suggested. There are several variations of this argument: some say that increased testing is the main reason for a rise in cases, others suggest that the numbers are blown out of proportion when viewed in relation to other illnesses. The onset of flu season is also seen to contribute to the rise, whilst some believe that the virus does not exist altogether.

I think one reason is because the number of people countrywide being tested is rising week on week. (Female, 65-74, Yorkshire)

Far too much focus is still being put on COVID and hardly any comparisons being made against the usual illnesses, so it's not being kept in context and is being exaggerated. Why don't they now start reporting positive cases where people have been admitted to hospital with COVID which would enable the data to become more realistic. (Male, 55-64, South West)

I don't believe numbers have gone up - I think this is scaremongering and a depopulation program as part of the new world order. (Male, 45-54, West Midlands)

THE INFLUENCE OF ALTERNATIVE THEORIES

Although much less frequently mentioned, 6% of people think that conspiracy theories have contributed massively to the rise in cases. These alternative theories have led some people to wholly reject any form of mitigation measures, with the infection risk at the mass gatherings of anti-covid demonstrations being particularly high. Some are also concerned that those spreading these theories will have a wider influence on behaviours and perceptions, so people begin to take the virus less seriously.

The cases are rising because people have become complacent. Others don't believe that there is C19, they think it's all made up and a conspiracy. Unofficial crowd gatherings and police are overwhelmed and can't sort things out without the Media portraying them in a negative light. (Female, 55-64, Greater London)

I heard from my client who heard from people who are still talking about conspiracy theory driven on the Covid-19. Immediately I have to explain and take the USA case to show the magnitude of the number of people died, to illustrate that the Covid-19 is not a joke, it is real, it is not to be messed up with. (Female, 45-54, Scotland)

IT'S SIMPLE

Overall, people broadly fall into two main categories - those who see a very simple causal relationship between peoples' behaviour and the surge in cases; and those who reflect on the complexities of the wider situation and name numerous factors driving the spike.

For those who comment on simplicity, a clear relationship is drawn between a cause (e.g. people not wearing a mask OR the government failing to deliver track & trace etc.) and effect (the rise in cases). The implicit suggestion being that if this cause were removed (e.g. people wearing a mask OR track & trace working perfectly) we would not be in this current situation.

People are not following the rules! It is so simple! Just wear a mask, wash hands and be careful. It's really not that hard. I know people just want it to be normal again like it was last year but that not possible unless they follow the rules. (Male, 18-24, West Midlands)

Cases are rising because people are being stupid. Plain and simple. These are the people who don't wear masks and don't social distance in places where it is needed. (Male, 18-24, Yorkshire)

It is quite obvious here. The restrictions were lifted too soon, people have gotten to the point where they have forgotten about the 'virus'. People are congregating in the streets, pubs, beaches, going on holiday - just because the government says it is now okay. Harsh truth is that it is not okay in the slightest. National lockdown again by Christmas. (Male, 35-44, Wales)

IT'S COMPLICATED

Our analysis shows, however, that people are much more likely to think about the complexities of the situation – suggesting that the many factors at play mean that a second rise in cases was unavoidable. For the most part, people do not feel that there is a single group or factor to blame. Certainly, many comment on other people bending the rules, however they often link this back to confusing and unclear government guidelines and lockdown fatigue. There is an appreciation of the difficult balancing act that is keeping infection rates low, whilst at the same time opening schools, universities and places of work. However, many have grown frustrated with the lack of responsibility taken by Government - and at attempts to direct blame towards certain groups.

Blame and no responsibility at all levels, led by the Government (Young people, raves blah blah blah but I'll have whoever I want in my own house/garden etc)
(Female, 55-64, East of England)

I'm sure the reopening of schools and colleges has had an impact but I do think it was necessary for this to happen to protect people's mental health. Above all, I think people have become complacent and somewhat wearied by events, confused by muddled government directives, different rules in different countries of the UK. Quarantine is not being enforced as in other countries and there appears to be no tests or checks on people entering the country. (Female, 75-74, SW)

APPENDIX

HOW WE ARE CONDUCTING THIS RESEARCH

Using both a digital platform and telephone interviews, this study hears from voices around the UK to better understand how interactions and relationships have influenced the role of communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Around 140 nationally representative participants from around the UK participate in weekly online tasks and discussion boards set by The Young Foundation on an online digital platform called Recollective. The participants are tasked with completing specific activities including polls, photo and video responses, digital diaries and other creative activities, to help us gather insights on different issues as the situation continues to evolve. The tool and method used enables a highly interactive yet un-intrusive approach to working in a participatory way. It also enables a flexible and interactive method in what is a fast-evolving context which can respond to new changes and challenges.

In order to capture the voices of those individuals who are digitally excluded, we are working with 15 trained peer researchers who are part of The Young Foundation's Peer Research Network. These peer researchers are individuals who are deeply connected within their own communities and as part of this project are conducting bi-weekly telephone calls with around 30 individuals from around the UK who either do not have access to, or feel comfortable using, digital devices.

This combined approach ensures that we are hearing from a range of voices and viewpoints, allowing us to create a nationally representative picture of what is happening around the UK as the Covid-19 pandemic continues to unfold.

We would like to thank the Wellcome Trust for their support of this work.

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