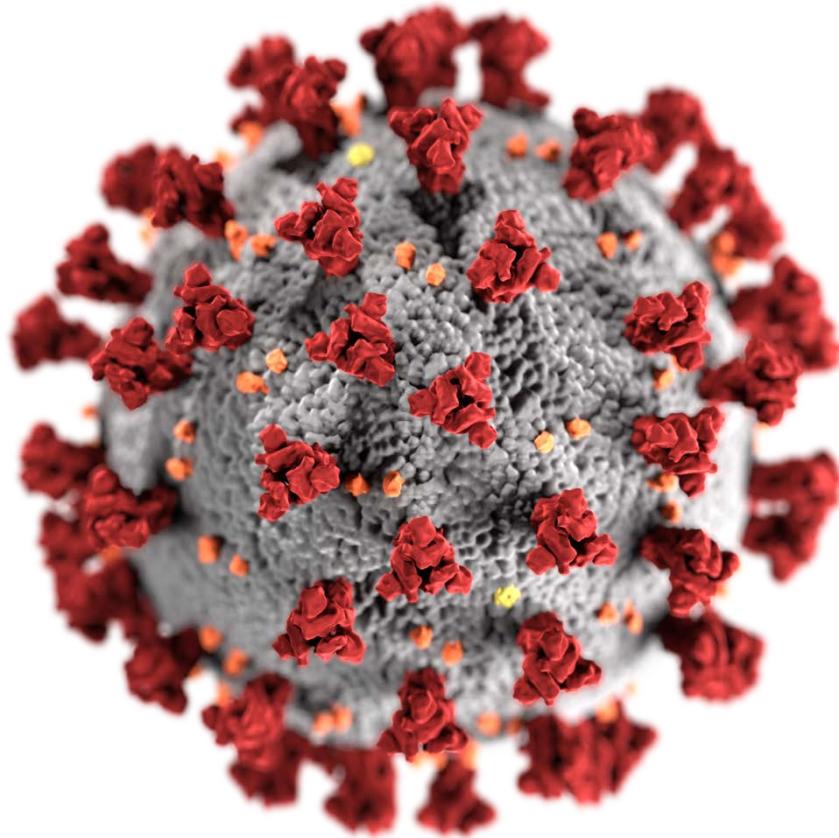


# COVID-19



*How are we coping?*

Part 1 - May 2020

## **Introduction**

At Healthwatch Halton, we're here to work with local health and care services to make sure they are working as best they can for the people who use them. We know the current coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic will have a big impact on people's ability to access the health and care support they need, and on the organisations that provide those services in Halton. We also know that this is a time of increased anxiety and worry for many, and that social distancing measures will have an impact on some people's emotional health and wellbeing.

We wanted to hear how people were being affected by the outbreak so that we can let services in Halton know what they're doing well during the pandemic, and where people feel their care and communication could be improved. We will share this information with providers, with NHS Halton CCG, and with Halton Borough Council to help make sure that their response to the pandemic takes into account the needs and experiences of local people as the situation progresses.

We launched an online survey on 31 March 2020. This report covers responses received up to 20 May 2020. During this time we have received 191 responses.

A copy of the survey is shown in Appendix A of this report.

# What did people tell us?

## Demographics

191 people took part in this online survey. The vast majority were Female (82%).

29% of respondents said they have a disability.

12% of respondents were under 35 years of age. 66% were aged between 35 and 64 with the remaining 22% being 65-84 years old.

### **Q1. Have you had Coronavirus/COVID-19?**

82% of respondents answered '*No, I've not had symptoms*'. 16% told us they had symptoms but had not been tested, while 2% identified as having been tested for positive for Coronavirus COVID19.

### **Q2. Have you found it easy to find clear and understandable information about what to do to keep yourself and others safe during the Coronavirus /COVID-19 Pandemic?**

95% of respondents *replied 'Yes'*, they were able to access clear and understandable information about what to do to keep themselves and others safe during the Coronavirus COVID19 Pandemic. 5% replied '*No*', they hadn't found it easy to find clear and understandable information. Those people who answered '*No*', all expressed concern about the mixed messages coming from different sources in the first few weeks of the outbreak and lockdown.

People were given the opportunity to comment further on this and say where they were able to find information and advice.

Respondents documented a wide range of sources of information they had accessed which they regarded as predominantly positive. This included both national and local sources of information which included BBC News and Radio Stations broadcasting daily Government briefings, Newspapers, Government Shielding Letters, World Health Organisation (WHO) NHS England, Public Health England, and the Government COVID-19 website.

As well as national sources many people told us they relied on local sources for information such as their employers and social media websites including Twitter and local Facebook groups, and a range of local statutory and voluntary sector organisations which they regarded as reliable sources of information. These included *Healthwatch Halton, Halton PPG+ Facebook Group, GP Practices, Urgent*

*Care Centres, Halton Hospital, NHS Halton CCG plus a local voluntary sector organisation Halton Speak Out.*

It appears that there is a wealth of information being provided by a wide range of organisations with regards to Coronavirus COVID-19 both nationally and locally leading to respondents to comment that the information given out in the first weeks changed so rapidly that it '*caused confusion on occasions*', another person told us '*Social media provided the most information, which sometimes proved difficult to determine what was real and what was fake*'.

The confusion surrounding government advice on daily exercise led to one respondent seeking clarification from the local police force, '*There is confusion regarding daily exercise. The advice is you can walk around the houses where you live but do not take your car to a location to walk. I do not agree with this and have written to the police for clarification. Some government spokesperson has not been clear at times on some issues, such as driving to a secluded place to walk/walk the dog or whether some jobs are able to be done at all (Gardeners, outside workers laying patio)?*

The wealth, speed and change of information and guidelines being provided by the government appears to have raised anxiety levels in respondents which was further reflected in additional comments such as:

- '*lots of advice - conflicting at times as government changed guidelines - lots of people confused and scared'*
- '*information is often mixed up myself I've stayed home as much as possible only left to shop, home and showered straight away'*
- '*Mixed messages from different authorities. Essential trips only but delivery firms are delivering clothes I spoke to one who said he had 120 stops and comes in close contact with all... Massive spreading'*

Some people commented on a lack of information from NHS Halton CCG, with one person saying, '*The government site good. Not much from CCG*' and another commenting, '*I never heard much off the CCG until the pandemic was a good few weeks into it, by this time I already knew what I needed to know off the PPG Facebook page.*'

### **Q3. *If you think you may have had Coronavirus / COVID-19 did you seek medical advice or care whilst you had the symptoms?***

65% of respondents answered '*No*', whilst 35% of respondents answered '*Yes*' and provided further information on their experiences of seeking medical advice or care for their symptoms.

The majority of people answering ‘Yes’ said they followed guidance and initially rang NHS 111 who gave them advice and on occasion made arrangements for further GP appointments.

Comments included:

- ‘Only medical advice and help I got offered was through 111, they advised me to stay at home’.
- ‘I hit a peak one day, and I was struggling to breathe and became very concerned and called them back. They confirmed my breathing was not dangerous and they would not take me to hospital (Not that’s what I wanted) and to stay home but if anything was to get any worse to ring back straight away or call 999 in an emergency.’

One respondent praised NHS 111 as a ‘Great Service’.

However, not all respondents seeking help were provided with a COVID-19 test, which concerned some:

- ‘During the beginning of March I had a severe chest infection and flu like symptoms, after calling 111 I was given an emergency GP appointment, due to not being able to confirm I had been near anyone with a confirmed case of COVID-19 I was not offered a test but given steroids and anti-biotics. I would have preferred to have been tested as my family had been with me and all came down with varying degrees of flu like symptoms and coughs.’
- ‘Son had it quite bad and contacted 111, I had mild symptoms a few days.’

Not everyone sought medical advice, with some choosing and chose to self-medicate believing they had a common cold or flu like symptoms, as some people told us:

- ‘Just stayed in and drank water. Took paracetamol and co-codamol tablets.’
- ‘I have not sought medical help due to thinking it was just a cold.’
- ‘Just thought it was a nasty case of the flu as there seemed to be a lot of it going around at the time before COVID-19’ and ‘I had a high temperature and a cough and felt a bit unwell for a few days. I didn’t feel I needed to see anyone as I used NHS 111 and think I had it late December 2019 through to early February 2020.’

#### **Q4. Has your mental health and wellbeing been affected by the Coronavirus COVID-19 Pandemic?**

Almost two thirds of people (64%) said ‘Yes’, their mental health and wellbeing had been affected with just over one third (36%) answering, ‘No’.

We received a wide range of additional comments on this question. A number of themes emerged, including feelings of extreme anxiety and panic which appear to be further exacerbated for people with underlying or pre-existing mental health needs:

- ‘I suffer from mental health issues normally but they have been amplified’
- ‘I used to suffer with anxiety and depression but over the past 5 years this has been completely controlled by keeping my self-busy but over the past few weeks I have been really anxious and my panic attacks have returned’
- ‘I have mental health issues that I have medication for anyway, but I have been having panic attacks more frequently and intrusive thought’
- ‘I suffer from PTSD anxiety and panic disorder this has made it much worse for me’
- ‘I am having daily panic attacks and I am anxious 24 hours a day’
- ‘As I am in the shielded category I have found the instruction to stay at home very isolating. I have walking difficulties caused by a back issue, I therefore feel that not being able to walk outside for a short while due to being shielded very counterproductive to my physical wellbeing and subsequently my mental wellbeing’
- ‘Yes, I suffer with anxiety anyway but gone through the roof, watched films and been keeping busy in the garden to take my mind off things.’
- ‘My anxiety has been terrible and is normally under control, it effects my bowels badly, I have clinical depression and it is getting harder to be positive as each day passes’
- ‘I already have a mental illness so this was never going to be easy I’ve found it harder to keep in touch with my practice because they are incredibly busy’
- ‘There’s not a huge amount of info on how to deal with mental health services during the pandemic’

Many respondents reported feelings of isolation, loneliness and lack of physical contact with relatives, all of which appear to be impacting on their health and wellbeing as highlighted in the following comments:

- ‘I’ve never suffered with anxiety or panic attacks until now because of COVID-19. It becomes worse when I have to go out for weekly shopping or if I go for a walk which I now only do once a week instead of daily’
- ‘Crying constantly, I feel it would be better If I weren’t here. I miss my family’
- ‘Social Isolation and not being able to visit family or friends’
- ‘Miss contact with my family’
- ‘Several days without speaking to anyone is not easy, as there is no opportunity to discuss worries and concerns’
- ‘feel lonely’

- ‘Anxious and lonely’
- ‘Feel very scared, lonely and tearful’
- ‘Isolation is really crippling me’
- ‘I live on my own and not being able to see my children and grandchildren is breaking my heart as I usually see them every day’
- ‘I live alone and sometimes find it overwhelming, I am a key worker and that is keeping me sane at the moment’
- ‘not seeing family members and friends not allowed physical contact with parents’
- ‘My daughter already had anxiety was getting help from CAMHS, first couple weeks anxiety was through the roof, now having weekly telephone calls which is helping’

The stresses and strains of informal family caring during the pandemic was also highlighted by many:

- ‘I have a son with additional needs anxiety, anxiety has been high in my household.’
- ‘I sometimes go shopping with my friend it’s been very hard for me because I cannot go out only on my own if I have to.’
- ‘I have not been out yet on my own my husband is at high risk who I look after. I also look after my 89yr old mum. I have a sister next door who used to help me I can’t even go to her my anxiety is very bad at the minute. I have also had two asthma attacks, but I am not high risk, I have a lot of health conditions too but it’s so hard, I get teary everyday this is effecting me bad’.
- ‘Anxiety of caring for a complex need child, sleepless nights, boredom, worry over getting enough food and drink with shopping slots being so limited.’
- ‘My daughter is suffering I am her main carer. She will not let me in. She worries about her having visitors and me out caring for her, so difficult but we have support.’
- ‘We as a family are still grieving for my daughter who passed away last November, finding it very hard not to see them and be there for them. Grandson has my problems so worried about him after losing his mum and now not going out and being laid off work, and granddaughter who is living with her auntie (my other daughter) and is also suffering from losing her mum. On top of this I have my husband, elderly mother and brother with learning disability living with me, trying to keep them all safe is a constant worry and keeping brother motivated is a struggle’.
- ‘I am isolating with my husband, he is 70 and I have had cancer. My elderly parents are isolating. None of us have been to a shop or in close contact

*with others for 6 weeks yet the rules don't allow us to be together. I find that really hard and stressful, they are in their mid 80's and time with them is precious. All this came at a time when my mum had just been discharged from hospital after bowel cancer surgery and sepsis and only a few months after losing my younger sister to cancer. We needed to grieve and support each other and this has made it worse.'*

A number of people told us that they believed their emotional wellbeing was being compromised from having to source food supplies with one person maintaining their '*biggest anxiety has been trying to find groceries*' and further comments such as:

- *'It's very stressful trying to sort shopping out not only the cost but trying to get a delivery as it scares the life out of me going out worrying I will bring it back to my kids or husband who has asthma and my young adult daughter that has asthma and Cerebral Palsy.'*
- *'The only thing I have found stressful is trying to find delivery slots for food I cannot drive and the supermarkets are too far away for me to walk with my daughter (I am a single parent with no childcare available). Normally I would get two deliveries a month, now I am lucky if I get one.'*

Another person, reliant on charitable food sources caring for her sister, explained the quality and inadequacy of a food parcel delivered to their home, '*I have been anxious because my sister is classed as extremely vulnerable and I am disabled and housebound and it has been very stressful trying to get a delivery slot for shopping because we cannot get out and the weekly parcel when it turned up was not enough for 2 and the contents wasn't any use. A catering tin of mushy peas and fruit cocktail the first week, there was a tin of corned beef and the next a tin of tuna, 10 teabags and 6 sachets of coffee and 3 small hotel style shampoo sachets, so I have had to stay up till after midnight trying to get a slot,' with local supermarkets.*

All of these comments would suggest that the mental health and wellbeing of respondents is being adversely affected by the consequences of the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Q5. Has your healthcare for other conditions been affected by the coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic?**

47% of respondents said they had not been affected in comparison to 42% who told us they had been affected, whilst 11% of respondents indicated that the question was not applicable to their personal experiences.

Respondents were asked to tell us more about this.

A number of themes emerged from the responses, including the postponement or cancellations of treatments, operations and investigatory procedures in secondary health care settings. Comments included:

- ‘*Dad is currently having cancer treatment at Clatterbridge but all treatment stopped, this has destroyed him emotionally as his cancer is terminal.*’
- ‘*Two investigative procedures cancelled.*’
- ‘*Cancelled colonoscopy and appointments cancelled.*’
- ‘*Cancer treatment cancelled.*’
- ‘*Cancelled appointment for my 6 monthly Cancer injection*’
- ‘*Been waiting two years to get my gall bladder out pre op cancelled disappointing selfish I would rather live than die*’
- ‘*I suffer from plantar vasculitis on my foot I can’t even walk it is that painful I also have osteoporosis where I have risk of fractures I have appointment for physio with CATS team but they cannot do my appointment it’s a phone call next week.*’
- ‘*Cancelled rheumatology appointments at Warrington.*’
- ‘*My appointment for rheumatology clinics has been cancelled. After being in remission for 8 years the disease returned in September last year I am struggling with the effects.*’
- ‘*I have had my smear cancelled.*’
- ‘*Mammogram appointment cancelled.*’
- ‘*I have had three appointments cancelled this week a Physio, an MRI scan and Breast Screening.*’
- ‘*Wythenshawe Hospital appointment been cancelled*’
- ‘*Had appointment for a lung and breathing problem cancelled again for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time scared about my future.*’
- ‘*3 operations cancelled plus I have been in plaster cast for since start of January was supposed to see consultant in March it got cancelled then 20<sup>th</sup> April as no doubt that will be cancelled.*’

It appears from responses that some patients, but not all, are being provided telephone consultations as opposed to face to face consultations:

- ‘*Hospital appointment changed to telephone.*’
- ‘*Hospital appointment has been changed to telephone consultation which maybe a problem as I have pictures of my condition which I needed to show, hopefully I can send these via email.*’
- ‘*I have had an appointment with the pain management clinic cancelled and had a telephone call discussing my case... I was due to have an appointment with Haematology in early May, my check up after being treated for Non Hodgkins Lymphoma. This appointment was again conducted by telephone in this instance I was able to have the necessary blood test*’

With regards to Primary Care services, a number of respondents commented on the excellent service and tools provided by their GP services in assessing their health needs and treatment. These included:

- ‘*My Practice offers e-consult, which is an excellent tool to use.*’
- ‘*The GP practice has introduced various changes and procedures, to allow it to operate safely during this COVID-19 outbreak. This has slowed things down but given some patient understanding i.e. patience everything is working. In fact, my wife and myself had shingles jabs, during this period.*’
- ‘*I hope the PPE gear gets sorted out for the staff in the practices*’
- ‘*Had excellent service from GP had phone consultation within an hour of calling them and prescription ready to pick up in chemist next day.*’
- ‘*Had an already doctor’s appointment over the telephone which was great. Prescriptions ordered online and collected successfully*’.

Respondents outlined the problems they experienced with regards to accessing prescribed medications and told us:

- ‘*I have struggled to get my monthly medication and anti-biotics for a water infection which I had to wait for five days to receive,*’
- ‘*I am working from home and being in discomfort has not helped my wellbeing*’
- ‘*Picking prescriptions up and waiting in the cold for over 2 hours, badly managed by Lloyds pharmacy, they never asked if the prescription had been put in or not.*’
- ‘*I have severe psoriasis and I am running out of tablets and my appointment at the end of April has been cancelled.*’

## **Q6. Has your experience of social care been affected by the coronavirus /COVID-19 pandemic?**

Of those people who received social care 21% said their experience of care had been affected.

Comments received included people who said they were health care professionals who gave their experiences of how coronavirus COVID-19 was impacting on their working environment in terms of visiting and the processes for social care and discharge of patients in their care.

- ‘*Affected working environment. Patients having reduced visitors in a traumatic time of their life*’,
- ‘*Delayed discharges due to lack of care in the community, it affected our working environment*’.

- ‘*Patients are affected by discharge plans being made more difficult, unable to have as many visitors due to illnesses.*’

The stress and strain on family members regarding the health and wellbeing of family members who are care workers and scarcity of PPE was also highlighted by one respondent who wrote, ‘*My husband is a care worker, this week they got masks. My granddaughter works in sheltered accommodation - one of the people she looks after has been confirmed positive... they have run out of PPE!*’

One person, who has relatives living in a care home and sheltered accommodation, highlighted the impact this is having on his own mental wellbeing, ‘*I can’t visit my wife in the care home where she is a resident. I also care for an elder sister who is unwell and lives in sheltered housing, not visiting her as often as I used to can increase my anxiety*’, whilst other respondents commented:

- ‘*I cannot visit my elderly mother*’
- ‘*Unable to visit family in care home although we completely understand why.*’

Another person told us about the procedures in place for visitors at a supported living complex, ‘*When I visit my nan to bring her anything she needs, they have a signing in book and disinfectant and I keep two metres distance from everyone. In the lift you have to be on your own now/always make sure no one else is on it first.*’

## **Q7. Has anything helped you cope day to day during the pandemic?**

A number of respondents told us they used a wide range of coping strategies to reduce their anxiety which included maintaining social contact with friends and family virtually, either through telephone calls or their use of social media. One person told us, ‘*Yes, I am engaged in social media groups, group chats etc., facetimeing family has helped seeing they are ok.*’ Another person replied, ‘*I am using social media as a way of keeping in touch with my family and friends*’.

Coping strategies identified by respondents also included keeping to normal daily routines such as gardening, physical exercise, gardening and caring for pets.

- ‘*spending more time with pets they are a great stress relief.*’
- ‘*Walking the dog has helped coupled with keeping busy.*’
- ‘*Taking a daily walk has helped me to alleviate my anxiety by providing distraction.*’
- ‘*Working out every evening in the garden.*’
- ‘*I have a garden at home and an allotment so have been having time to myself there.*’
- ‘*I exercise every day and my garden is a sanctuary.*’

A further strategy identified by respondents as a source of wellbeing and comfort appears to come from volunteering and being offered support from the Halton community as a whole.

- *'I have become a volunteer on the local aid group - collecting and delivering for those in isolation due to age or illness and this has kept me more normal',*
- *'Support from the community and giving support.'*
- *'Halton community have been exceptional in helping the hospice.'*
- *'Support from colleagues and staff at hospice along with friends.'*
- *'Halton community has been amazing in the support we have received both in donations and the wonderful words of comfort.'*
- *'I have a voluntary organisation and have had to stop most activities, however our volunteers have been excellent at lifting each other up with keeping in touch.'*
- *'There is a great page on Facebook that gives out loads of information every day on what we should be doing for each surgery and where to get help from. The girl who runs it is Karen finds loads of info when you ask her, she knows phone numbers and opening times of nearly everything and she even calmed me down very late one night when my anxiety was up the wall over it all and made me think much straighter over it. She's a great woman to know during all of this, PPG Halton update page it's called.'*
- *'There's been new community pages set up but also some older ones have proven to be very useful. There's a page that Karen Forde has been promoting for a few years now... The Carers Centre page is also very good for information but I wouldn't have known about any of the other pages if I wasn't on the PPG page as they promote loads of services in Widnes and Runcorn... There's also another lady called Diane who does a lot recently and tells us of updates all the time. I also use the NHS Facebook page and I've looked into some courses I've seen Karen post which id never have had the confidence to do before, but they make them sound really inviting and interesting so I will be doing a lot more once all this is over.'*
- *'Having my sister living in the same house. Being in groups on Facebook have helped immensely as has talking with family and friends on the phone.'*
- *'Seeing what the community can achieve and helping so many vulnerable and isolated people really lifts my spirits.'*

Family support was mentioned by many people as vital in helping them cope. Families have kept in touch in a number of ways, ranging from phone calls through to video calls. Zoom, Facetime, WhatsApp and Facebook seem to have become essential ways for families to help and support each other through the pandemic.

- *'Facetiming family has helped, seeing they are OK'*

- ‘Keeping in touch with friends and family on Facebook’

Employment and support from employers helps some people, especially for key workers. Comments included:

- ‘I work in a hospice so they are sending through communication regarding health and wellbeing and this has been very helpful’
- ‘Yes partly, coming to work to feel normal amongst friends keep me sane and knowing I have a support line through my employer has although, I have not felt the need to use it yet.’

A number of respondents said they have taken the opportunity to develop new interests and hobbies to help them cope day to day:

- ‘Reading novels gets your mind away from current situation.’
- ‘Starting new interests and on-line courses, reading, and taking a daily walk has helped me to alleviate my anxiety by providing distraction.’
- ‘I have joined in with online activities. There is lots of online classes and things to do.’
- ‘Colouring and crocheting.’

Meditation and Yoga has helped others:

- ‘My husband has helped me immensely. A brilliant meditation app (called Balance, currently free) has also helped manage my anxiety and all Holistic Practices.’
- ‘The Headspace App and information from NW Boroughs NHS Trust put out a little sheet of coping, I have re-joined social media during the pandemic but keep myself away from the doom news. I focus on the daily briefing and that’s all.’

Faith has allowed some people to cope during the pandemic, with one person telling us, ‘My faith in God has helped me cope’, while another person said reading the Bible had been a great help.

Another person told us, ‘I have decided to embrace lockdown and use it as a time to rest.’

However, a number of people explained that nothing appeared to help reduce their anxiety during the Coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic, especially for those with underlying neurological health conditions:

Many people told us their anxiety levels had, ‘gone through the roof.’

*Others said:*

- ‘Nothing has helped me I just need to not worry about myself to this is over so I can look after my family at home.’

- ‘Due to neurological conditions, I need repetition and organisation and this has gone to pot, don’t know what time, day what I’m meant to be doing leaving me very frustrated angry with no outlet.’

Another person also told us, ‘I am drinking more often as a coping mechanism to settle better at night also for something to do’

## **Q8. Is there any other way that you feel your health, care, or wellbeing has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic that you would like to tell us about?**

A number of themes emerged from responses to this question.

Many respondents felt the government should have acted sooner:

- ‘I am disappointed my government did not lock down earlier, could have prevented much more people from dying. It’s like being locked in a cage I didn’t have a lot of options but had to stay inside completely feel like I am going mad.’
- ‘The vague information from the Government has increased my stress level. Other countries criticism of our Governments lack of action e.g. Italian Mayors statement of our slow response to the virus.’
- ‘If this had been prevented sooner social distancing etc we wouldn’t be as bad as we are, prevention was the key that we missed.’
- ‘We’ve got the worst possible government at the worst possible time after 10 years of underfunding all essential services... and coming up we have Brexit. The future is not looking good is it?’

It also appears from comments that some respondents with underlying health conditions are experiencing stress and anxiety due to fear of contracting the virus and the reduction in health care appointments and post operation support leading one respondent to comment, ‘Yes, I appreciate Corona has taken over the world, but I spent a week on ITU post op and physically and emotionally my needs are important too as none available to assist recovery and surgical secretary rude and unhelpful to myself and PALS - feel abandoned’, while other respondents are concerned that follow up health care appointments appear to have been halted:

- ‘anxious and scared as we both have underlying health problems.’
- ‘I have a yearly thyroid review which have been missed I do not like to remind my practice because they seem a bit overwhelmed. I’ll give it another month and then contact them to find out if the reviews are needed.’
- ‘Neurology will never happen, and it is crippling me in all respects.’
- ‘Just my appointments when I need to see my doctor or therapist.’

- ‘Just being able to get regular appointments with my GP over my illnesses etc.’
- ‘Clearly service restrictions /access hasn’t helped.’
- ‘Yes, I need a change of a medical item which has not been changed 6 monthly appointment has been cancelled.’
- ‘Worry that I will have my oncology review cancelled, the last was a year ago and I hope to be discharged in June.’
- ‘Nothing has helped me. I’m in the vulnerable group being over 70 yrs and I am disabled. Nobody has contacted me. I could be dead for all they care. Good job I have two sons to help me. God help the elderly with families.’

Respondents were also concerned with not being able to see family and friends as a direct result of the Coronavirus COVID-19 Pandemic lockdown and social distancing rules, as well as the fear that family members may contract the virus:

- ‘it has affected everyone differently, I can’t see my family friends or feel I lead a normal life.’
- ‘Only not being able to see my friends. Unable to see the rest of my family’
- ‘Restricted movements’ Stress of worrying in case family members get it and having to go into hospital alone, missing my great grandchildren whilst grieving for my daughter need to see my family.’
- ‘Not being able to regularly visit my family, especially as I help care for my elderly grandparents one of whom has dementia, to keep the social distancing guidelines, I have stopped doing this for now.’
- ‘Not seeing my elderly parents helping them with shopping etc. I can’t drive long distances due to my health condition so I can’t get to them to help them worries me that they still have to go out shopping.’

Anxiety around employment, income and the government’s criteria for financial help for self-employment was a further theme that emerged, as respondents told us:

- ‘I miss my Gym there is only so much I can do at home my job is a dog walker so I am very anxious about my health and fitness while I can’t do the same amount as I normally would, as I am not able to be out doing my job and only started my own business last year I don’t have the previous tax years to claim from the government so I am worried about my loss of earnings.’
- ‘Stress through myself being worry about finances etc.’
- ‘I have been told by my doctor to isolate for 12 weeks because I am classified as immunosuppressed because of my medication I am on for Ankylosing Spondylitis, but did not receive a letter to say so, I have asked my nurse specialists for one and my consultant but still have not received it and I am stressing over this and not sleeping as I need these for my employer who are Halton Borough Council.’

- ‘100% everything has changed in my entire focus is lost, I started my own non for profit and was just expanding into Widnes from Runcorn. It’s really difficult because I am really scared to leave my home.’
- ‘I complete auditing in the hospice that I work in, this has been quite challenging to do, but at the same time this is much needed to ensure our patient safety and wellbeing, my wellbeing is affected due to staffing levels to deal with the day to day cleaning so I have been filling the gaps to ensure infection control is not compromised.’

Respondents additionally expressed their fears and concerns regarding the updates being televised via news streams and uncertainty:

- ‘I know how to keep up to date with virus info, but knowing how many people have died from it is very stressful but I understand this has to be done.’
- ‘I think the uncertainty is not helping as there does not seem to be any ‘endgame’ at the moment, so best focus on the day.’
- ‘If there was more positivity and not to scare people about but understand there must be a need to inform people.’
- ‘The constant news stream is so depressing. I know it’s there to give people information but it’s constant, I have to turn it off’.

Respondents also talked about other ways Covid-19 had affected their wellbeing, health or care.

- ‘Stress of worrying in case family members get it and having to go into hospital alone... Whilst still grieving for my daughter need to see my family’
- ‘Being ill with symptoms makes you not want to access help as you don’t want to infect others or put more pressure on healthcare. Also makes you feel alone.’
- ‘My mum died of covid-19, it was horrendous.’
- ‘Just makes me feel sad and weary.’
- ‘Not being able to physically see my other sisters and brothers has been awful for my health and theirs as they live alone and have no one especially my brothers who are over 70. Not being able to meet for a coffee, being limited on time spent outdoors. Garden centres could have stayed opened for plants and our well-being. Not enough communication from our Council on what is actually happening here.’

## **Summary**

We'd firstly like to thank everyone who took the time to take part in our survey.

Our report provides a snapshot of people's view and experiences on how Covid-19 has affected their lives during the seven weeks since lockdown on 23 March 2020.

We received a wealth of comments detailing individual personal experiences of the impact, both positive and negative, of the Coronavirus/COVID-19 outbreak on local people's health, wellbeing and their daily lived experiences of accessing health and social care services.

From the responses received we can see that people's lives have been impacted in a variety of different ways.

- Many people are struggling with the isolation and uncertainty
- There has been a rise in anxiety and a loss of coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic with almost two thirds of people saying their mental health and wellbeing been adversely affected by the outbreak.
- Over 40% of respondents had been affected by the cancellation or postponement of appointments and treatments for both physical and mental health conditions. This also had the knock-on effect of increasing their stress and anxiety levels.

## **Community Spirit**

Despite the quite significant worries and concerns that people have about the pandemic, many highlighted positive aspects that helped them in their day to day life. There was praise for the support available locally during this difficult time, mainly through a variety of online community support groups. Many people also commented about an improved community spirit locally.

One person expressed the views of many when they said, '*The Halton community have been amazing in the support we have received both in donations and the wonderful words of comfort.*'

This report will be sent to Healthwatch England, Halton Borough Council and NHS Halton CCG and our local NHS Trusts. We hope the information provided in this report will be of interest to local commissioners and providers of services. We also hope that the issues and themes highlighted will be considered when looking at the provision of future services and support for the people of Halton.

## Appendix 1

# Covid-19 Survey



## About this survey

At Healthwatch Halton, we're here to work with local health and care services to make sure they are working as best they can for the people who use them. We know the current coronavirus / COVID-19 pandemic will have a big impact on people's ability to access the health and care support they need, and on the organisations that provide those services in Halton. We also know that this will be a time of increased anxiety and worry for many, and that social distancing measures will have an impact on some people's emotional health and wellbeing.

We want to hear from you about how coronavirus / COVID-19 has affected you or your family members, so that we can let health and care services in Halton know what they're doing well during the pandemic, and where people feel their care and communication could be improved. We will share this information with providers, with NHS Halton CCG, and with Halton Borough Council to help make sure that their response to the pandemic takes into account the needs and experiences of local people as the situation progresses.

The first part of our survey asks some questions about your experience of accessing health and care services during the COVID-19 outbreak as well as some questions about the impact that this has had on the wellbeing of you and your family members.

The second part of the survey asks for a few details about you to make sure that we are reaching as many parts of the Halton population as possible. It should take approximately 5 minutes to complete depending on the detail of your responses.

We will always make sure that your information is protected and treated securely. Any information that you give will be held in accordance with:

Data Protection Act 1998

As of 25 May 2018, the new data protection legislation introduced under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Bill.

Our privacy policy can be found on our website - <https://healthwatchhalton.co.uk/privacy-policy-2/>

Click below to give your consent. In doing so, you agree to participate in the survey and to the use of your survey responses as described above. If you do not wish to participate in the survey, please close your browser.

Yes, I agree to the privacy policy

## Your experiences

Have you had coronavirus/COVID-19?

- Yes, I've been tested
- Possibly - I've had symptoms but not been tested
- No, I've not had symptoms

Symptoms include a high temperature, a new, continuous cough

Have you found it easy to find clear and understandable information about what to do to keep yourself and others safe during the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic?

- Yes
- No

Would you like to tell us more about this, and where you were able to find this information?

If you think you may have had coronavirus/COVID-19, did you seek medical advice or care whilst you had symptoms?

- Yes
- No

Would you like to provide more feedback on your experiences accessing medical advice or care related to coronavirus/COVID-19?

Has your mental health and wellbeing been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic? For example, through increased anxiety, as a result of social isolation, or a lack of access to community groups and activities?

- Yes
- No

Would you like to tell us more about this?

Has your healthcare for other conditions been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic? For example, through cancelled operations or appointments, difficult obtaining prescriptions or medication, difficulty making GP appointments?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

Would you like to tell us more about this?

Has your experience of social care been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic? For example, visits from care workers, access to residential or nursing care homes, etc.

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

Would you like to tell us more about this?

Has anything helped you cope day-to-day during the pandemic? (eg. Learning to manage anxiety better, support from the community, etc). Would you like to tell us more about this?

Is there any other way that you feel your health, care, or wellbeing has been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic that you would like to tell us about?



## A bit about you

Your responses to this survey are anonymous, but we are collecting this demographic information to see if there are any areas of Halton or groups of people that are particularly strongly affected by the pandemic.

First part of your postcode (eg WA7 2, WA8 3)

? of 5 characters

Age Range

- |                                |                               |                               |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Under 18 | <input type="radio"/> 35 - 44 | <input type="radio"/> 65 - 74 |
| <input type="radio"/> 18 - 24  | <input type="radio"/> 45 - 54 | <input type="radio"/> 75 - 84 |
| <input type="radio"/> 25 - 34  | <input type="radio"/> 55 - 64 | <input type="radio"/> 85+     |

Gender

- Male  
 Female

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

- Yes  
 No  
 Prefer not to say

Thank you for taking part in this survey. Please press submit to complete the survey.

Healthwatch Halton, Suite 5 Foundry House, Widnes Business Park, Waterside Lane, Widnes WA8 8GT  
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website: [www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk)

**Call us: 0300 777 6543**

# We're Healthwatch

**Tell us what you think  
of local services.**

**We're here to help make it better**

- Care homes
- Community services
- GP Surgeries
- Mental Health services
- Pharmacies

- Carers at home
- Dentists
- Hospitals
- Opticians



**[www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchhalton.co.uk)**

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