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Health

Blog

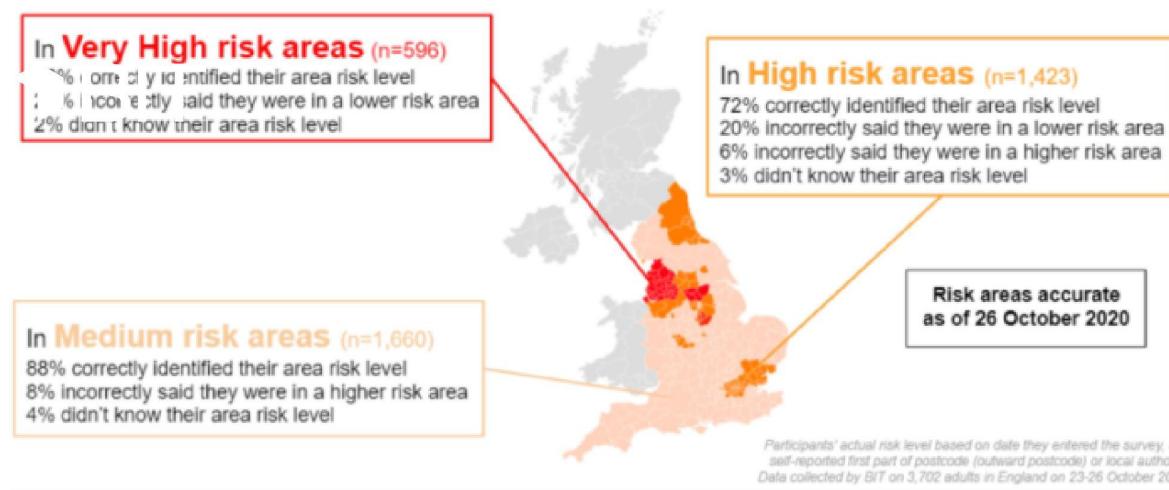
The word 'CORONAVIRUS' is spelled out in a grid of white scrabble tiles. The letters are dark grey. The tiles are arranged in a staggered pattern. In the top-left corner of the grid, there is a small white box containing the word 'Blog' and the date '3rd Nov 2020'.

Do you understand the guidance? Four findings from an experiment with 3,702 adults in England

Following the [announcement](#) that England will enter a second national lockdown, the public will need to familiarise themselves with the [new rules](#) coming into force this Thursday. But how well does the public understand the [current rules](#), some of which vary depending on what part of the country people live in? We investigated this using an online experiment involving 3,702 adults in England contacted between 23 to 26 October 2020. Our four key results are shown below.

1. Most people know their local COVID alert level

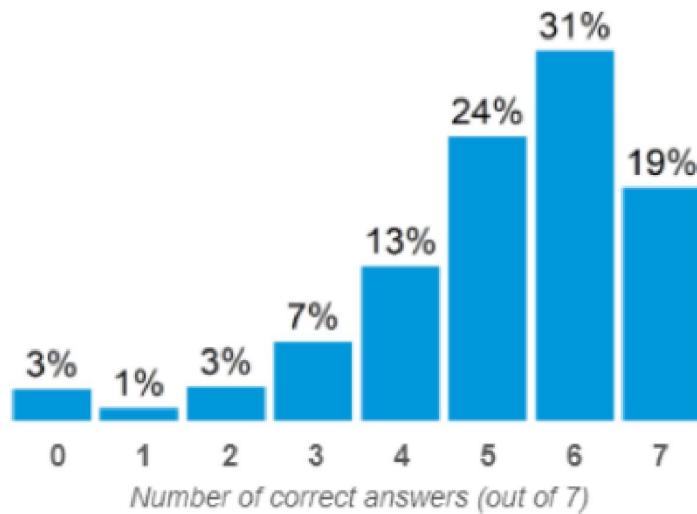
The country is divided into three local COVID alert levels – Medium risk, High risk, and Very High risk. Most people (72-88%) correctly identified the risk level of their local area, but about 1 in 5 people in the higher risk areas incorrectly thought they were in a lower risk area.



2. Most people understand the basic rules, but have trouble with the tier-specific ones

We asked participants 7 questions to test their knowledge of what is and is not allowed (with the correct answers varying in some cases depending on the risk level of the area they lived in).

Overall, people did reasonably well – most (74%) got between 5 and 7 correct.



The rules that people understood best (85–93% correct) were the ones common across all three risk areas, e.g. knowing you are allowed to go outside to buy groceries or to drive alone in a car without wearing a facemask, but not to ride public transport immediately after developing coronavirus symptoms.

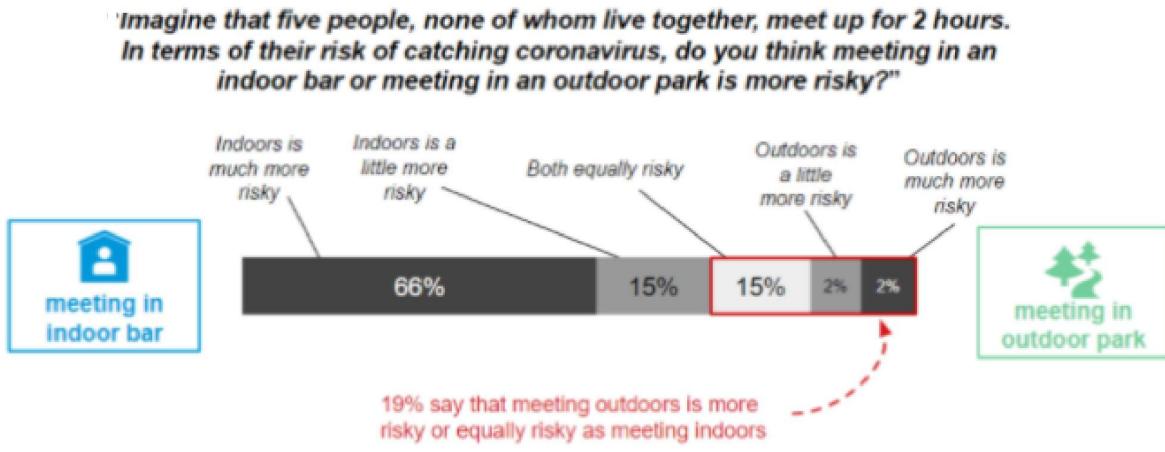
Tier-specific rules were less well understood. For example, only 2 in 5 understood local rules on providing childcare to a child from another household (allowed in 'Medium', but not allowed in 'High' and 'Very High' risk areas). Additionally, only 1 in 5 in 'Medium' risk areas correctly said that staying overnight in someone else's home is allowed. Generally, whenever people misunderstood the guidance, they tended to err on the side of assuming that more things were not allowed than is actually the case.

3. 1 in 5 people did not understand that being indoors is higher risk than being outdoors

A [database](#) of 1,500 coronavirus superspreading events – situations where a large number of people are infected with coronavirus – reports that 95% of these happened indoors, 4% in a mix of indoors/outdoors (e.g. a wedding), and less than 1% in a purely outdoor setting.

In other words, the risk of catching coronavirus appears much higher indoors than outdoors. Some governments have emphasised this in their messaging – for example, Japan's '[Three Cs](#)' campaign strongly discourages people from gathering in crowded, closed, close-contact spaces (e.g. bars, indoor restaurants).

Although we found that most people in England agree that meeting up indoors is more risky than outdoors, 19% did not know this.



4. Very few people fully understand the rules about support bubbles

Support bubbles can only be formed between a single-adult household and household of any size (i.e. a pair of two-adult households cannot form a support bubble). However, when we asked people six questions to test their knowledge of this rule, only 7% answered all six correctly.

Can the households form a support bubble in this situation?	% correct
Household A (2 adults, 1 child) and Household B (1 adult, no children)	69%
Household A (1 adult) and Household B (3 adults)	66%
Household A (2 adults, 2 children) & Household B (2 adults, 1 child)	56%
Household A (1 adult, 2 children) & Household B (1 adult, no children) & Household C (1 adult, no children)	47%
Household A (2 adults, no children) and Household B (2 adults, no children)	34%
Household A (5 adults) and Household B (1 adult, 1 child)	29%
Correctly answered all six questions	7%

Actually allowed Actually not allowed

In summary – most people understand the specifics of the guidance reasonably well, and when they do get it wrong they tend to err on the side of caution

(assuming things are not allowed even when they are). But, there is room for improvement in helping people understand that:

- people are, on average, more likely to catch or spread coronavirus indoors (particularly in crowded, poorly ventilated locations) compared to outdoors
- support bubbles can only be formed between a single-adult household and household of any size.
- some of the rules differ depending on the risk area people live in (infographics, such as those created by the [BBC](#), may be helpful for explaining this).

As a next step, we plan to do some follow-up testing on how well people understand the new rules arriving later this week.

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