

NPHET - Review of Existing Policy Personal Behaviours & Social Distancing

Framing the current phase of the pandemic

Dept of Health and HSE Communications were asked to explore the most appropriate phrase to frame the current phase of the pandemic in the minds of the public. A number of phrases were explored in focus groups this week, with the main feedback around two phrases; 'the new normal' and 'living with COVID.'

While both phrases are already in the public vernacular 'the new normal' is perceived as negative framing and suggests loss. 'Living with COVID' is seen to be more empowering and to reflect the current reality – it also suggests new behaviours are required. Ideally, people would like to know how long they will have to 'live with COVID.'

The recommended phrase is 'living with COVID.'

Quantitative Tracker

The latest public opinion tracker data, dated Monday 22 Jun, is available online [here](#)

This week's survey of 2,100 people shows an increase in the proportion of people who self-report to be wearing face coverings, up from 34% last week to 41% today.

- 48% of females and 33% of males self-report to wearing face coverings
- Of those who said they have worn face coverings, 94% have worn them in shops
- 33% say they have worn face coverings in a healthcare setting and 21% on public transport

Qualitative Tracker

Key insights from the latest focus group feedback, conducted on 16 Jun, reveals that:

- Many people report feeling positive, optimistic and hopeful. However, there is a consistent underlying concern that we can't get too far ahead of ourselves and an underlying fear that engaging economically and socially too quickly, coupled with complacency due to over confidence, will lead to spread of the virus. Key issues causing stress and concern include;
 - Images in the media of queues of people outside of popular retail
 - Groups gathering without social distancing
 - Lack of clarity in relation to masks particularly amongst those with underlying conditions who have heightened risk perceptions (*Note from Comms: face coverings campaign launched 15 Jun*)
- While some people are eager to embrace the new freedoms that the easing of restrictions has enabled, the majority, while welcoming the easing of restrictions, are still wary, they are watching reports of new clusters internationally and are themselves are proceeding with caution.
- Many believe the virus continues to pose a significant threat because of its unpredictable nature and its potential to spread so quickly

- It is still out there and has not been eradicated
 - Experts and scientists still don't fully understand it
 - Older people (70+) and those with underlying conditions still feel more vulnerable to the virus and feel they need to continue to be extremely cautious
 - Risk is smallest for rural people, and those who are pre-family with no vulnerable people in their circle
- The biggest concern over the next few months is that people 'lose the run of themselves' and we see a second wave of cases and deaths.
 - While a second wave is expected around the flu season, people are keen to reduce it through acting responsibly. They do not wish to see a return to heavier restrictions or even lockdown, especially having tasted freedom for the first time in months.