

# **Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes**

Results from week one of Ofcom's online survey

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[Covid-19 news and information: consumption and attitudes](#) – Welsh translation

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## Overview

As a response to the Covid-19 outbreak, Ofcom has commissioned an ongoing weekly online survey of c.2,000 respondents, to monitor how people are getting news and information about the crisis. This research is designed to support a range of stakeholders with their activities during this time. Fieldwork takes place each weekend, with this first wave taking place between 27-29 March 2020, asking people about their habits and attitudes of the previous seven days. This period coincided with the 'stay at home' measures announced by the Prime Minister on Monday 23rd March, and so week one of our survey corresponds to week one of the UK 'lockdown'.

It should be noted that as it is an online panel methodology, the survey findings are representative of the views and habits of the 87% of the UK population that are online<sup>1</sup>.

## Key findings

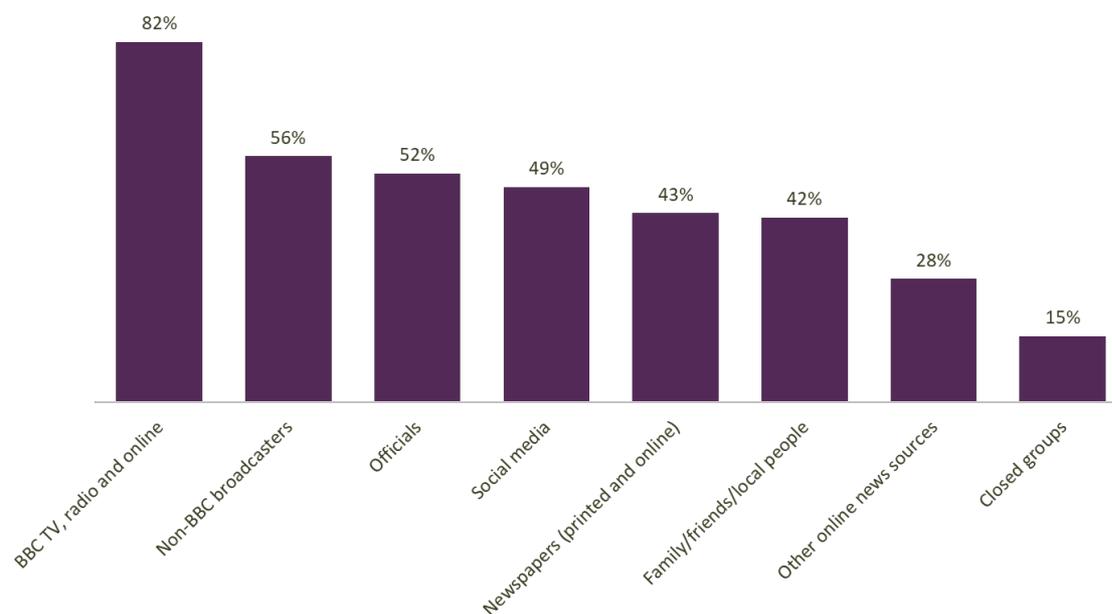
### Consumption of news and information about Covid-19

- In the first week of the 'lockdown', almost all the UK online population (99%) accessed news and information about Covid-19 at least once a day. One quarter (24%) said they were getting news 20 or more times a day.
- BBC services are the most-used source by some margin (see Figure 1). Four in five (82%) say they use the BBC as a source of news/info. Just over half use non-BBC broadcasters (56%), followed by officials (52%), social media (49%), the press either online or printed (43%) and family, friends or local people (42%). 15% say they use closed groups, such as WhatsApp groups and Facebook messenger.

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<sup>1</sup> Ofcom, [Online Nation](#) 2019

Figure 1: Sources used for news/information about Covid 19: week one



Source: Ofcom Covid-19 news survey, March 2020

Note: 'Other online news sources' combines three aggregated types of source: websites/apps of online news organisations like BuzzFeed, Huffington Post, Vice, etc; websites or apps that bring together news from different news providers; and non-mainstream news sources such as Russia Today, Breitbart, Swawkbox etc

- When asked to nominate their most important source for news/info about Covid-19, 36% say BBC TV, 16% nominate direct from official sources (such as WHO, NHS, Govt, etc), 12% non-BBC broadcasters, 12% BBC Online, and 5% social media. The pattern among 18-24s is slightly different, with 11% nominating social media compared to 4% of those aged 35+, although BBC TV (29%) is still the most important.
- In general, people say they are using media organisations more than they were before the outbreak of the virus; 65% claim to be using UK-wide organisations (a lot or a little) more than before, and 38% that they are using local media organisations more.
- While one in ten (11%) respondents say they aren't sharing information about Covid-19, the vast majority are doing so, mostly in person/by phone (81%). One third (34%) are sharing via written comms in closed groups, Zoom, Teams etc, and 25% via social media posts. One in five (21%) say they are sharing via video.

## Misinformation related to Covid-19

- Nearly half of respondents (46%) say they have come across false or misleading information<sup>2</sup> about Covid-19 in the last week. Those aged 18-24 are more likely to say this (58%) compared to those aged 65+ (33%). People from AB socio-demographic households are more likely to say they come across this information (53%) than people from C2 and DE households (44% and 36% respectively).
- Of those that have seen misinformation, two thirds (66%) say that they are seeing it at least once a day. The most common piece of misinformation that people have come across (from a selected list) was drinking water more frequently, with 35% saying they had seen this. 24% had seen “gargling with saltwater”, and the same percentage had seen “eating warm food/drink and avoiding cold food/drink”. 22% had seen “increasing use of natural remedies such as colloidal silver, essential oils, garlic, MMS (chlorine dioxide) or vitamin C”, whilst 11% had seen “putting clothes in the sun to disinfect them” and 10% had seen “drinking more lemon juice”.
- Just over half (55%) of those seeing misinformation said they did nothing about it. 15% said they used tips from media such as the BBC website; 13% checked it with friends and family; 10% checked it with a fact-checking resource; and 7% reported or blocked it. Some 7% said that they forwarded it on.

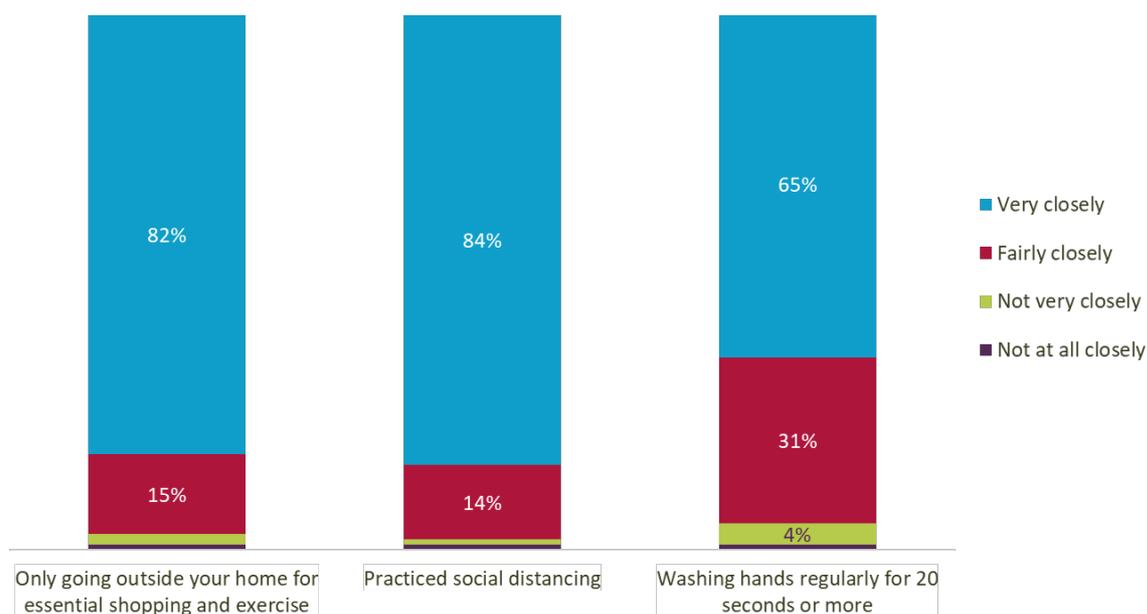
## Official advice about Covid-19

- Virtually all respondents say they are (either very or fairly) closely following the official advice of practising social distancing (98%), only going outside for essential things (97%) and washing hands regularly (96%) (see Figure 2).

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<sup>2</sup> The wording of the survey question does not distinguish between misinformation that is being reported as such, and misinformation that is being spread deliberately.

Figure 2: Extent to which people are closely following official advice: week one



Source: Ofcom Covid-19 news survey, March 2020. Note: Percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

## Attitudes towards Covid-19 and media coverage

- Official sources are the most trusted. Nine in ten or more of those using the official sources trust the NHS (95%) the WHO (94%), local health services (91%), official scientists (90%), and the government (89%). Traditional broadcasters are also highly trusted, with 83% of users trusting BBC TV, 83% Channel 4, 82% ITV, and 75% Sky. The least trusted sources are social media and closed groups where between one in five and one in four users say they trust the news and information about Covid-19 that they find there.
- Nearly one in five (17%) of respondents agree that they are ‘confused about what they should be doing in response to Covid-19’, and 40% agree that they are ‘finding it hard to know what’s true and what’s false about Covid-19’. Those aged 18-24 (52%) were more likely to agree that they are finding it hard to know what’s true and what’s false compared to those aged 65+ (30%).
- One in five (22%) agree they are ‘trying to avoid news about Coronavirus’, and 17% agree that ‘the mainstream media is exaggerating the seriousness of Covid-19’, although only 5% agree strongly with this statement.
- Finally, 86% agree that the crisis has shown positive sides to society, with 42% agreeing strongly that this is the case.