

The impact of COVID-19 on disabled people

Summary of secondary
research

Updated December 2020

activityalliance.org.uk



**activity
alliance**

**disability
inclusion
sport**

Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- [Wellbeing and support](#)
- [Shielding and self isolation](#)
- [Finances and benefits](#)
- [Impact on physical activity](#)
- [Case studies](#)

Introduction

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak has caused significant challenges for many people, affecting our health, lifestyles, and wellbeing.

Disabled people face additional barriers in many areas of life, including being physically active.

This document, using a review of recent research, outlines the social impact of the pandemic and restriction measures on disabled people, and the impact on physical activity levels. References to the relevant research can be found at the end of the document.

This document is updated regularly with new figures. Last updated:
02/12/2020

[Previous updates are available on our website](#)

**activity
alliance**

**disability
inclusion
sport**

Wellbeing and support

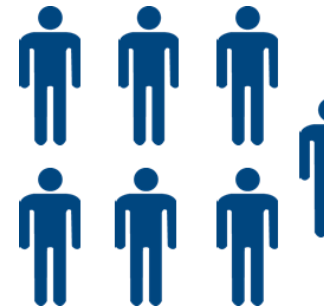
Disabled people were more likely to die from coronavirus



For every one non-disabled woman who dies
11 disabled women die



For every one non-disabled man who dies
6.5 disabled men die



Disabled people are more worried about the impact COVID-19 is having on their lives

75%

Over three quarters of disabled people are "very" or "somewhat" worried about the effect that coronavirus is having on their life

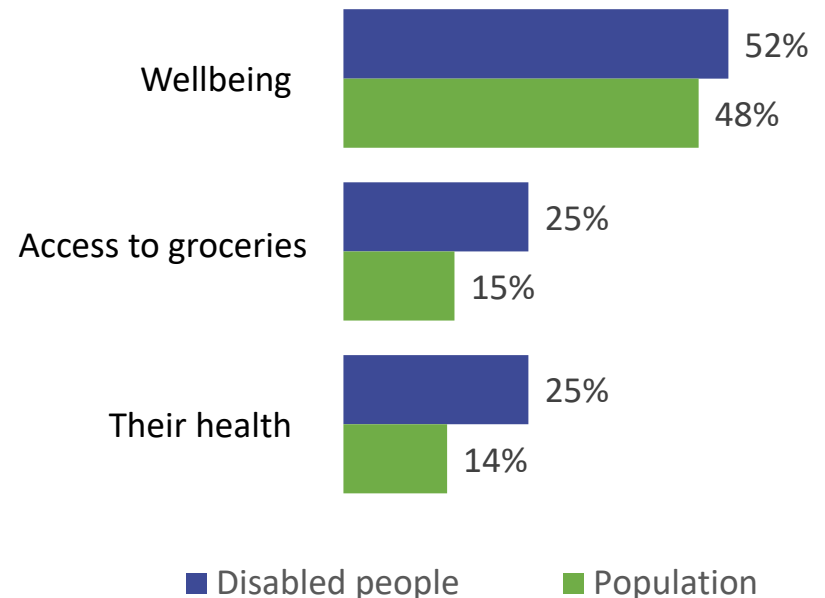
x2

People with a health condition are twice as likely to feel lonely than the overall population.

43%

Of people with a health condition report high levels of anxiety (compared to 35% of general population)

COVID-19 is having a greater impact on disabled people's ...



Compared to the data from October, disabled people are experiencing a similar impact on their wellbeing and health, with a slight increase in concern about the effect on their lives (from 70%) and anxiety (from 40%).

Disabled people were left without the social care they needed over the first lockdown, and unpaid carers are still lacking support

In June:

51%

Over half of disabled adults who previously received care are no longer receiving home visits from health care professionals.

31%

Almost one third of disabled people are concerned about the level of care they are currently receiving and how it is provided.

An October study found that 34% of disabled people feel less safe receiving care than before the pandemic

This has led to an increased strain on unpaid carers. In September:

- Only 12% of unpaid carers feel they had enough support from social care
- 64% of carers were providing 50 hours or more of care a week
- 54% of carers had given up or reduced paid work because of responsibilities

The medical care of people with health conditions has also been affected, leading to a negative impact for many

34%

A third of people with a long-term health condition said they had been able to access the same level of medical care in October (an increase from 28% in September) as they had before COVID-19.

42%

Four in ten of those whose care had been reduced or cancelled said their health has gotten worse because of this.

Compared to the data from October, a similar proportion of disabled people were able to access the same level of care. However, more people who couldn't access care said their health had gotten worse (an increase from 36%)

COVID-19 is having a negative impact on disabled children and their parent's health



Parents of disabled children report worsening emotional and mental health for both their children and themselves



Nearly half (45%) say their disabled children's physical health has declined

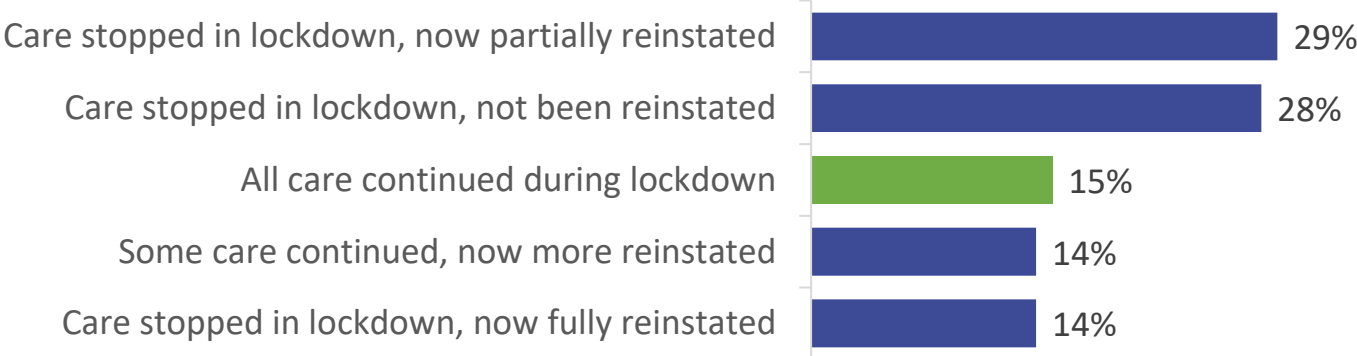
With just over half (54%) saying the same about their own health



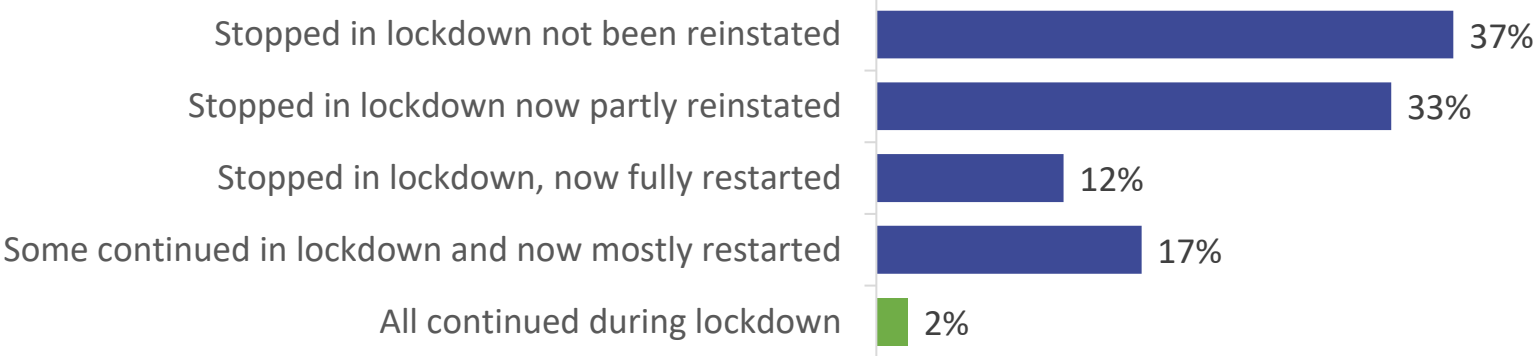
Over two thirds (68%) say a health or social care assessment has been delayed due to the lockdown.

Most families had social care and therapies stopped in lockdown; for many this is still not fully reinstated

Social care: only 15% had all of their child's social care continue over lockdown



Therapies: only 2% had all of their child's therapies continue during lockdown



A quarter of disabled children have not fully returned to school and others are not getting the support they need

School attendance:

24%

A quarter of disabled children had not returned to school or were only attending part time.

Reasons why....

44% - Family are shielding (school seen as unsafe)

26% - Child too anxious to return

19% - Educational support not in place

14% - Child happier at home

12% - Health support not in place

Support in school:

32%

Only a third of disabled children had all provision from their Education, Health and Care Plan provided.

EHCP support: 39% had some provision provided, and 8% had no provision. 9% were waiting for the plan to be agreed or assessed; half of this group had been waiting for more than 6 months.

School support: Parents feel schools prepared well for the return to the classroom but there were areas for improvement:

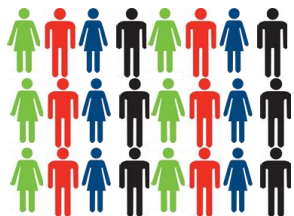
- More blended learning to help transition
- Mental health and emotional support
- School transport

**activity
alliance**

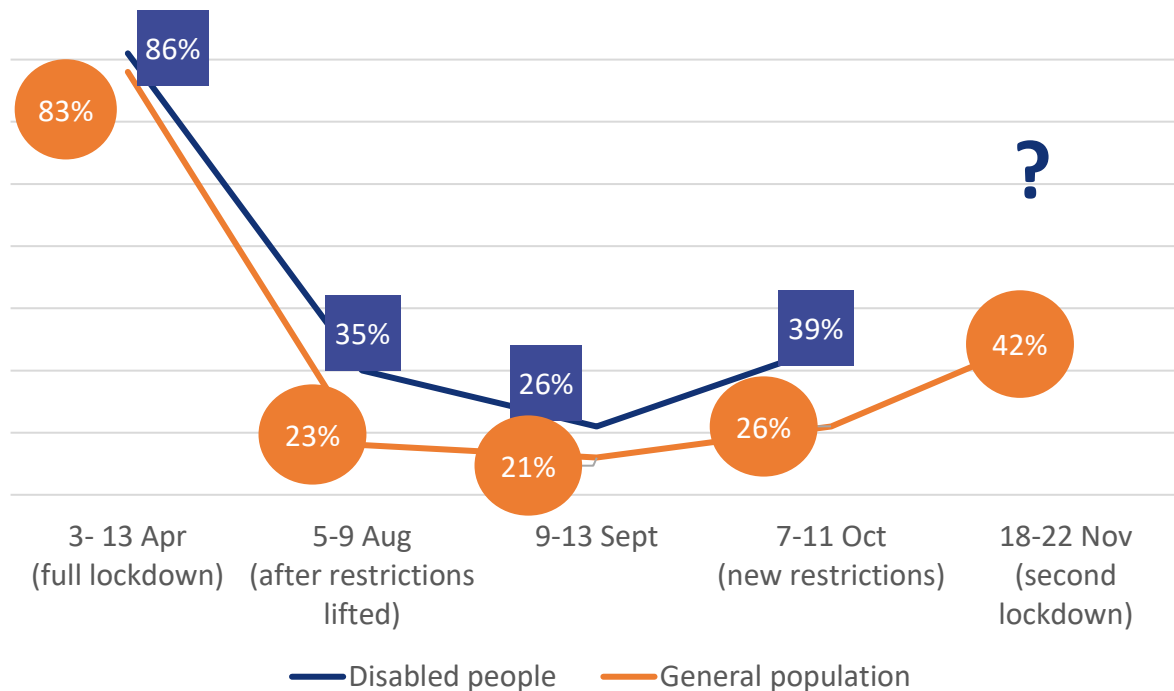
**disability
inclusion
sport**

Shielding and self isolation

Disabled people are more likely to be socially isolating or shielding



2.2 million people were classed as clinically extremely vulnerable by the Government. Guidance on shielding was paused in August, but in August the Government introduced additional formal restrictive measures for those in high alert areas, and full lockdowns were later introduced in Wales and England.



The proportion of disabled people who are staying at home or only leaving for essential reasons has increased.

Disabled people continue to feel more uncomfortable (49% compared to 31% of the general population). These figures are similar to the previous update.

Disabled people are feeling overlooked and are less sure how to keep themselves safe

71%

Almost three-quarters feel that the needs of disabled people have been overlooked during the pandemic.

65%

Many feel that the pandemic has had a negative impact on the rights of disabled people.



Disabled people are less likely to feel they have enough information on how to protect themselves from coronavirus (October 2020).

**activity
alliance**

**disability
inclusion
sport**

Finances, benefits, and work

Disabled people use benefits to support them day to day, including for being active



65%

Almost two thirds of disabled people rely on benefits to be active:

- Travel
- Paid for exercise
- Specialist equipment

3.5
million

3.5 million disabled people of working age receive benefits.

x2

A disabled working-age adult is more than twice as likely to be in poverty than a non-disabled adult.

£538

Disabled people face over £500 a month in extra costs related to their impairment or condition.

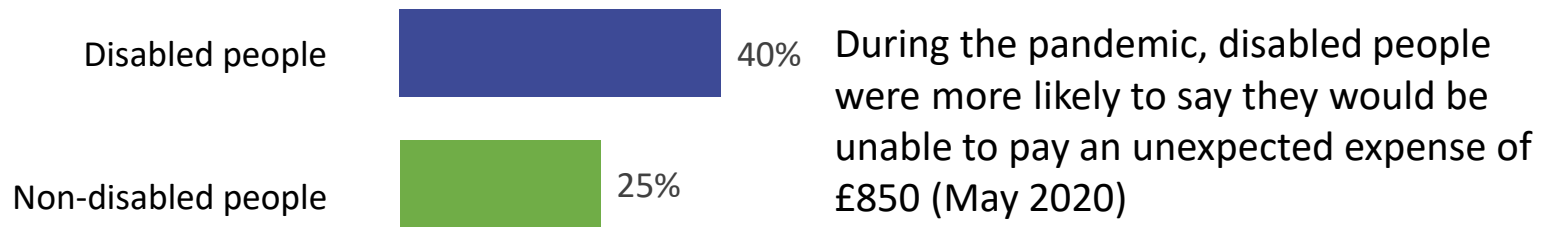
2

million

2 million people on legacy benefits* did not benefit from the £20 uplift given to those on Universal Credit during the pandemic.

*Legacy benefits were established before the new Universal Credit system (e.g., Employment Support Allowance), and are often received by disabled people

Disabled people are more likely to face acute financial challenges because of coronavirus and have worries about work



During the pandemic, disabled people were more likely to say they would be unable to pay an unexpected expense of £850 (May 2020)

25%

A quarter of disabled people are worried about losing their jobs as a result of the pandemic (August 2020)

41% are anxious about not going back to work
48% are worried about using public transport
87% fear others won't respect social distancing rules, putting them at risk

In October, 8% of disabled adults had left their job due to health concerns related to the pandemic – this increases to 16% for 18–34-year-olds.

Parents of disabled children also face additional financial pressure



In June, many parents of disabled children were facing financial pressures



With one fifth believing they will end up in debt because of coronavirus

61%

6 in 10 had seen an increase in costs (36% home schooling costs, 32% specialist equipment, 15% PPE).

39%

Almost two fifths had seen a reduction in income.

76%

Over three quarters have had no increase in benefits.

**activity
alliance**

disability
inclusion
sport

The digital divide

COVID-19 is magnifying the digital divide; disabled people are likely to be more affected by this

9

million

9 million people struggle to use the internet independently in the UK. Those most affected are:

- Unemployed or retired people
- Disabled people
- Those living on a low income
- Those with few or no qualifications
- Older people
- People living in rural areas
- People whose first language is not English
- Homeless people

4.8

million

Almost 5 million people never go online at all.

35%

Disabled people are 35% less likely to have essential digital skills than non-disabled people.

Key factors contributing to the digital divide are: difficulties with access (paying a monthly fee or buying equipment), a lack of literacy or digital skills, low motivation and interest, and accessibility for those with different needs.

**activity
alliance**

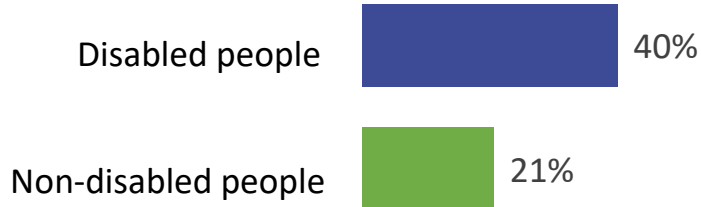
**disability
inclusion
sport**

Impact of COVID-19 on physical activity

Activity levels among disabled people were increasing before coronavirus

Disabled people had seen an increase in activity levels, with a 2.9% increase since 2015. However, they are still almost twice as likely to be inactive as non-disabled people.

Proportion of people who are inactive (doing less than 30 mins of physical activity per week)



The most popular physical activities that disabled people participate in are:



Walking for leisure and travel



Fitness activities



Cycling for leisure and sport



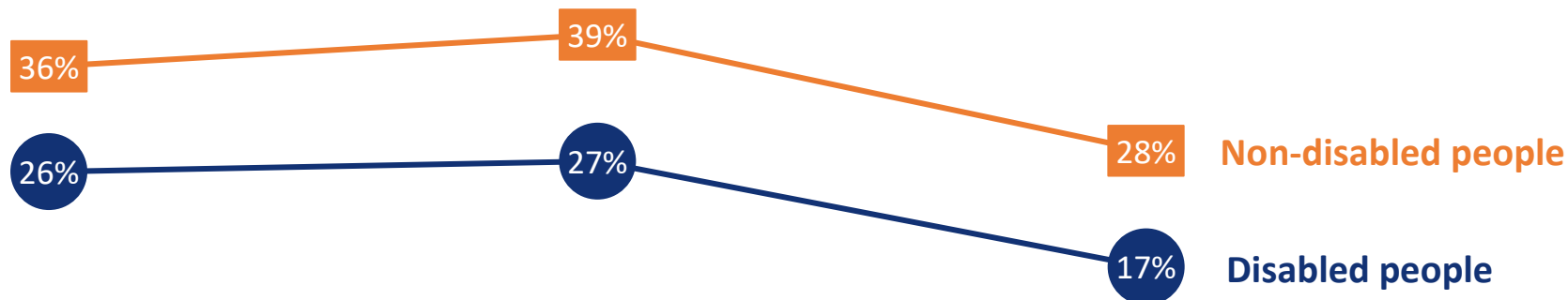
Swimming



Fitness classes

Disabled people continue to be less active, and activity levels are decreasing from the summer

Proportion of people doing at least 30 mins of physical activity five times or more in the last week



3-6 Apr

Phase 1: Full lockdown Mid March to mid May: Activities restricted, with facilities closed

- Recognition of the importance of physical activity in response to the pandemic.
- Inequalities emerging.
- Peak activity levels and positive attitudes at end of this period

15-18 May

Phase 2: Mid-May to mid-September: Activities extended to include outdoor activities. From the end of July, gyms, leisure centres, and pools reopen, and team sports start to resume

- Physical activity falls as society starts to reopen
- Attitudes and motivations become less positive

23-26 Oct

Phase 3: Mid-September onwards: New restrictions to indoor sports and the rule of 6 introduced, followed by new national restrictions

- Physical activity and motivations settle at new lower level
- Inequalities continue

Other inequalities in activity levels have also worsened over this period

Traditional inequalities in activity levels have continued during the pandemic

Proportion of people doing at least 30 mins of physical activity five times or more in the last week

Women

22%

Lower socioeconomic groups

24%

Older people (55+)

24%

New inequalities have also emerged

Proportion of people doing at least 30 mins of physical activity five times or more in the last week

People without access to outdoor space

17%

Young people (16-24)

20%

People who live alone

22%

People living in urban areas

24%

Disabled people are less likely to feel they have the ability to be active because of coronavirus

55%

Just over half feel they have the opportunity to be physically active (compared to 72% of non-disabled people)

51%

Half are worried about leaving their home to be active (compared to 36% of non-disabled people)

Disabled people were less likely than non-disabled people to:

Have found new ways to be active during the pandemic

Be using exercise to manage their physical or mental health

Have more time for physical activity

Attitudes and motivations to be active have fallen since August and are lower than for non-disabled people



Proportion of disabled people who agree it's important to exercise regularly

August 2020

63%



October 2020

54%

70% for non-disabled people



Proportion of disabled people who exercise to manage physical health

70%



58%

70% for non-disabled people



Proportion of disabled people who exercise to manage mental health

64%

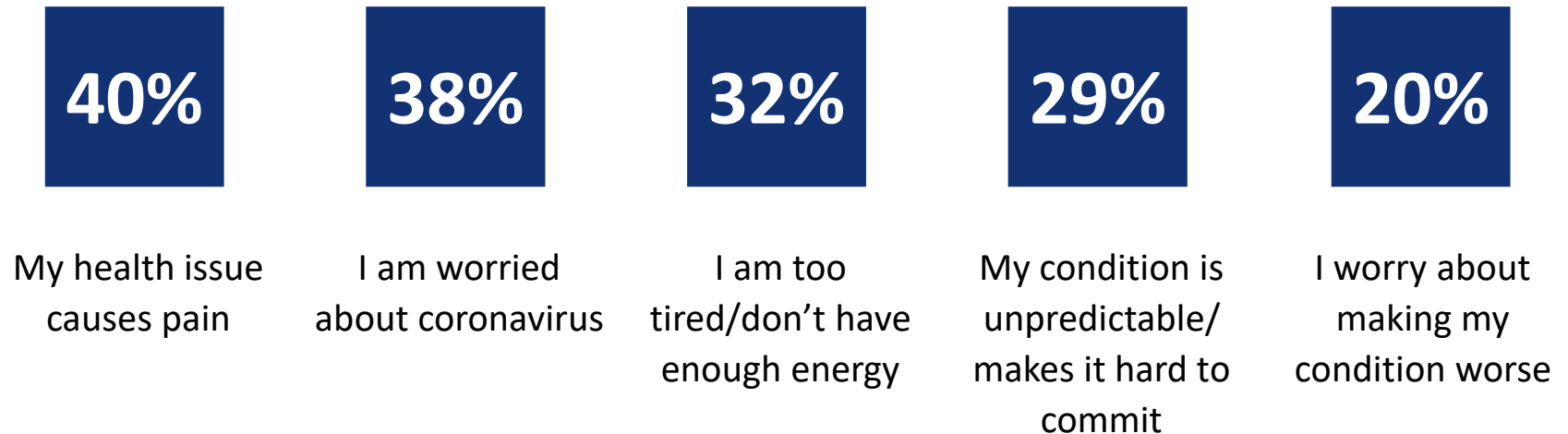


58%

64% for non-disabled people)

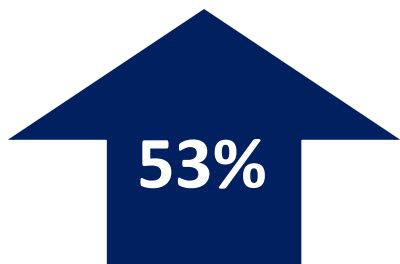
Coronavirus is an important additional barrier to activity for people with health conditions

Barriers to being active:



Those with a lung or mental health condition are more likely to say coronavirus is a barrier.

Disabled people want to be more active after the pandemic



Over half of disabled people want to increase the amount of activity they do once restrictions are removed and COVID-19 is under control (compared to 51% of non-disabled people).

However....

51% are worried about leaving their home to be active

68% say they will feel safer exercising at home

67% are worried about exercising close to other people

**activity
alliance**

**disability
inclusion
sport**

Overcoming COVID-19 challenges: Case studies

Overcoming challenges to support disabled people to be active

- Plan for and provide safe opportunities to be active for those who are comfortable
Case study 1: Geddington Newton Bowls Club
- Provide online physical activities that are designed to increase connectedness, providing social and mental health benefits.
Case study 2: #DSCathome, Disability Sports Coach
- Connect with community organisations to help people be active at home (including those without digital access).
Case study 3: Get Out Get Active, Activity Alliance

What else is important?

- Provide clear information on safety and risk using Government and Sport England guidelines.
- Use [inclusive communication](#) and accessibility guidance.
- Ensure inclusion is at the heart of any redevelopment plans using our '[Reopening activity: An inclusive response](#)' resource.
- Recognise that many people's health or impairment have become harder to manage due to COVID-19 and lockdown.
- Inspire those who are less motivated by connecting with wider values and new needs (e.g. managing mental and physical health, social opportunities).

Get Out Get Active, Activity Alliance

Get Out Get Active (GOGA) is a programme that runs across the UK. It supports the very least active disabled and non-disabled people to enjoy being active together.

COVID-19 has had a huge impact on the different activities GOGA provides, but the teams across the country have come up with some helpful ways to continue to support people being active

Examples of what has been offered:

- Personal telephone calls to offer words of encouragement and listen to what individuals have been doing to keep active.
- Weekly emails with information on home workouts (sourced locally or nationally)
- Exercise postcards mapping suitable exercise programmes for people to follow from their home.
- Social media accounts sharing exercise suggestions and online classes and activity challenges
- Delivering equipment to care homes and individuals to help them be active (adapted bikes /badminton / foot golf)

#DSCathome, Disability Sports Coach

Disability Sports Coach empowers disabled people to lead more active lives by providing affordable weekly opportunities to get active and meet friends. The charity also trains coaches, leaders and teachers with the skills to deliver high quality accessible sport activities for disabled people.

Schools closing and lockdown meant they have had to cancel or postpone their regular coaching programmes and community clubs. To help with motivation and to keep participants active, they developed a programme using online and offline resources.

Examples of what has been offered:

- Sending out over 300 equipment packs to members of Community Clubs
- Provide bespoke activity card downloads online
- Running live Zoom activity sessions four times a week – including mindfulness, yoga, dance, and multi-sports
- A weekly social session and quiz on Zoom
- Weekly challenges for participants to achieve personal goals

Impact of the programme:

- Increasing connectedness and reducing social isolation
- Increased reach to new participants
- Ensured vulnerable participants continued to keep active during lockdown

Geddington Newton Bowls Club

The offer:

Following the easing of lockdown and the re-opening of the club, the committee realised many of their members were fearful of a return to bowls due to being at risk or unsure of mixing outside their own household.

- Therefore 'extra safe' bowling sessions were offered: Members could have the bowls green to themselves; the gates were opened ready for their arrival; equipment was put out and disinfected to minimise the need to touch any surfaces.
- Sessions have proved hugely popular with many feeling so satisfied with the safety measures in place that they have felt confident enough to book a regular session. A video has been made to demonstrate all the safety measures that have put in place at the club. [Watch the Geddington Newton Bowls Club video](#).

The impact:

- The club has enabled its members to return to the sport at their own pace, whilst gaining confidence to leave their homes and socialise in a safe environment
- The number of extra safe sessions being booked has now reduced as members feel comfortable with the safety measures in place
- A 'Buddy Scheme' has now been introduced, for individuals who want an opponent to be paired up
- Other clubs have implemented similar 'extra safe' models in order to encourage members who are wary of returning to the sport
- Committee members continue to meet regularly via Zoom so as to assess the club's progress and any arising issues

References

- Activity Alliance, [The Activity Trap: disabled people's fear of being active](#) (2018).
- British Medical Journal, [Covid-19 is magnifying the digital divide](#) (2020).
- Carers Trust, [Social Care Survey 2020](#) (2020)
- Department for Work and Pensions, [Work, health and disability green paper](#) (2017).
- Disabled Children's Partnership, [Left in Lockdown](#) (2020).
- Disabled Children's Partnership, [Slow return of support](#) (2020).
- Disabled Children's Partnership, [Back to School Poll](#) (2020).
- Office for National Statistics, [Coronavirus related mortality 2 March – 15 May 2020](#) (2020).
- Office for National Statistics, Office for National Statistics, [Coronavirus and the social impact on Great Britain](#) (2020).
- Office for National Statistics, [Coronavirus and shielding of vulnerable people 9-18 June](#) (2020).
- Office for National Statistics, [Family Resources Survey, 2017/18](#) (2020).
- Lloyds Bank, [UK Consumer Digital Index 2020](#) (2020)
- Research Institute for Disabled Consumers, [Coronavirus: the impact on disabled and older people](#) (2020).
- Scope, [The Disability Report](#) (2020).
- Scope, [Price Tag of Disability](#) (2019).
- Sport England, [Active Lives Adult Survey 2018/19](#) (2020).
- Sport England, [Savanta ComRes coronavirus research](#) (2020).
- The Good Things Foundation, [Blueprint for a 100% Digitally Included UK](#) (2020).
- We Are Undefeatable, [Health conditions and physical activity: The impact of COVID-19, June 2020](#) (2020)
- YouGov and BBC, [The YouGov Disability study: Disability and COVID-19](#) (2020).



activity alliance

disability
inclusion
sport

Jessica Flavell

Research and Evaluation Advisor

Jessica@activityalliance.org.uk

0161 200 5442

Emma Spring

Research Consultant

Emmaspringinsight@outlook.com