

Impact on Society Survey

Clinically Vulnerable Families

*Findings from a national survey exploring the impact of Covid-19
on Clinically Vulnerable households.*

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5) Society, culture and hospitality

“I was unable to attend my daughter’s wedding abroad... I felt very lonely... No hugging or physical contact with my close family was difficult... especially when my first grandchild was born.”
Robin, 67

For many Clinically Vulnerable people, reopening was not experienced as freedom. The removal of protections such as masking, ventilation, occupancy limits made everyday activities more unsafe.

Hospitality, retail, and tourism were repeatedly identified as especially inaccessible, since eating and drinking required unmasking. The government’s “*Eat Out to Help Out*” scheme amplified the divide by promoting indoor dining without safeguards at a time when no vaccines or treatments were widely available. This effectively excluded vulnerable households and reinforcing their feelings of abandonment or incentivising risk-taking behaviour.

Venues rarely provided information about ventilation or crowding, leaving people unable to assess risk. Where adjustments were made - such as outdoor seating, occupancy limits, or improved ventilation and air filtration - participation became more possible. Yet these mitigations were inconsistently applied.

Many expressed frustration that online or hybrid access to cultural events, which had been valuable, was quickly withdrawn once protective measures were lifted. The sudden loss of hybrid access was experienced as another layer of exclusion, removing opportunities for connection that had briefly opened up.

1.7% felt able to safely return to public places during periods of reopening due to mitigations they took. A further **19.0%** only partially returned to public spaces, taking extra precautions and avoiding places they deemed unsafe. For many families, what was celebrated publicly as a “*return to normal*” marked a new phase of exclusion.

6) Faith, worship and rites of passage

"We felt like our faith-based values - caring for the vulnerable - were completely abandoned. It hurt more coming from people we trusted."

Leah.

Among respondents who had engaged in religious life, participation was widely affected. 54.6% said significantly affected, **35.9%** somewhat, and **9.3%** said they were unaffected.

Early online services helped, but later withdrawal of mitigations and online access left many feeling abandoned or excluded from communities and key rituals. Hybrid and outdoor services early in the pandemic were widely valued.

Later, the removal of live streaming and mitigations created difficult choices around funerals, weddings and communal worship. Several respondents described tensions within congregations about masking and ventilation that affected their sense of belonging.

Clear expectations set by faith leaders, together with practical precautions, made a noticeable difference to inclusion. Steps sometimes taken included opening windows and doors, services without singing, providing a masked area, or remote options.

Voices from the Survey

"I hadn't realised until it stopped how much my weekly services meant to me in terms of my mental health. The community and social aspect of going to church is very important to me and when this stopped it was very hard. Unfortunately, two significant events happened during the timeframe that greatly challenged my Christian faith and without the weekly face-to-face support, I felt very isolated. All this has made me turn my back on organised religion and I am no longer a practicing Christian."
Morgan, 43.