

**THE
POLICY
INSTITUTE**

KING'S
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LONDON

Coronavirus uncertainties: vaccines, symptoms and contested claims

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Introduction

This report includes findings from a survey of 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75 by [King's College London](#) in partnership with [Ipsos MORI](#), conducted on 17-20 July 2020. Some of these are compared with results from two other surveys that were carried out during the coronavirus pandemic.

It finds that:

- Only half the population (53%) say they'd be certain or very likely to get a vaccine against coronavirus, if one becomes available, with one in five (20%) fairly likely.
- 1 in 6 people (16%) say they are unlikely to or definitely won't get a Covid-19 vaccine, if one becomes available.
- This rises to even higher levels among different groups, such as:
 - Those who believe face masks are bad for people's health (37%), who believe masks do not reduce the spread of Covid-19 (34%), and who think the government only wants people to wear them as a way of controlling them (34%).
 - Those who strongly agree that too much fuss is being made about the pandemic (36%) and those who say they do not find coronavirus stressful (27%).
 - Those who say they're very much the kind of person for whom it's important to make their own decisions (24%) and who say they're not at all the kind of person who follows the rules at all times (24%).

- Certain behaviours and experiences are also linked to being unlikely to get a potential vaccine. For example, around a quarter of those who don't wear face masks (24%) and those who have/had or think they've had coronavirus (23%) say they probably or definitely won't.
- Where people's knowledge on the virus comes from is also a factor: 27% of people who get a great deal of their information on Covid-19 from WhatsApp say they are unlikely to or definitely won't get a vaccine.
- And while just 4% think we'll never be able to vaccinate the population against coronavirus, less than half the public (44%) think we'll be able to within the next 12 months.

Some are also still uncertain about what the key signs of Covid-19 are. Many know at least one of the three main symptoms of coronavirus, as identified by the NHS, with 81% recognising two – but only 31% correctly recognise all three.

Finally, there's growing uncertainty about some conspiracy claims, while many are also unsure about widely debated scientific claims, such as whether children spread coronavirus as easily as adults and whether shouting spreads it more than talking. This uncertainty about key scientific claims reflects the shifting and contested evidence base on certain issues.

A Covid-19 vaccine: who's unlikely to get it?

There is uncertainty among some sections of the public about whether they would actually get a coronavirus vaccine, if one becomes available.

Being unlikely to get such a vaccine is related to certain beliefs, attitudes and values that reflect greater scepticism about science and authority and less concern about the pandemic.

Some experiences and behaviours, such as not wearing face masks and having or thinking you've had coronavirus, are also linked to greater uncertainty about getting vaccinated, as is whether people get a lot of their information on the virus from WhatsApp.

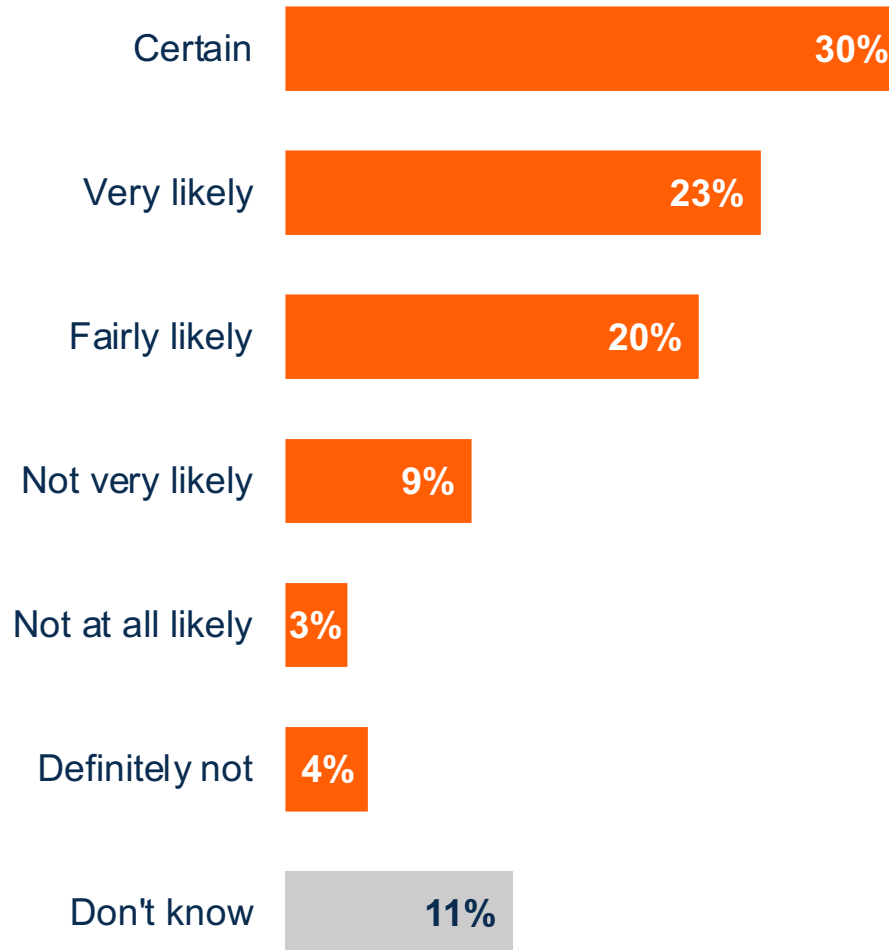
Younger people, too, are more likely than older people to say they are unlikely to or definitely won't get the vaccine.

And while very few think we'll never be able to vaccinate the population against coronavirus, there is limited optimism that we'll be able to do so within a year.

Only half the population (53%) say they'd be certain or very likely to get a vaccine against coronavirus, if one becomes available, with 1 in 5 (20%) fairly likely, and 1 in 6 (16%) saying they are unlikely to or definitely won't.

1 in 9 (11%) say they don't know how likely they are to get such a vaccine.

If a vaccine for coronavirus becomes available, how likely or unlikely would you personally be to get the vaccine?



Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July

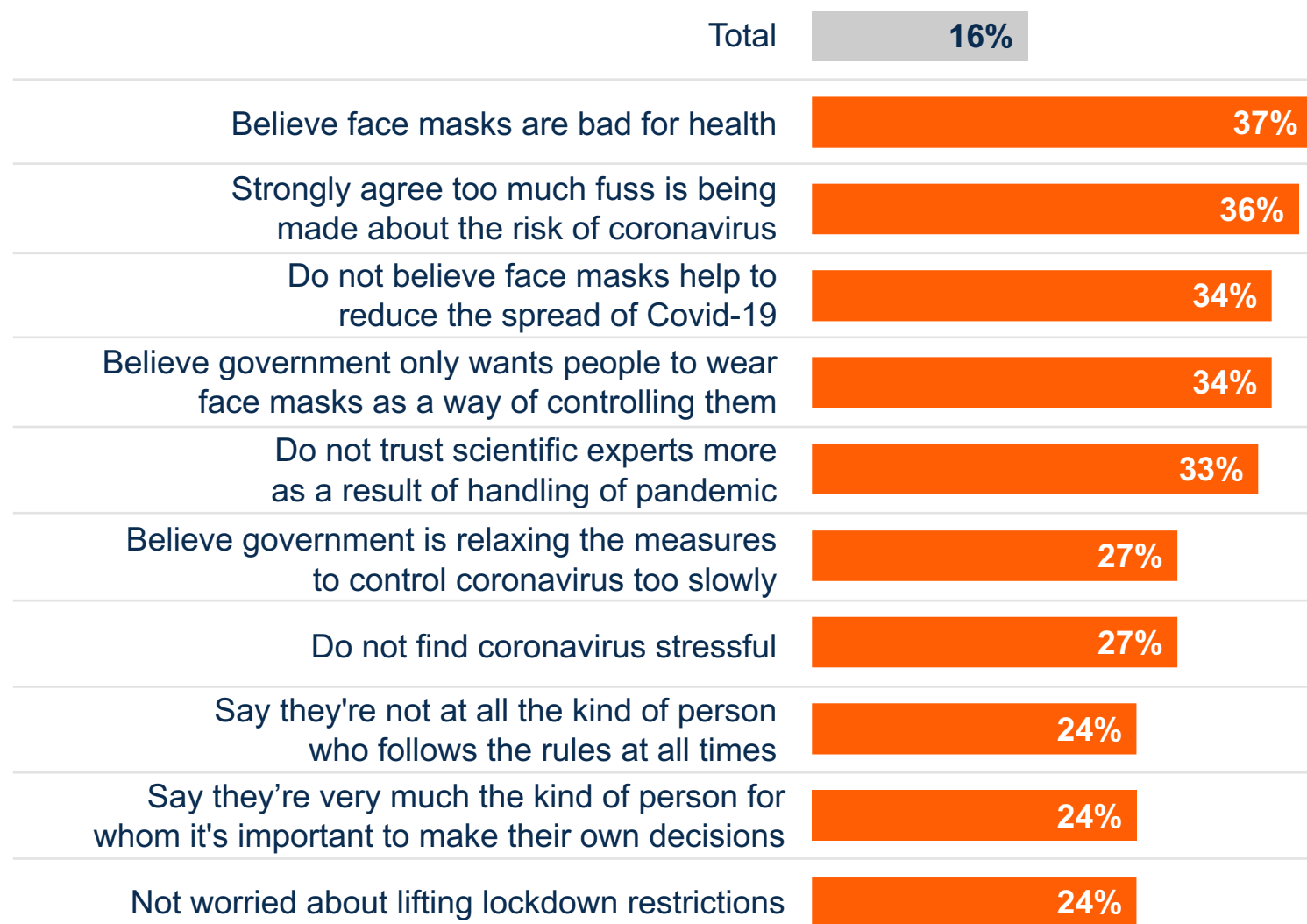
A range of **beliefs, attitudes and values** are associated with greater doubt about getting a potential Covid-19 vaccine.

In particular, around a third or more of those who are sceptical of the value of face masks or believe certain conspiracy theories about them say they're unlikely to or definitely won't get a vaccine – more than double the proportion of the overall population who say the same.

Lower levels of stress and concern about the pandemic are also related to people being more doubtful about getting vaccine.

And around a quarter of those who prioritise their own personal freedoms and those who say they're not always rule-followers are more doubtful about being vaccinated.

% who say they are **unlikely to or will definitely not** get a vaccine for coronavirus if one becomes available



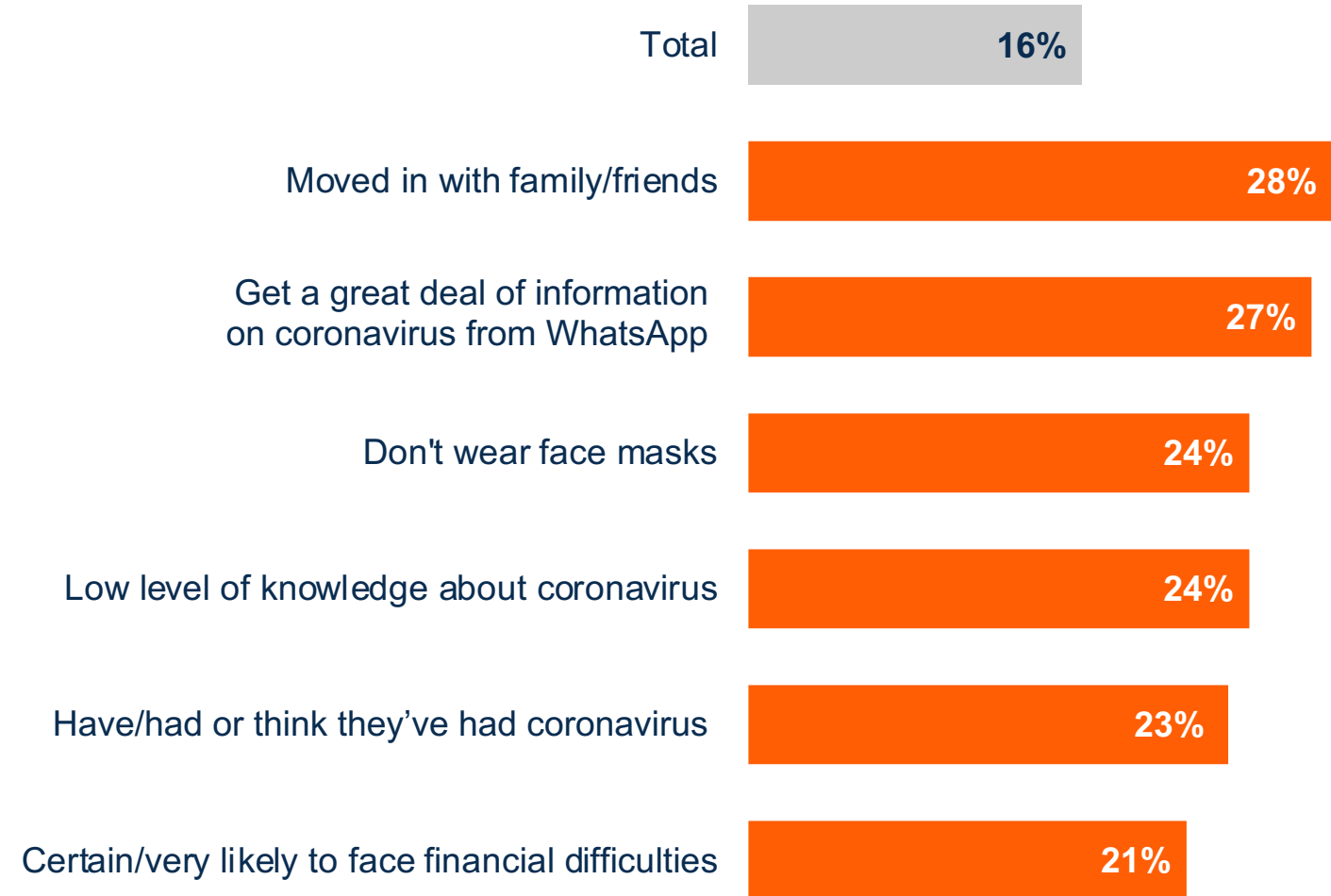
Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July

Certain **behaviours and experiences** are also linked to greater misgivings about a Covid-19 vaccine.

Around a quarter of those who report not wearing face masks and those who say they've had, or think they've had, coronavirus say it's doubtful they'll get one.

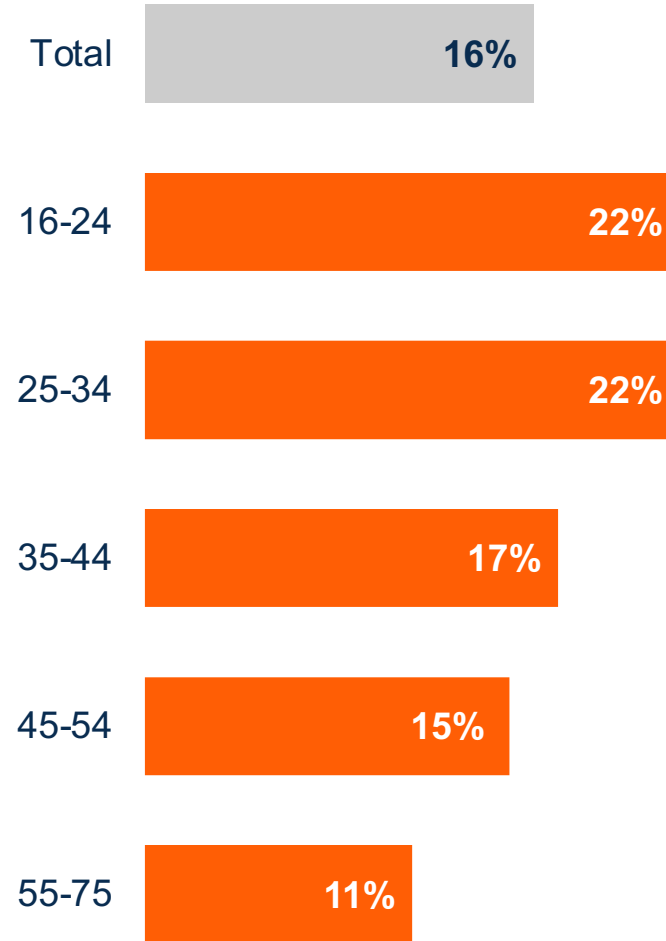
Where people's knowledge about the virus comes from is also a factor: more than a quarter of those who say they get a great deal of information on Covid-19 from WhatsApp say they're unlikely to or definitely won't get a coronavirus vaccine.

% who say they are **unlikely to or will definitely not** get a vaccine for coronavirus if one becomes available



There is an age divide in the likelihood of not getting vaccinated, with 16-24s and 25-34s twice as likely as 55-75s to say they're doubtful about doing so or definitely won't.

% who say they are **unlikely to or will definitely not** get a vaccine for coronavirus if one becomes available



Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July

Only 4% say we'll never be able to vaccinate the population against coronavirus – but less than half the public (44%) think we'll be able to in the next 12 months.

When, if at all, do you think the following will happen? We will be able to vaccinate the population against coronavirus in...

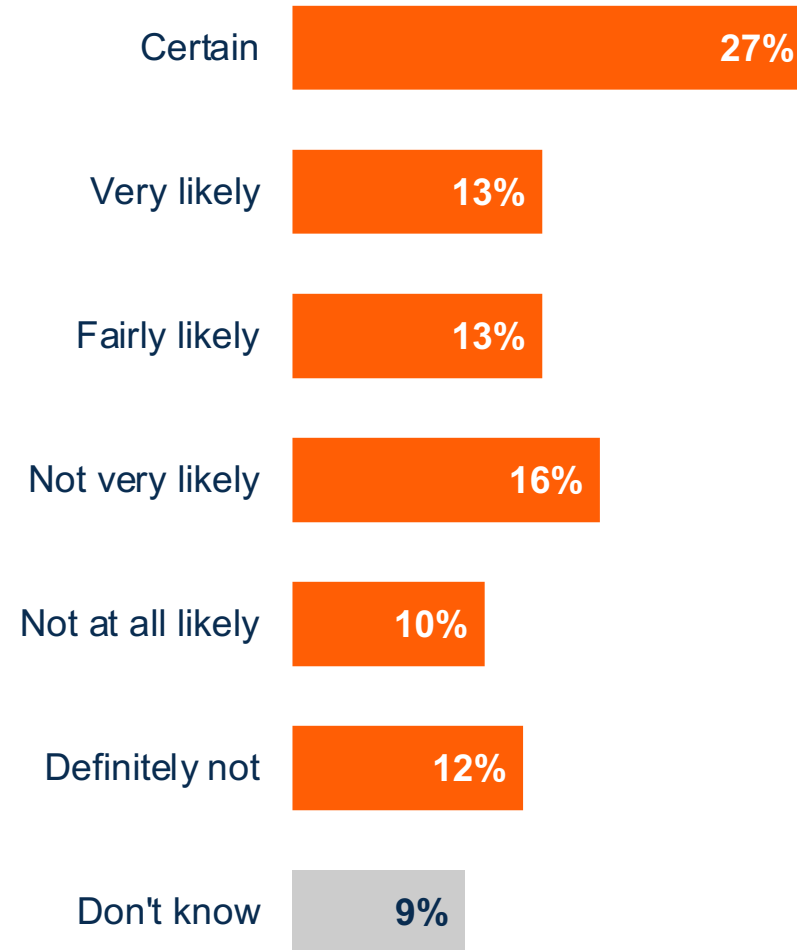


Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July

There is concern about how health services could cope with a wave of seasonal flu on top of Covid-19 infections – intentions to vaccinate against flu are therefore also key.

Only 4 in 10 are certain or very likely to get a seasonal flu vaccine (lower than for Covid-19), while 38% say they are not very, not at all likely or definitely won't.

How likely or unlikely is it that you personally will get the seasonal flu vaccine this winter?



Base: 2,237 UK residents aged 16-75, interviewed 17-20 July

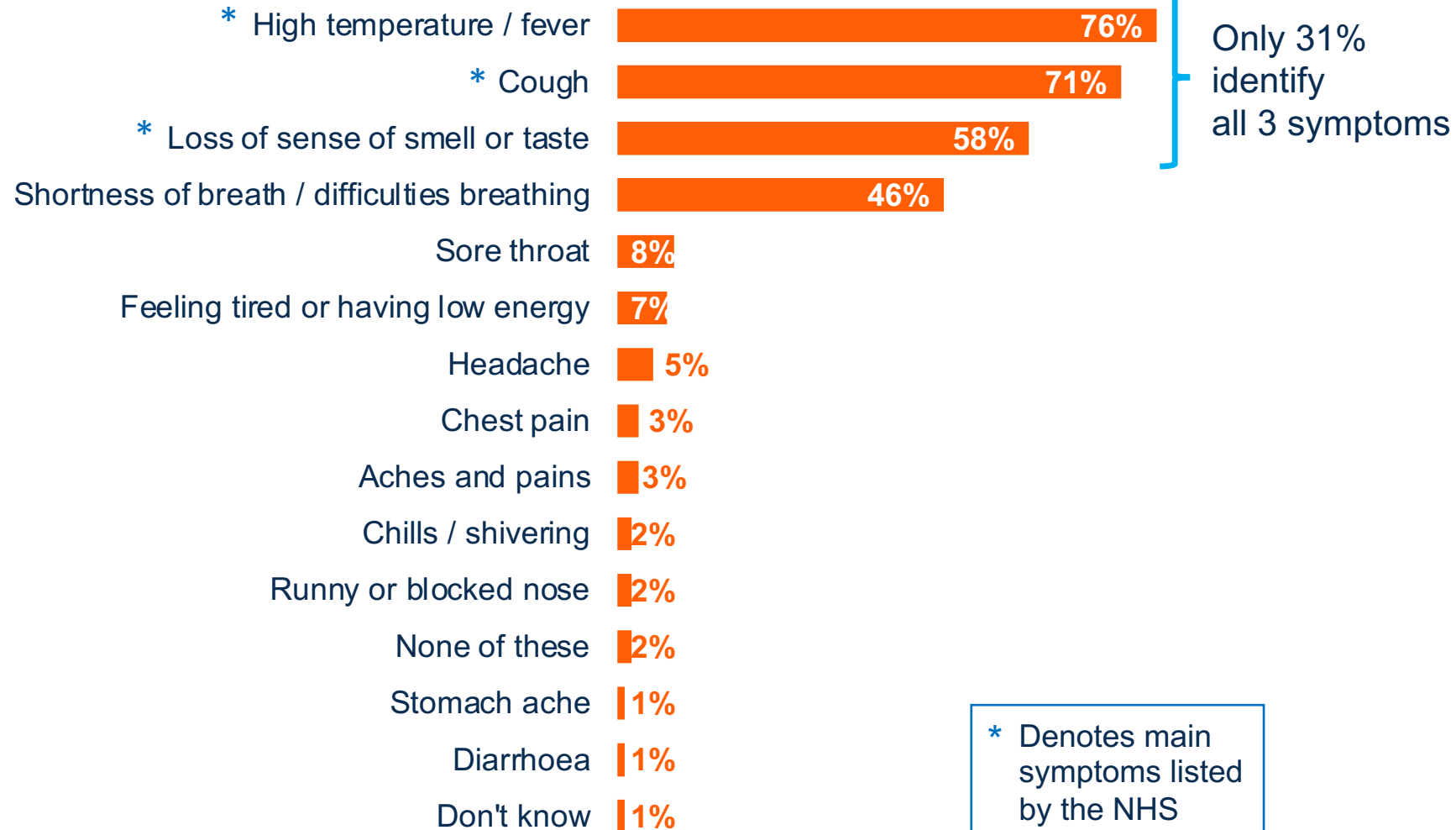
Coronavirus symptoms: how certain is the UK about the key signs?

Knowledge of the symptoms of Covid-19 will be key if the lockdown restrictions are to be relaxed further, as people will need to remain vigilant as they resume aspects of normal life.

But while most people know some of the main symptoms of Covid-19, far fewer are able to recognise all three identified by the NHS.

There is a high level of awareness of the key symptoms of coronavirus – but only 31% correctly identify all three of the main symptoms as listed by the NHS, while 81% identify two out of three.

Can you tell us what you think the most common symptoms of coronavirus are? Please select up to three



There's growing uncertainty about conspiracy claims that Covid-19 deaths are being hidden or exaggerated, while many are also unsure about widely debated scientific claims

Levels of belief in conspiracy theories about the Covid-19 death toll are not far off what they were back in May – although uncertainty has increased, with more now saying they don't know whether they're true or false. There has also been a significant decline in the proportion who think it's false that coronavirus deaths are being deliberately exaggerated by the authorities.

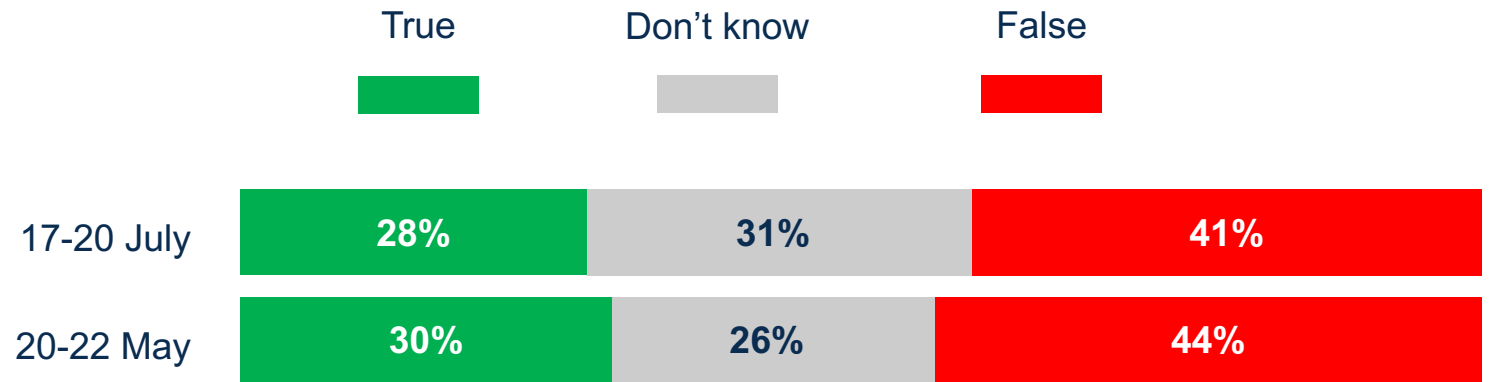
On other widely debated scientific claims about Covid-19, public opinion reflects the shifting and contested evidence base: the UK is relatively divided on whether children spread the virus as easily as adults, and while majorities think that shouting spreads it more than talking and that people who have had a confirmed case can still pass it on to others, significant proportions say they don't know.

Belief that the authorities are intentionally minimising deaths from Covid-19 is largely unchanged since May, although there has been an increase in the proportion who say they don't know whether this claim is true or false.

There has been more change when it comes to the belief that coronavirus deaths are being deliberately exaggerated by the authorities: 59% now think this is false, down from 69% in May. In line with this, there has been an increase in the proportions who say they either think it's true or don't know.

Are the following statements true or false?

The number of people reported as dying from coronavirus is being deliberately reduced or hidden by the authorities



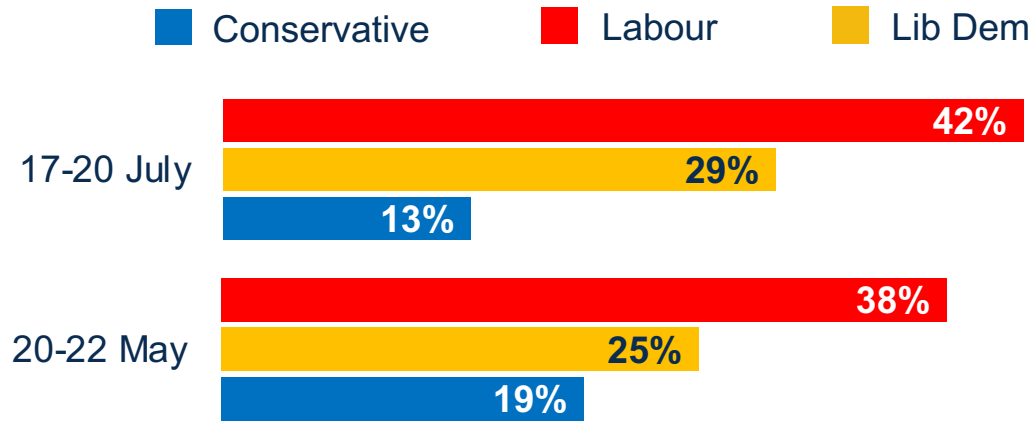
The number of people reported as dying from coronavirus is being deliberately exaggerated by the authorities



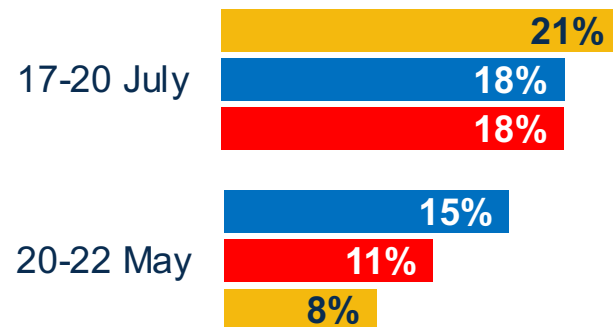
13% of Conservative voters now believe that Covid-19 deaths are being minimised, down from 19% in May, while belief among Labour and Lib Dem voters is largely unchanged.

But there have been bigger increases in the proportions who believe that deaths are being intentionally exaggerated: among Lib Dem voters belief has more than doubled, from 8% to 21%, while among Labour voters it has risen from 11% to 18%.

% who think Covid-19 deaths are being deliberately reduced or hidden, by 2019 general election vote



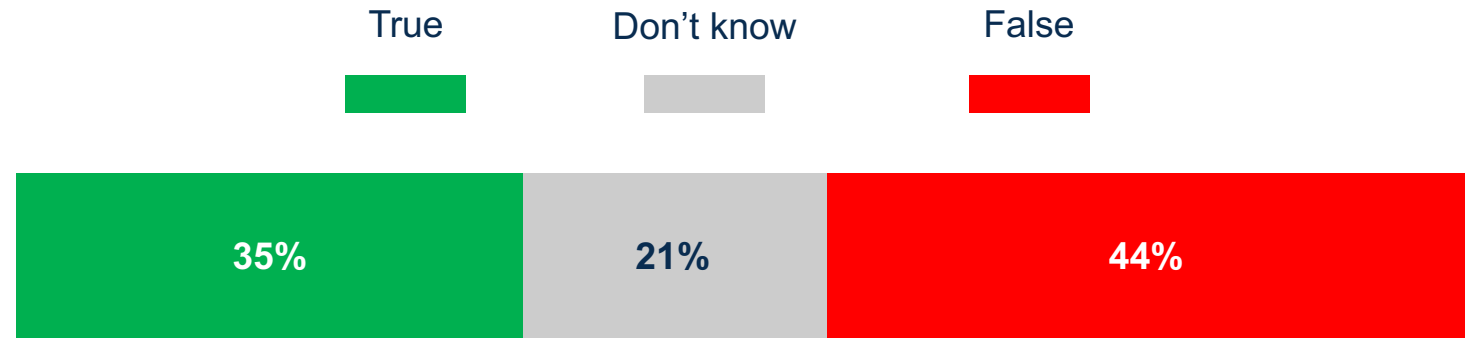
% who think Covid-19 deaths are being deliberately exaggerated, by 2019 general election vote



35% of the public think children do not transmit Covid-19 as easily as adults, while 44% think they do and 21% say they don't know.

Younger generations are less likely to believe that children don't spread the virus to such an extent, with 31% of millennials and gen xers believing this is the case, compared with 40% of baby boomers and 45% of the pre-war generation.

Are the following statements true or false? Children do not spread coronavirus as easily as adults



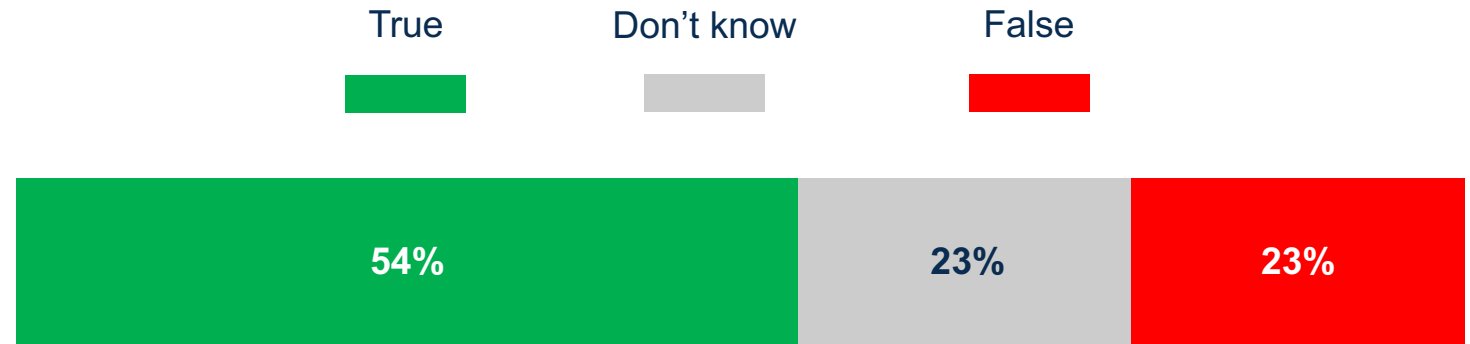
Children represent only a small proportion of total coronavirus cases, and while it is unclear what role they play in spreading the virus, there is emerging evidence that suggests children may in fact transmit Covid-19 as easily as adults.

A US study found that children younger than 5 years with mild to moderate cases of Covid-19 have much higher levels of genetic material for the virus in the nose compared to older children and adults. This may suggest that the youngest children transmit the virus as much as or more than other age groups. And a large study in South Korea found that children from 10-19 years old can transmit coronavirus to adults as well as adults can, although children under 9 were less likely than adults to transmit coronavirus to their families.

More than half the population think shouting spreads Covid-19 more than talking, which rises to 64% among the pre-war generation and 62% among baby boomers.

Again, a significant proportion of the population – almost a quarter – say they don't know, while the same amount think shouting does not spread the virus more than talking.

Are the following statements true or false? Shouting spreads the coronavirus more than talking



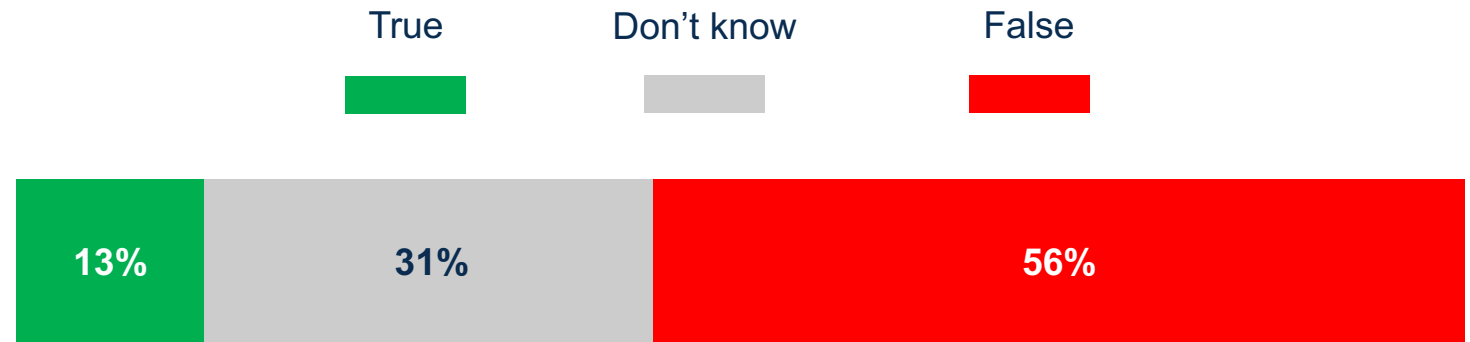
The World Health Organisation reports that outbreaks of coronavirus have been linked to closed settings where people may be shouting or singing, but notes that more research is needed to assess the significance of shouting for the transmission of coronavirus.

56% think people who have had a confirmed case of Covid-19 can catch it again or still spread it, but uncertainty is even higher on this issue, with 31% saying they don't know.

Just 13% think this isn't possible, which rises to 24% among those aged 16-24 and 25% among BAME groups.

Are the following statements true or false?

People who have had a test that confirms they've already had coronavirus can't catch coronavirus again or give it to others



According to the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#), the correlation between the detection of SARS-CoV-2 antibodies and protective immunity has not yet been established.

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