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Confident COVID Vaccine Conversations: People with physical disabilities

“The world is opening up and that we’re going back to ‘normal’, **but for many disabled people this isn’t the case.**”

Richard Kramer, chief executive of Sense, charity for people with complex disabilities ([inews.co.uk – 20 Jan 2022](https://www.inews.co.uk/news/2022/01/20/20-Jan-2022))



“**Disabled people** should not be **collateral damage** in efforts to return everybody else to the pre-pandemic normal.”

Sarah Reilly, disability rights advocate and researcher ([Women's Research Centre – 24 Jan 2022](https://www.womensresearchcentre.org.uk/news/2022/01/24/24-Jan-2022))

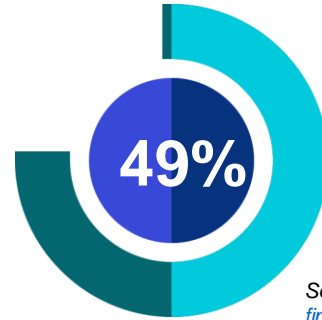
People with physical disabilities – Data and insights



1.3 million

Disabled people live in London

Source: [London's diverse population – GLA – 2019](#)



of disabled people report having mobility impairments

Source: [Family Resources Survey: financial year 2019 to 2020 - GOV.UK](#)

1 in 3

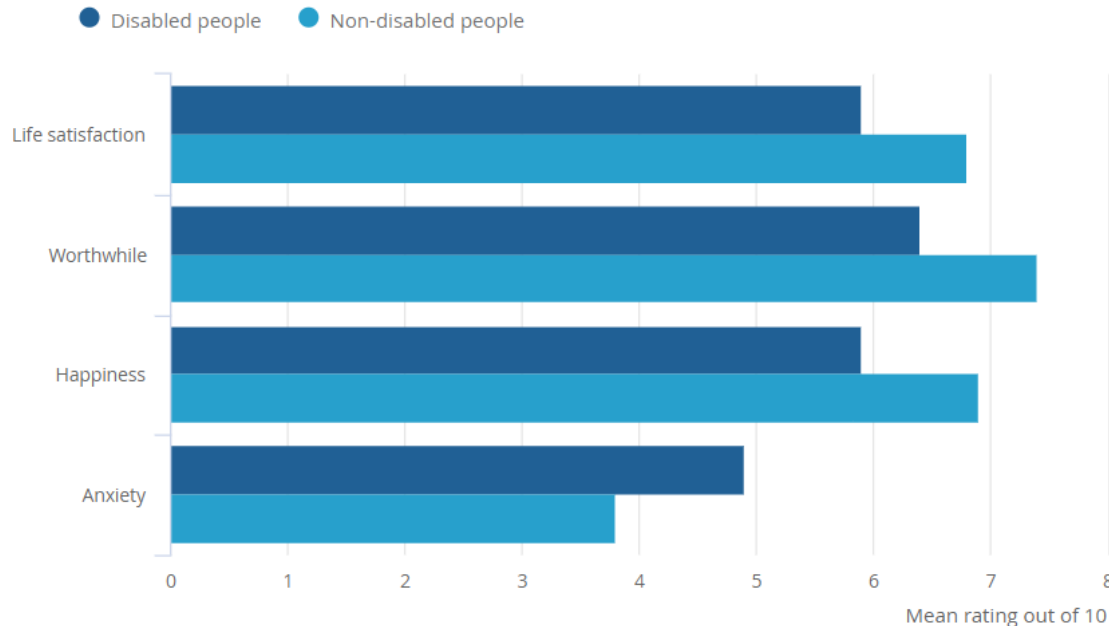


disabled people feel there is a lot of disability prejudice

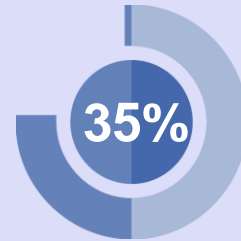
Source: [Disability Perception Gap - Scope UK](#)

Figure 5: Disabled people report poorer ratings for all well-being measures than non-disabled people in February 2021

Great Britain, February 2021



Source: [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain - Office for National Statistics](#)



In the 3 years to 2019/20, 35% of families that included a disabled person were in poverty compared to 25% of those without a disabled household member.

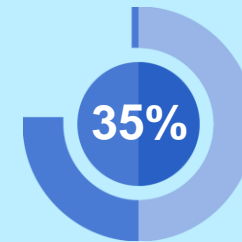
Source: [Disabled People | Trust for London - 2020](#)

1 in 5



disabled people face extra costs of more than £1,000 a month

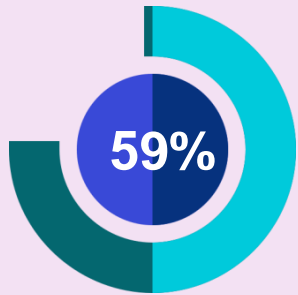
Source: [Disability Price Tag - Scope UK](#)



of disabled people say their finances have become worse since the start of the pandemic

Source: [We won't be forgotten - Scope UK](#)

People with physical disabilities – COVID-19 and disabled Londoners



of all COVID-19 deaths were disabled people

(ONS 2 March to 14 July 2020)

Source: [Sara Rotenberg: We need equitable access to the covid-19 vaccine for disabled people - The BMJ](#)

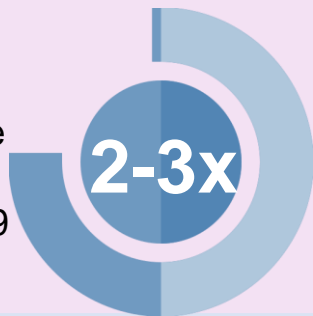
People with mobility impairments were



more likely to be admitted to hospital with COVID-19

Source: [Are older people with disabilities neglected in the COVID-19 pandemic? \(ids.ac.uk\)](#)

Disabled people's death rate from COVID-19 was



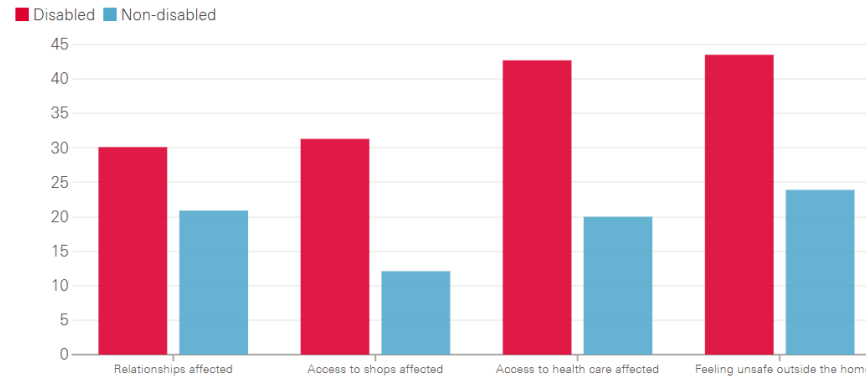
higher than the general population

(ONS 2 March to 14 July 2020)

Source: [Sara Rotenberg: We need equitable access to the covid-19 vaccine for disabled people - The BMJ](#)

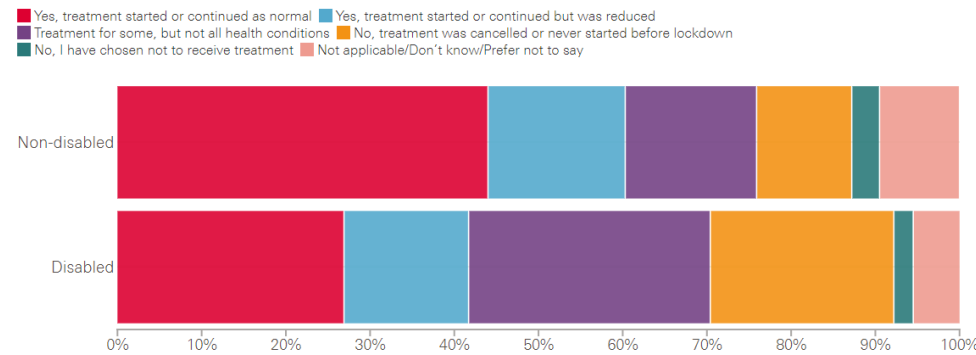
Disabled people are more likely to report that COVID-19 restrictions have had a negative impact on their lives

Share of adults reporting social impacts, by disability status: UK, September 2020



Disabled people are more likely to report that their medical treatment has been disrupted during the pandemic

Access to the same level of medical care for any long-term mental or physical health condition, problem or illness since the COVID-19 outbreak, Great Britain, 24 September to 4 October 2020



(Source: [The forgotten crisis: exploring the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on disabled people - The Health Foundation](#))

Views on COVID vaccinations amongst disabled people in the UK:

Disabled people were more likely than non-disabled people to worry about the effect of the COVID vaccine on an existing health condition (19% for disabled, 7% for non-disabled)

and thinking it will not be safe (29% for disabled, 24% for non-disabled);

but they are less worried than non-disabled people about side-effects (25% worry about side-effects, 35% non-disabled).

Source: [ONS survey](#)

People with physical disabilities – Barriers to COVID vaccination and strategies to overcome them

“Reasonable adjustments are not happening, as staff don't know the needs until people arrive.”

“It is hard for disabled people to get to Vaccine Centres.”

“We shouldn't be 'fixing' our environment, we need to create an inclusive environment to support everybody.”



Barriers

[The lived experience of disabled people during the COVID-19 pandemic - GOV.UK](#) presented the perceptions and lived experiences of a group of disabled people during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research found that COVID-19 magnified social inequalities and injustices experienced by many disabled people.

- The pandemic exposed and exacerbated the existing inequalities, including physical and social barriers, experienced by disabled people
- Disabled people felt particularly vulnerable when receiving social and healthcare services during the pandemic
- The actions mandated by the government, aimed at stemming the spread of COVID-19, have given some disabled people the impression that their needs do not matter
- Many disabled people found the changing rules around COVID-19 difficult to understand and follow across different areas of their lives



Strategies



There is a need for an inclusive, accessible, and clear set of responses to the pandemic, and to future health and social care, grounded in disabled people's experiences



Adopt a consistent approach to the identification [of information and communication needs, where they relate to a disability](#), impairment or sensory loss. Ensure information is fact based, easy to understand and culturally competent



There is a need to look at whole vaccination journey for the person – from booking to post vaccine - carer availability, transport, wheelchair access



Involve disabled people and disabled support groups in planning and decision making relating to vaccination centres



Work with disability groups over the longer term to build trust and confidence in health and public health systems

YOU are key

Evidence indicates that there is greater trust, and that **vaccine uptake is higher in campaigns conveyed by healthcare professionals**.

This is especially true for addressing those who have had less access to health services, and where the **healthcare professionals are representative of the communities** that they are talking to.

If you are yourself worried about the vaccine, do speak to your GP or colleagues for further information and reassurance.

Preparation is key

It may feel like a big responsibility to support people but reading all the trusted resources available to you will help you feel more confident about the topic.

Have information to hand: Create your own resource pack, with FAQs, model Q&As and key messages, so you feel prepared. The resources [here](#) can support your conversations.

Use trusted community or cultural spaces, if you can, such as schools, community centres, ethnic food stores, food banks, Saturday schools, places of worship or take an opportunistic moment with your patients and allot enough time to have the conversation. Choose somewhere where you are both comfortable.

Work closely with local influencers such as community and faith leaders, utilising them as facilitators to bridge the gap and build trust by using their networks to reach their communities.

Active listening and open questions are key

Making Every Contact Count – it takes people **at least three instances of communications** before they begin to process information.

Start the conversation with open questions such as “How do you feel about the vaccination?” or “Are you happy to have a chat about the vaccine?” and remember that people have the right to refuse your advice.

Make time to listen, understand real concerns and focus on **providing evidence-based information** and answers to questions for people to make an informed decision, rather than ‘pushing’ the vaccine.

Help find solutions to barriers: Ask if there is a practical reason stopping them from attending an appointment to have the vaccine and support them to find solutions.

Planting the seed: If people continue to be hesitant, provide information and resources to help them make their own decision.

Don’t know: Never be afraid to say “I don’t know.” Tell them you will find the information out and get back to them.



Key COVID vaccine information and useful resources



What are the benefits of COVID vaccinations?

Vaccination allows you to develop immunity in a safe and controlled way, without being ill with COVID-19 and passing it onto others.

COVID vaccines:

- protect against serious illness, **hospitalisation and death** - people who are [unvaccinated are up to eight times more likely to be hospitalised](#) with COVID-19
- reduce **the likelihood of you getting COVID-19**
- reduce the risk of **spreading COVID-19** to others, including people who are more vulnerable
- **strongly recommended in pregnancy** as this is the best way to protect against the known risks of COVID-19 in pregnancy for both women and babies, including admission of the woman to intensive care and premature birth of the baby
- reduce the risk of **developing Long COVID** – a [UK study](#) of double-vaccinated adults showed a 41% lower likelihood of reporting Long COVID than unvaccinated people

Even if you have already had COVID-19, getting the **COVID vaccine will give you extra protection, stimulating a stronger and longer lasting immune response** than natural infection, which will help against any future new variants.

For those who have yet to take up their first or second dose, it is never too late to come forward – every dose counts.



Are the COVID vaccines safe?

- **Billions of people have been safely vaccinated** against COVID-19 around the world .
- Like all medicines and vaccines, the COVID vaccines underwent **extensive and rigorous multi-stage testing** through clinical trials.
- The COVID vaccines are **continually monitored** for safety and effectiveness. In the UK this is done by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA).
- Serious adverse reactions and **side effects** are [extremely rare](#) and are investigated. Remember that COVID-19 disease itself can cause serious complications in the short term and Long COVID.
- **COVID vaccines were tested** on tens of thousands of men and women from different ethnic backgrounds and there **is no evidence** any of the vaccines **will work differently in different ethnic groups**.
- COVID vaccines do not contain the live virus that causes COVID-19 and can be **used by everybody**, including immunocompromised individuals or people with autoimmune disease.



How to book a COVID-19 vaccination appointment

Anyone aged 16 or over can book their first, second and booster (or third dose)



[appointment online on the NHS website](#)

Or by calling 119

119

You need to be [registered with a GP](#) to book an appointment online

If you are not registered with a GP you can get a COVID vaccination at a [pop-up centre](#), where there are no ID checks and your immigration status is not relevant.

More information and support

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccine – NHS](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination guides – UKHSA – translations and easyread available](#)
- [Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines - WHO](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine questions - British Society for Immunology](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccine resource links – MECC](#)
- [MECC – Short COVID vaccine conversations](#)
- [COVID-19 fertility and pregnancy - public – RCOG](#)
- [COVID-19 vaccination and pregnancy – for professionals – RCOG](#)