



Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey

2020-21

Research briefing





Introduction

The Annual Disability and Activity Survey was launched in 2019 to provide a greater understanding about disabled people's attitudes towards and involvement in sport and physical activity. Now, in its second year, the survey plays a crucial role. It helps to uncover the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on disabled people's motivations and ability to be active.

This year, additional questions were added to understand the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on disabled people's attitudes towards and involvement in physical activity.

It complements Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey with greater detail on perceptions, experiences and issues of importance to disabled people. Active Lives is the authoritative source of data on activity levels and participation, and can be found at sportengland.org.uk.

The survey was conducted by IFF Research from June to September 2020. Almost 2,000 disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16+ took part. In this study, we define a disabled person as

anyone who has a long-term health condition, impairment or illness that has a substantial effect on normal daily activities.

The findings provide robust insight to Activity Alliance and the wider sector. They will support organisations to help embed inclusive practice and change perceptions toward disabled people being active.

This document will take you through a summary of the report's key findings. The full report, including a detailed executive summary is available on our website:

activityalliance.org.uk/research.

Summary of findings before COVID-19

Survey respondents were asked to consider their experience before the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings show that inactivity levels among disabled people were decreasing and perceptions were improving.



Fewer disabled people were inactive (doing less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week).

2019	2020
41%	34%



More disabled people felt they had the opportunity to be as physically active as they wanted to be.

2019	2020
40%	58%



Fewer disabled people felt that their impairment affected their ability to be active 'a lot'.

2019	2020
81%	77%



More disabled people agreed 'physical activity and exercise is for people like them.'

2019	2020
51%	57%



Motivations to be active are changing, with disabled people more likely to take part to relax, have something to do, and to socialise.

Taking part to:	2019	2020
Relax	23%	28%
Have something to do	17%	23%
Socialise	13%	19%

These findings suggest strategies and interventions that support disabled people to be active were making a difference.



Summary of COVID-19 pandemic impact

Our Annual Disability and Activity Survey shows COVID-19 is having a significant impact on disabled people, their lives and their ability to be active:

The pandemic has made disabled people feel that they do not have the opportunity to be as active as they want to be compared to non-disabled people.

Disabled people	Non-disabled people
29%	44%

More than double the number of disabled people felt coronavirus **greatly reduced their ability** to do sport, exercise or physical activity compared to non-disabled people.

Disabled people	Non-disabled people
27%	13%

Almost a quarter of disabled people felt they had **not received enough information about how to be active** during the pandemic.

Disabled people	Non-disabled people
23%	13%

The pandemic has presented disabled people with new barriers to being active, which disabled people are more likely to experience than non-disabled people. These include:

	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
The need to self-isolate at home	38%	13%
A fear of contracting the virus	35%	13%
Impact on health	31%	13%
Concerns about social distancing	29%	20%

Disabled people are also less able to exercise at home due to a:

	Disabled people	Non-disabled people
Lack of space	23%	18%
Lack of support from family and friends	16%	5%



We asked disabled people how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected them

Many disabled people told us how being less active has impacted their lives:

Making it harder to manage their health condition or impairment:

“ I’ve found that having to remain at home for months on end has reduced my overall stamina. I find every step painful because of my sacroiliac joints and sitting at home since lockdown with nowhere to go has made my bones and muscles weaker and more painful. ”

Person with mobility impairments and long-term pain

“ I live in a very small one bed flat so it is very difficult to get any exercise. In addition to cancer I have arthritis and a bad back. I do some small exercises but I don’t have room to do much. Having to change direction every two or three steps does not do my back any good. I would like some help with exercise, the sort of stuff available online is too strenuous. ”

Person with mobility impairment

Making them lonely and socially isolated:

“ I am shielding and it is affecting my mental health and making it worse. My depression is getting really bad and my anxiety and panic attacks are increasing. Because of this, it starts off my asthma and so I am using my inhalers more often. ”

Person with mental health condition and breathing condition

“ I’ve gone from dancing five nights a week, down to just walking two miles a day. I don’t see any of my friends or family. I’m ready to give up because the future looks so scary. I don’t even know who we’re supposed to ask for help or advice now. ”

Person with mental health condition

Negatively impacting their mental health:

“ I haven’t been able to be as active which can make my nerve pain worse and it has really affected my mental health as I already had depression. ”

Person with long-term pain and mental health condition

“ I cannot take any frustration out at the gym and I am too insecure to exercise outside. I struggle to sometimes get out of bed, there’s nothing to do. ”

Person with learning impairment

“ All my activities, enriching and exercise, have been cancelled. Mental health has been impacted by a sense of helplessness. ”

Person with hearing and mobility impairment



Recommendations

In response to the findings, Activity Alliance has identified five recommendations with action points to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on disabled people's activity levels.

We know that the sport and physical activity sector is experiencing unprecedented challenges. However, it is important that disabled people are still supported to be as active as they want to be. We must ensure that inclusive practice and meeting the needs of disabled people are part of the response to this crisis.

These recommendations will help to continue the positive progress that was being made toward reducing the fairness gap between disabled and non-disabled people's activity levels.

1. Provide clear and consistent information about being active:



Disabled people need consistent and clear information to support them to be active. Information needs to be available in different formats and delivered through a range of communication channels. Use our **inclusive communications guidance** to create and promote your information in an accessible way.

2. Embed inclusive practice into opportunities as they recover:



Providers must put inclusion at the heart of their recovery plans and deliver activities that are appealing and accessible for disabled people. As leaders in inclusion and organisational improvement, Activity Alliance has a range of resources outlining the value of inclusion and how to embed it in practice.

Visit our COVID-19 page to find out more.

3. Work collaboratively to address new challenges arising from COVID-19:



More collaboration across sport, health, social and community services is needed to promote physical activity, and address the challenges that many disabled people face to being active. We need to draw on the expertise and experience of organisations who have already implemented successful and inclusive responses to COVID-19.

Visit our active at home page for examples.

4. Offer a variety of ways to be active:



Disabled people should have access to different types of physical activities that appeal to their motivations and values. Offer online and in-person activities (when possible) with clear guidance on how the activities are safe and accessible. Read our **'Reopening Activity: An inclusive response' resource guidance** to find out more.

5. Change attitudes towards disabled people in sport and activity:



Sport and physical activity at all levels should be a positive experience for disabled people. Challenging perceptions around health and impairments among disabled people, the wider public and providers is crucial to ensuring disabled people feel truly included in all active environments. Embed our **Ten Principles (developed from our 'Talk to Me research')** to reassure, show and include disabled people in activities.

Visit www.activityalliance.org.uk/annual-survey to read more about the findings and our recommendations.



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**This document is also available in Word format.
Please contact us if you need more support.**

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Activity Alliance is the operating name
for the English Federation of Disability Sport.
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