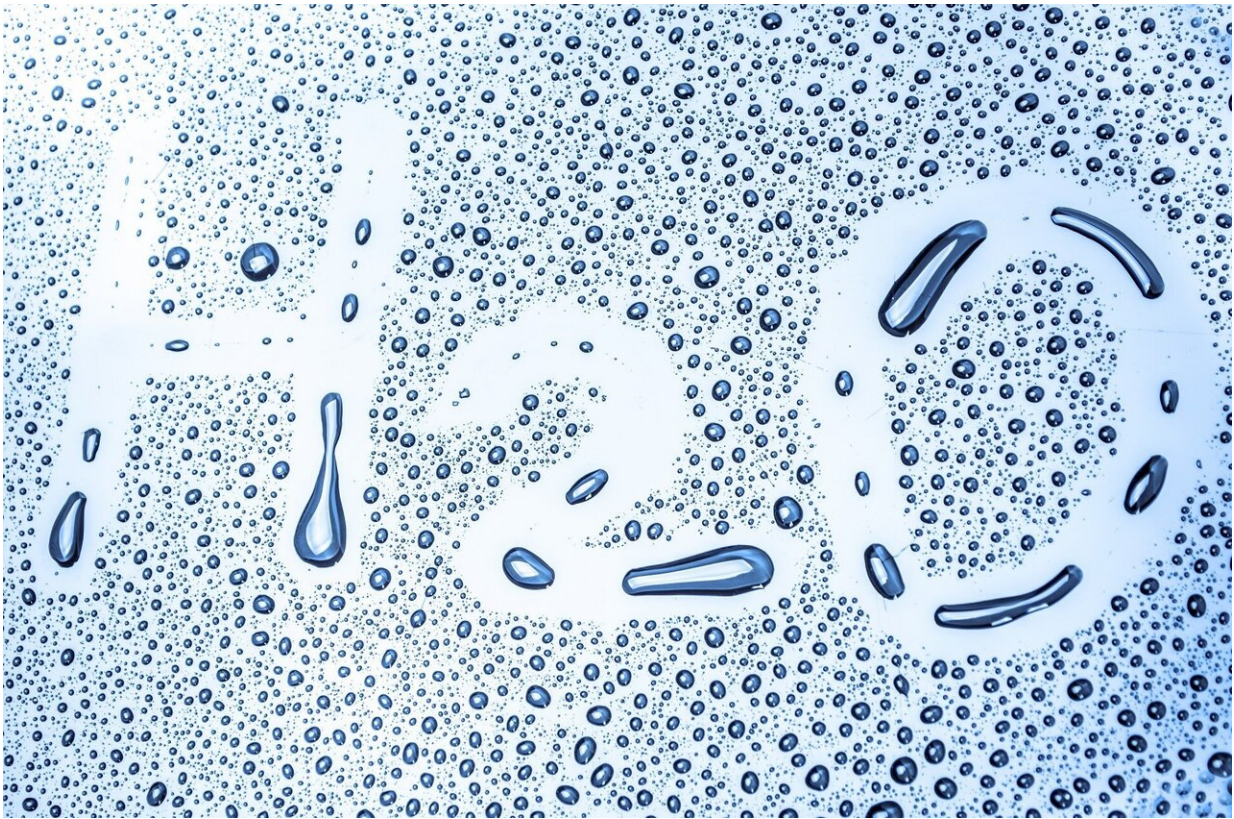


# Coronavirus lockdown caused dramatic changes in water consumption, research finds

November 11 2020, by Joe Stafford

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New research has found that the coronavirus lockdown led to dramatic changes in water consumption in England and Wales, and that some of these are likely to continue even after the pandemic.

In conjunction with Artesia, a team from the University of Manchester's Department of Geography and the Sustainable Consumption Institute led by Cecilia Alda Vidal examined [water](#) use in both indoor and outdoor domestic spaces, focusing on changes in personal routines and schedules, ways of spending free time, hygiene, and the implications these hold for household [water consumption](#) at present as well as predictions for the future.

The research involved evidence of changes in water demand, an assessment of news articles, reports and journal articles, and online focus group discussions with members of the public.

They found that people having to work from home has relocated [water consumption](#) from [public spaces](#) such as offices and gyms to the home. In addition, peak times of water use have changed, as people have more flexible schedules, water-intensive routines such as showering are undertaken at different times throughout the day instead of first thing in the morning before commuting to their workplaces.

They also discovered that people adopted water-intensive practices at the start of the lockdown period in a bid to protect themselves from COVID-19 infection, which included the washing of groceries, more frequent cleaning of clothes and more intensive personal hygiene. However, most of these practices have faded as people have become accustomed to living with the virus.

Outdoor water consumption has also changed, with a huge rise attributed to increased usage of domestic gardens. These spaces became much more important to people during lockdown as they were unable to take part in [leisure activities](#) outside the home, and became vital for people's mental health as their key connection with nature.

As lockdown restrictions have become less strict and leisure activities

have restarted, gardens have continued to be important spaces for families and friends to gather safely without needing to go indoors. Interestingly, the research has also found a big increase in people growing their own food in their gardens—whereas previously, the vast majority of Brits just used ornamental plants.

"As people slowly return to their pre-coronavirus routine, it is likely that water intensive hygiene practices are likely to reduce. However, many people are expected to continue working from home post-COVID-19, which will result in long-term changes in domestic [water use](#) patterns such as taking longer showers throughout the day and the increased use of gardens," says Cecilia Alda Vidal. "Our study highlights the different meanings and values water has for people during an event of crisis, such as the current pandemic, from delivering public health, to supporting mental well-being or sustaining spaces to host our social lives. Recognizing and understanding these dynamics is important if the water sector—both businesses and governments—wants to plan for more sustainable water futures."

Provided by University of Manchester

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