

People in deprived areas 3 times more likely to use public transport for essential travel

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Credit: Chris Guy , source: [Flickr](#)

People living in the most deprived areas of England and Wales were significantly more likely to use public transport and make more visits to essential shops during the second lockdown compared to those in the

wealthiest areas, finds the UCL COVID-19 Virus Watch study.

The UCL Virus Watch study began recruiting in June 2020 and now involves 45,861 people of all ages from 22,488 households across England and Wales. The team of researchers analyzed self-reported data from participants provided from June 2020 to January 2021 and also found that there was no difference in the likelihood of undertaking non-essential activities between the least and most deprived areas.

Professor Robert Aldridge (UCL Institute of Health Informatics), Co-Chief Investigator of the Virus Watch Health Equity Study, said: "Higher levels of COVID-19 disease and infection in [poorer areas](#) are connected to the social and economic circumstances that constrain people's options.

"People living in the most deprived areas are less likely to be able to work from home and are more reliant on public transport which puts them at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19. This is likely to be driving the higher rates of COVID-19 in the most deprived areas of the country.

"The threefold difference in public transport use we've seen in the second lockdown is particularly stark and likely reflects differences in car ownership. The increased number of visits to essential shops like grocery stores may reflect a diminished ability to buy in bulk or shop online due to less disposable weekly income."

Other key findings from this wave of data that were obtained between June 2020 and January 2021, include:

- The new COVID-19 variant of concern (B.1.1.7) does not appear to cause differences in symptoms to the original variant
- Compared to adults, symptoms are a poor predictor of

COVID-19 infection in children—who are less likely to develop cough, fever and loss of smell or taste

The researchers found that [symptom](#) profiles of COVID-19 were similar in hotspots where the new variant was common, as they were in areas where it was more uncommon. The findings show that most symptomatic adults were likely to have one of the defined COVID-19 symptoms when tested by Test and Trace and that this did not change for those with the new variant.

Professor Andrew Hayward (UCL Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care) said: "Our findings show COVID-19 is harder to spot in children as they are less likely to have the Test and Trace defined symptoms and it is harder to distinguish the virus from other illnesses in children than it is in adults on the basis of symptoms alone.

"In the first wave of the pandemic people living in the poorest areas were more than twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as people in the richest areas. Our data shows that during lockdown, people in more deprived areas were more likely to leave their household to travel to work in shared cars or on public transport than people in wealthier areas. If we want to bring down COVID-19 infection rates faster and reduce inequalities in deaths, we need to provide better [financial support](#) enabling people in lower income groups to stay at home during lockdowns and to self-isolate when ill or in contact with other cases."

Between 24 November 2020 and 01 December 2020, researchers found that compared to people in the least deprived areas of England and Wales, those living in the most deprived areas were 318% more likely to have used [public transport](#).

Provided by University College London

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