

FACTSHEET

COVID-19 and physical activity

The primary role of the Institute of Public Health is to inform public policy to support healthier populations in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

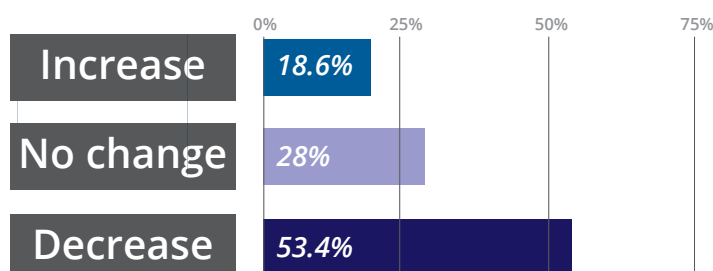
The Institute is currently assisting the Departments of Health, North and South, with evidence review and policy development on the impact of Covid-19 and related Public Health and Social Measures (PHSM) on population health.

KEY FACTS:

- 1 Being physically active is one of the most important steps that people of all ages can take to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 2 Physical inactivity is one of the leading risk factors for overweight, obesity, non-communicable diseases and chronic conditions.
- 3 The measures introduced to contain the spread of COVID-19 present challenges to maintaining a physically active lifestyle, particularly for older adults.
- 4 Keeping active can help to maintain our physical health and help reduce the feelings of stress and anxiety.
- 5 For current and future population health children should be given the opportunity to be as active as possible. Patterns of physical activity can transition from childhood into adulthood.
- 6 Measures introduced during the pandemic mean that many older adults are spending more time at home. This may result in a lot of time sitting, reclining or lying down - leading to an increased risk of chronic health conditions.
- 7 Emerging evidence suggests older adults reduced their level of physical activity during the pandemic. More than half of people aged 70+ in Ireland reported their frequency of exercise had decreased since COVID-19 restrictions were introduced (CSO, 2020).
- 8 In Ireland, over 40% of those aged 35-44 reported doing more exercise when COVID-19 measures were introduced. Nearly 50% of those aged 45-54 also reported doing more exercise than previously (CSO 2020).
- 9 In Northern Ireland 19% of people aged 65+ say they are exercising outdoors to help them cope with staying at home and 13% are exercising indoors. This compares to 50% exercising outdoors and 62% indoors in the age group 16-44 (NISRA 2020).
- 10 Many physical activity programmes have moved online, but it is important to recognise there is a clear digital divide as to whether people can access these resources. In Northern Ireland, just 54% of people aged 65+ use the internet compared to 98% by those aged under 50 (NISRA 2018).

Change in frequency of exercise by age - Republic of Ireland

When COVID-19 measures were introduced the biggest change in exercise habits was in the **70+ age group**



Change in frequency of exercise in the 70+ age group

Source: CSO, 2020

This briefing provides a summary of evidence relating to COVID-19 and physical activity.

This briefing series is a 'snapshot' based on a review of available evidence at the time of writing. The briefings will be routinely reviewed and periodically dated.

Updated October 2020. View more at publichealth.ie

Overall, supporting people to maintain physical activity is important to a population's physical and mental health.

Remember some activity is better than none, try to move more, and make a start today – it is never too late.

"... at a time like this, it's very important for people of all ages and abilities to be as active as possible."

World Health Organization

For more information: www.publichealth.ie