

# 3

## Changes to everyday activities in response to COVID-19 restrictions

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# 3

## Changes to everyday activities in response to COVID-19 restrictions

### Key Findings

- There is a high level of compliance with Government advice in relation to COVID-19, with a large majority of the participants engaging in protective behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Eighty percent of the over-60s are adhering to social distancing guidelines, 98% are washing their hands more frequently than before and 74% report wearing a protective face mask when outside.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the social behaviour of adults aged 60 years and older. Sixty-nine percent of participants report leaving the house less often than before, and 53% report doing grocery shopping less often than before as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 62% of participants report not travelling to visit family members at all, and 80% not to visit friends, since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Older women report higher levels of changed behaviours in response to Government recommendations compared to men.
- Adults aged 60-69 report higher levels of changed behaviours in different settings (at work, in outdoor places and indoor public places) compared to adults aged 70 and older.
- National television is rated the most trusted source for COVID-19 information, followed by the Health Service Executive website and the official Irish government website.
- A large majority of participants report getting up-to-date news on COVID-19 from national television (72%) and national radio (61%), while two fifths of participants report getting news from Irish newspapers (39%) and other television stations (37%).
- With respect to understanding Government guidance on COVID-19, half of people over 60 years find it extremely easy to understand (51%) and 39% find it very or somewhat easy to understand.
- Only 27% of adults aged 60 and over report that their level of knowledge on COVID-19 is extremely good, while 54% consider their level of knowledge somewhat good.

### 3.1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has required dramatic changes to the everyday activities of older adults, as well as the adoption of new hygiene practices. As we approach a year since a lockdown was first announced, and more than a year since identification of the novel coronavirus, we are advised to continue to adhere to the guidelines introduced in the initial response to the pandemic in March 2020. It therefore remains critical that we have information on the extent of behavioural changes among older adults. While other chapters in this report examine the effect these changes have on people's wellbeing, here we describe some of the changes older adults have made to their daily activities, as well as compliance with relevant recommended hygiene practices. We also provide information on the news and other media from which adults aged 60 years and over get information on COVID-19, as well as their levels of trust in these sources.

Behavioural change and compliance with public health guidance and restrictions have formed an important part of every national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Survey research published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicates that there has been a high level of compliance with Government restrictions in Ireland in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, with 80.6% and 59.9% of participants aged 16+ indicating high levels of compliance for the month of April and June 2020, respectively. (1) A cross-sectional survey of adults in the United Kingdom noted that participants reported taking at least one preventive measure against COVID-19. These included washing their hands more frequently with soap (85.8%), avoiding crowded areas (56.5%) and avoiding social events (54.5%). (2) Participants' willingness to self-isolate was high across all the groups, but adoption of social distancing measures was higher for those aged seventy years and older compared to younger age groups. (2) Socioeconomic status impacted participants' ability to work from home, as those with the lowest household income were six times less likely to be able to do so. They were also three times less likely to be able to self-isolate. (2) This research indicates a high degree of self-reported behavioural change during the COVID-19 pandemic. (2) Importantly, emerging research also highlights significant differences between different sociodemographic and socioeconomic groups with respect to social distancing behaviour, ability to self-isolate and ability to work from home. (2)

Turning to information sources and COVID-19, the CSO has shown that people aged 16-59 years are accessing news from online channels more often since the initial lockdown due to COVID-19 in mid-March 2020. (3) More than three quarters (76%) of internet users report reading or downloading online news, an increase of 2% on the corresponding January 2020 figure. (3) Among the over 60s, there was a decrease in internet usage for reading or downloading news, from 70% in January 2020 to 64% in March. (3) The means

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by which older adults access news and public health information on COVID-19 is important in relation to their knowledge and understanding of Government guidelines. As we look to the near future and the roll-out of vaccinations against the virus, this information can be used to assist the vaccination programme by informing policymakers of where older adults get their health-related information and also the levels of trust they have in these sources.

## 3.2 Methodology

Here we describe in detail the questions that were asked in the survey questionnaire that are reported on in this chapter.

To capture information on the extent of changes adults aged 60 and over have made to their everyday activities, the following items were included in the TILDA COVID-19 SCQ. Participants were asked how often they did the following 13 activities since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic: go grocery shopping; travel to visit friends; travel to visit family; attend religious services outside the home; exercise at home; walk outside your home for more than 20 minutes; do hobbies, crafts, or puzzles; watch TV, Netflix, stream movies, or shows; volunteer; do garden work or home repair; read books, magazines, or newspapers (in print or online); and meet with social groups on Zoom or other online video conference sites. Each item has four response options (“Not at all” “Less often” “About the same” and “More often”).

From the beginning of the pandemic, people have been asked to follow numerous hygiene practices. The SCQ sought to collect information on the extent to which older adults adhered to guidelines on hygiene practices and other protective measures and behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Participants answered “Yes” or “No” the following five questions:

*Did you wash your hands more frequently than usual?*

*Did you use special hand sanitiser or disinfection fluids?*

*Did you pay close attention to covering coughs and sneezes?*

*Did you take any drugs or medicine as a preventative against COVID-19?*

*Did you wear a protective face mask when outside the home, around other people?*

As well as specific behaviours, participants were asked to what extent have they changed their behaviour in a number of specific settings (at home, at work, in outdoor public places, and indoor places) in response to Government recommendations on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (a lot).

Turning to information sources, participants were asked how often they read, watch or listen to news on COVID-19 on an average day, with the following possible responses: “several times a day”, “once per day”, “less than once per day” or “never”. If participants answered, “several times a day”, they were asked to indicate about how many times per day they read, watch or listen to news on COVID-19. Most participants report reading watching or listening to news on COVID-19 several times a day (61%) or once per day (34%).

As well as the frequency that participants accessed information about COVID-19, participants were also asked what information sources they listen to, read or watch for news on COVID-19, including national radio, local radio, Irish television, Irish newspapers, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, government websites and the HSE website.

The SCQ also asked about the degree to which adults aged 60 and over found official Irish Government guidance on COVID-19 easy to understand. Specifically, participants were asked “Did you find the official Irish Government guidance on COVID-19 easy to understand?” The response categories were: “extremely easy”, “somewhat easy”, “somewhat difficult” and “extremely difficult”.

The final question on information sources related to COVID-19 asked participants to rate their knowledge of COVID-19, with the following potential responses: “extremely good”, “somewhat good”, “neither good nor bad”, “somewhat bad” or “extremely bad”.

This chapter is organised into three sections. Firstly we provide a background to the chapter, outlining the current evidence on precautionary behaviours in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the older population. Next, we present data on precautionary behaviours in response to COVID-19 in the older population in Ireland, including changes to activities, compliance with social distancing guidelines, protective behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and behavioural changes due to Government recommendations. This section also presents the findings on the information sources used by participants to obtain information on COVID-19. Finally, we summarise the overall key findings from these two parts of the TILDA COVID-19 self-completion questionnaire.

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## 3.3 Results

There were full data available for 3,614 participants aged 60 years and older in this survey.

### 3.3.1 Changes to activities due to COVID-19 pandemic

Table 3.1 shows how often adults aged 60 years and older did each of these activities. The majority of participants do the following activities less often as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic: 69% report leaving the house less often than before the pandemic, and 53% report doing grocery shopping less often. Sixteen percent of adults aged 60 and older exercise at home more often than before the pandemic, while 26% went for walks outside the home for at least 20 minutes more often than previously. Nearly half of participants (44%) engage in garden and home DIY work more often since the COVID-19 pandemic. Conversely, many participants are not doing the following activities at all since the outbreak of COVID-19: travelling to visit family members (62%), travelling to visit friends (80%), attending religious services outside of the home (86%), and volunteering (81%).

Table 3.1. Changes to activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic

	Not at all		Less often		About the same		More often		N
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	
How often do you leave your home?	14	[12-16]	69	[67-61]	16	[14-17]	1	[1-2]	3243
How often do you go grocery shopping?	30	[28-32]	53	[51-55]	15	[14-17]	1	[1-2]	3223
How often do you travel to visit friends?	80	[78-82]	19	[17-20]	1	[1-2]	0	[0-1]	3223
How often do you travel to visit family?	62	[60-65]	34	[32-36]	3	[2-4]	0	[0-1]	3239
How often do you attend religious services outside of the home?	86	[85-88]	10	[9-12]	3	[2-4]	0	[0-1]	3210
How often do you exercise at home?	20	[18-22]	16	[14-17]	48	[46-50]	16	[15-18]	3182
How often do you walk outside your home for more than 20 minutes?	13	[11-14]	25	[23-26]	37	[35-39]	26	[24-28]	3243
How often do you do hobbies, crafts, or puzzles?	26	[24-28]	11	[9-12]	40	[38-42]	23	[22-25]	3207
How often do you watch TV, Netflix, stream movies, or shows?	3	[3-4]	6	[5-8]	55	[53-57]	35	[33-37]	3234
How often do you volunteer?	81	[79-82]	8	[7-9]	10	[9-11]	2	[1-2]	3117
How often do you do garden work or home repair?	14	[12-15]	7	[6-9]	35	[33-37]	44	[42-46]	3214
How often do you read books, magazines, or newspapers (in print or online)?	8	[6-9]	5	[4-6]	52	[50-54]	35	[33-37]	3226
How often do you meet with social groups on Zoom or other online video conference sites?	8	[7-9]	36	[34-38]	27	[25-28]	28	[26-30]	4897

### 3.3.2 Compliance with social distancing guidelines

Overall, there is a high degree of compliance, with 97% of older adults always or often keeping their distance from others. A higher percentage of women (89%) 'always' comply with social distancing guidelines compared to men (73%). (Table 3.2)

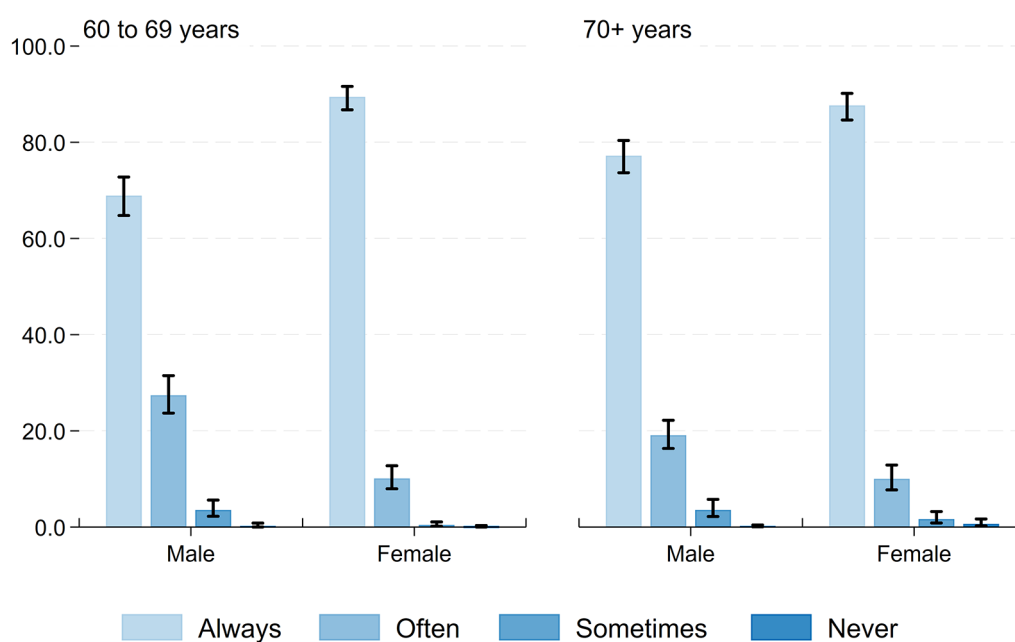
Table 3.2. Proportion of adults aged 60 years and over adhering to social distancing guidelines, by gender

	Always		Often		Sometimes		Never		N
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	
<b>60-69 years</b>									
Male	69	[65-73]	27	[24-32]	4	[2-6]	0	[0-1]	654
Female	89	[87-92]	10	[8-13]	0	[0-1]	0	[0-0]	857
<i>Total</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>[77-82]</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>[16-21]</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>[1-3]</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0-0]</i>	<i>1511</i>
<b>70+ years</b>									
Male	77	[74-80]	19	[16-22]	4	[2-6]	0	[0-0]	780
Female	88	[85-90]	10	[8-13]	2	[1-3]	1	[0-2]	918
<i>Total</i>	<i>83</i>	<i>[81-85]</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>[12-16]</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>[2-4]</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0-1]</i>	<i>1698</i>
<b>Total</b>									
Male	73	[70-76]	23	[21-26]	4	[3-5]	0	[0-0]	1434
Female	89	[87-90]	10	[8-12]	1	[1-2]	0	[0-1]	1775
<i>Total</i>	<i>81</i>	<i>[80-83]</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>[15-18]</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>[2-3]</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>[0-1]</i>	<i>3209</i>

As shown in Figure 3.1, women were more likely than men 'always' to comply with social distancing guidelines. This was true of those aged 60 to 69 and the over 70s.



Figure 3.1. Frequency of compliance with social distancing guidelines by age and gender



### 3.3.3 Protective behaviours to prevent spread of COVID-19

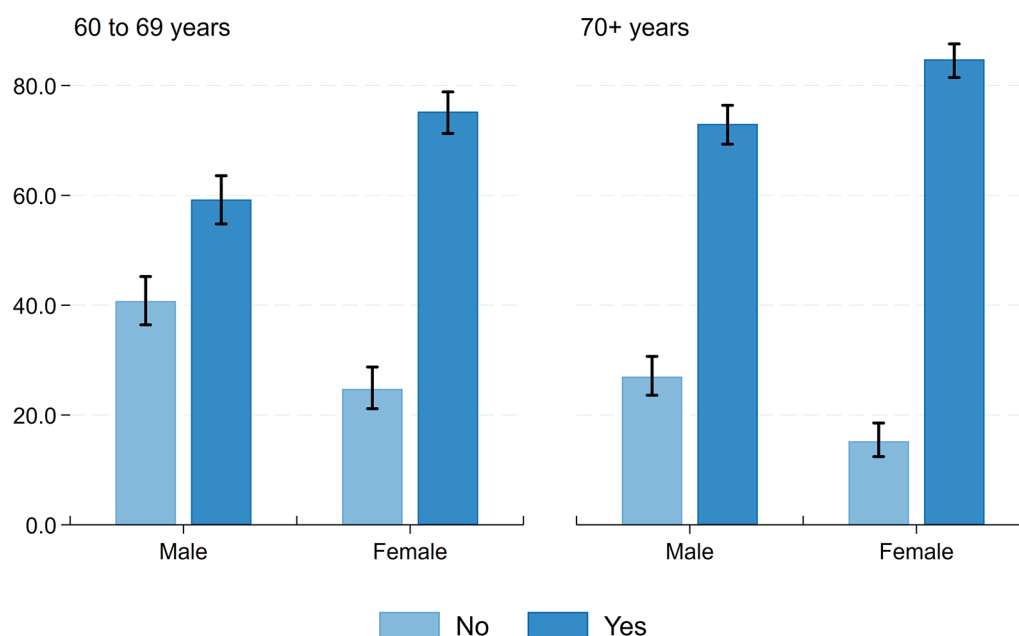
Overall, compliance with these guidelines is very high among adults aged 60 years and older. As shown in Table 3.3, nearly all participants wash their hands more frequently, use special hand sanitiser/disinfection fluid and pay close attention to covering coughs or sneezes, and just under three-quarters of participants wear a protective mask when outside among other people.

Table 3.3 Percentage of older adults practicing protective measures and behaviours to prevent the spread of COVID-19

	No		Yes		N
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	
Did you wash your hands more frequently than usual?	2	[1-2]	98	[98-99]	3277
Did you use special hand sanitiser or disinfection fluids?	8	[7-9]	92	[91-93]	3267
Did you pay close attention to coughs and sneezes?	2	[2-3]	98	[97-98]	3252
Did you take any drugs or medicine to prevent the spread as a preventative against COVID-19?	95	[94-96]	5	[4-6]	3260
Did you wear a protective face mask when outside the home, around other people?	26	[25-28]	74	[72-75]	3245

As seen in Figure 3.2, the use of a protective facemask when outside is higher among women (80%) than men (66%), and higher for adults over 70 years of age (80%) compared with those aged 60-69 (76%). The highest rate of face mask use is seen in women aged 70 years and older.

*Figure 3.2. Percentage of older adults who wear a protective face mask when outside among others, by age and gender*



### 3.3.4 Changing behaviours in response to Government recommendations

Participants were asked to what extent have they changed their behaviour at home; at work; in outdoor public places; and indoor places, in response to Government recommendations, on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (a lot). The average scores for behavioural changes across different sociodemographic groups are presented in Table 3.4. Changed behaviour within the home, in outdoor places and in indoor places is higher for women than men. On average, adults aged 60-69 years have changed their behaviours more than adults over 70 at work, in outdoor places and indoor public places. Increased rates of behavioural change associated with educational attainment are evident at work only. There were no significant differences according to urban or rural location in changes in behaviour in any of these settings.

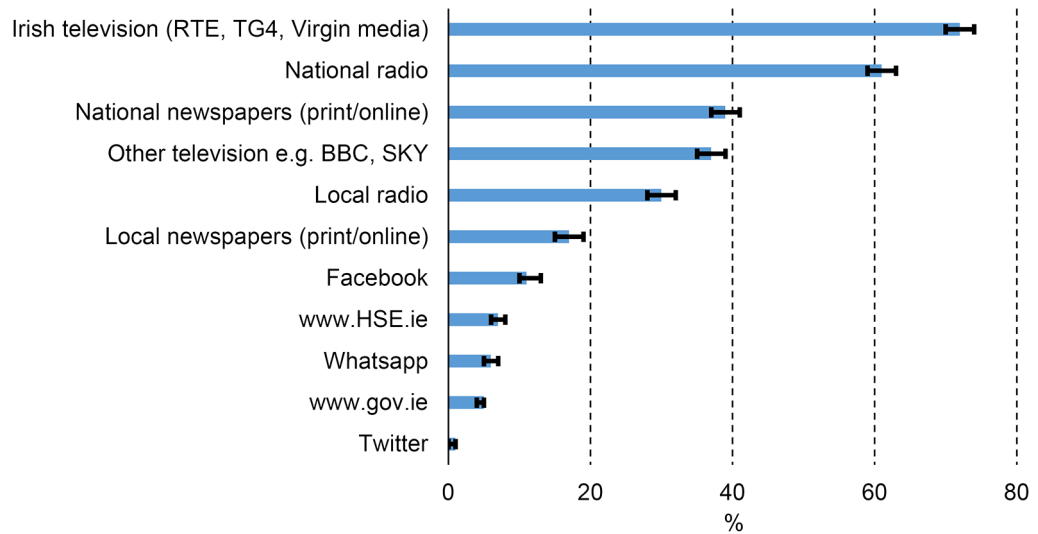
Table 3.4. Average change in behaviour (from zero to ten) at home, at work, outdoors, and indoors, by gender, age education, and location

	At home Mean (95% CI)	At work Mean (95% CI)	Indoors Mean (95% CI)	Outdoors Mean (95% CI)	N
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	6.64 (6.47, 6.80)	7.54 (7.22, 7.85)	8.53 (8.40, 8.67)	8.12 (7.97, 8.26)	1236
Female	7.07 (6.88, 7.27)	7.79 (7.28, 8.30)	8.84 (8.69, 8.99)	8.69 (8.54, 8.84)	1448
<b>Age Groups</b>					
60 to 69 years	6.97 (6.76, 7.15)	8.08 (7.82, 8.35)	8.94 (8.82, 9.06)	8.64 (8.51, 8.77)	1394
≥70 years	6.77 (6.59, 6.96)	6.43 (5.86, 7.01)	8.39 (8.21, 8.56)	8.13 (7.95, 8.31)	1290
<b>Education</b>					
Primary/none	6.90 (6.63, 7.16)	6.90 (6.27, 7.53)	8.42 (8.17, 8.67)	8.32 (8.08, 8.57)	407
Secondary	6.86 (6.69, 7.03)	7.83 (7.51, 8.15)	8.82 (8.70, 8.94)	8.45 (8.31, 8.58)	1060
Third/higher	6.84 (6.68, 7.00)	8.27 (8.00, 8.55)	8.87 (8.77, 8.97)	8.48 (8.36, 8.59)	1217
<b>Location</b>					
Urban	6.90 (6.72, 7.07)	8.16 (7.80, 8.53)	8.70 (8.55, 8.85)	8.50 (8.36, 8.64)	1541
Rural	6.83 (6.65, 7.02)	7.20 (6.84, 7.56)	8.68 (8.54, 8.82)	8.28 (8.12, 8.44)	1143
<b>Total</b>	6.90 (6.72, 7.07)	8.16 (7.80, 8.53)	8.70 (8.55, 8.85)	8.50 (8.36, 8.64)	2684

### 3.3.5 Information sources on COVID-19

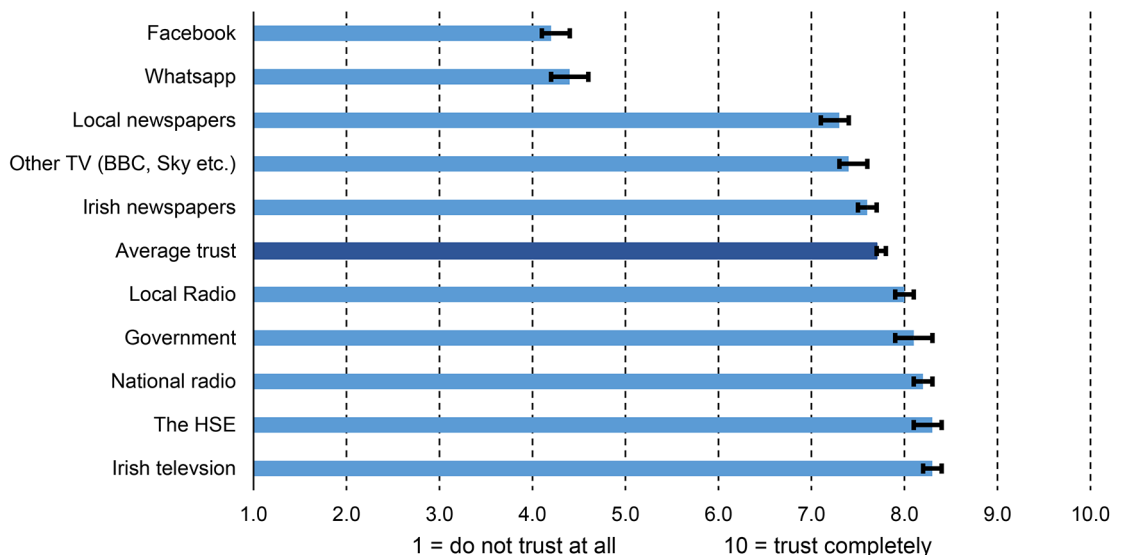
Most participants report reading, watching or listening to news on COVID-19 several times a day (61%) or once per day (34%). Regarding the most common news sources, Figure 3.3 shows that most participants get up-to-date news on COVID-19 from Irish television (72%) and national radio (61%), while two fifths of participants get news from Irish newspapers (39%) and other television stations (37%). Social media, including Facebook (11%), Twitter (1%) and WhatsApp (6%), and Government (5%) and HSE (7%) websites, are used by fewer older adults than other media.

*Figure 3.3 Percentage of adults aged 60 and older who used selected news sources during the COVID-19 pandemic*



Of the media outlets listed, the average level of trust in these news sources was 7.7 out of a maximum of 10. National television is rated the most trustworthy outlet (mean = 8.28), followed closely by the HSE website (mean = 8.26) and the official Irish Government website (mean = 8.11). Information from Facebook (mean = 4.24) and WhatsApp (mean = 4.47) are deemed to be the least trustworthy by participants (Figure 3.4).

*Figure 3.4. Level of trust on a scale selected news sources among adults aged 60 and older during the COVID-19 pandemic*



As shown in Table 3.5, the vast majority of participants find the guidance extremely easy (51%) or somewhat easy (39%) to understand, with 8% and 2% finding the information somewhat difficult or extremely difficult to understand, respectively. Differences in self-reported understanding of the Irish government guidance is seen between genders, age groups and level of education. A greater proportion of women (54%) rate government guidance as “extremely easy” compared to men (48%); those aged 60-69 (54%) compared to adults aged over 70 (48%); and those with third level education (57%) compared to adults with primary (45%) and secondary (54%) level education.

*Table 3.5. Ease that older adults understand official government guidance by gender, age, and education*

	Extremely easy		Somewhat easy		Somewhat difficult		Extremely difficult		N
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	
<b>Gender</b>									
Male	48	[44-51]	40	[37-43]	10	[8-12]	2	[1-4]	1454
Female	54	[51-57]	38	[35-41]	7	[5-8]	2	[1-3]	1791
<b>Age groups</b>									
60 to 69 years	54	[51-57]	37	[34-40]	7	[5-9]	2	[1-3]	1515
≥70 years	48	[45-51]	41	[38-43]	10	[8-12]	2	[1-3]	1730
<b>Education</b>									
Primary/none	45	[40-49]	40	[36-44]	11	[9-14]	4	[3-6]	581
Secondary	54	[51-56]	39	[36-42]	7	[5-8]	1	[0-2]	1282
Third/higher	57	[54-60]	37	[34-40]	6	[4-7]	0	[0-1]	1382
<b>Total</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>[49-53]</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>[37-41]</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>[7-10]</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>[1-3]</b>	<b>3245</b>

The final question on information sources related to COVID-19 asked participants to rate their knowledge of COVID-19. As shown in Table 3.6, most participants describe their knowledge of COVID-19 as extremely good (27%) or somewhat good (54%), with 17% percent describing their knowledge as neither good nor bad. Differences in level of knowledge are seen between genders, age groups and education levels. In those who describe their level of knowledge as extremely good, higher rates are associated with higher educational attainment in older people aged 60-69 and among women.

Table 3.6. Self-rated knowledge of COVID-19 by gender, age, and education

	Extremely good		Somewhat good		Neither good nor bad		Somewhat or extremely bad		N
	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	%	95% CI	
<b>Gender</b>									
Male	23	[21-26]	56	[53-59]	19	[17-22]	2	[0-3]	1447
Female	30	[28-33]	53	[50-56]	15	[13-18]	2	[0-3]	1793
<b>Age groups</b>									
60 to 69 years	30	[28-33]	54	[50-57]	15	[12-17]	2	[0-3]	1518
≥70 years	24	[21-26]	55	[52-58]	19	[17-22]	2	[0-3]	1722
<b>Education</b>									
Primary/none	19	[16-23]	53	[48-57]	25	[22-30]	2	[0-3]	574
Secondary	30	[27-33]	55	[52-58]	14	[12-16]	2	[0-3]	1280
Third/higher	36	[33-39]	55	[52-58]	8	[7-10]	1	[0-1]	1386
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>[25-29]</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>[52-56]</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>[15-19]</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>[0-3]</b>	<b>3240</b>

### 3.4 Discussion

Overall, participants report a very high level of compliance with Government advice in relation to COVID-19. A large majority of the over 60s are adhering to social distancing guidelines, washing their hands more frequently and wearing a protective face mask when outside among other people. Women show a greater degree of compliance in terms of using these protective measures. In general, compliance among older adults in Ireland appears to be higher than that in the United Kingdom. (2)

This chapter also shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the social behaviours of older people. Many participants are not engaging at all in certain activities such as travelling to visit family and friends, and they are not leaving their homes as often as before. Conversely, participants are gardening more and engaging more frequently in DIY at home since the outbreak. Women and older adults aged 60 to 69 show a greater level of changed behaviour in response to Government recommendations, at home, in the workplace, and in indoor and outdoor public spaces.

Irish television and the HSE website are rated as the most trusted information sources for COVID-19 information. A low number of older people use the HSE website as an information source, however, with Irish Television being the most-used source for up-date-date news on COVID-19.

The majority of adults aged 60 and over find it extremely easy to understand Government guidance on COVID-19. Overall, women and those with third level education show higher levels of understanding of Government guidance. Finally, participants have a high level of knowledge on COVID-19, with knowledge levels higher in women and in those with third level education.

In order for people to continue make the changes to their normal activities and behaviours required to limit their, and others', exposure to COVID-19, it is critical that public health messaging reaches as many people as possible and that it is easy to understand. In communicating Government guidelines like these, it is also important that trusted media are used. As we have shown in this chapter, levels of trust in media sources vary greatly, with higher trust found in traditional media sources such as national television and, conversely, very little trust in newer media such as Facebook. This information takes on even greater importance as we begin the roll-out of vaccinations. It is essential that information on vaccination for the COVID-19 virus is communicated via trusted news sources that adults aged 60 and over in particular might access for information on a vaccine. These data are of special importance as, according to the published vaccination schedule, priority will be given to people aged 65 and older in long-term care facilities, closely followed by all adults aged 70 years and older.

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