

# Social contacts in the UK from the CoMix social contact survey

## Report for survey week 74

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*Report for SPI-M-O and SAGE, 31 August 2021  
Data up to 24 August 2021*

### **Summary**

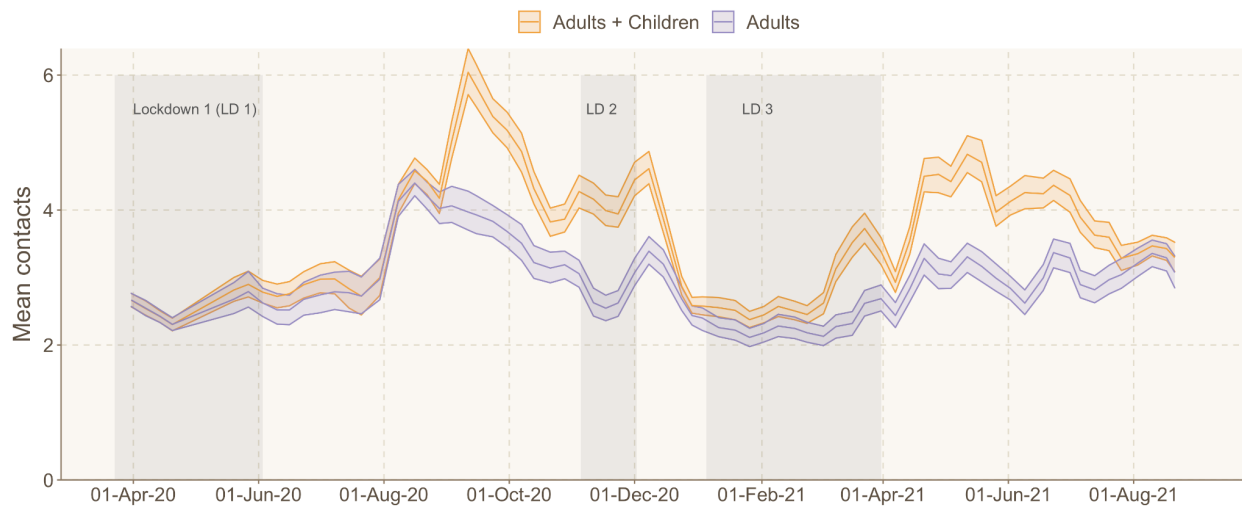
- Mean reported contacts for adults have leveled off. Overall contact rates are still considerably lower than those reported in August last year and are less than half of pre-pandemic levels.
- Reported contact rates for children are remaining consistent with past periods of school closure. In Scotland they have begun to increase as schools have started to open.
- The proportion of children and adults isolating has remained stable with adults just below and children just above 5%.
- The proportion of people wearing face-coverings in any setting appears to have leveled off at around 75% to 80%.

## Main

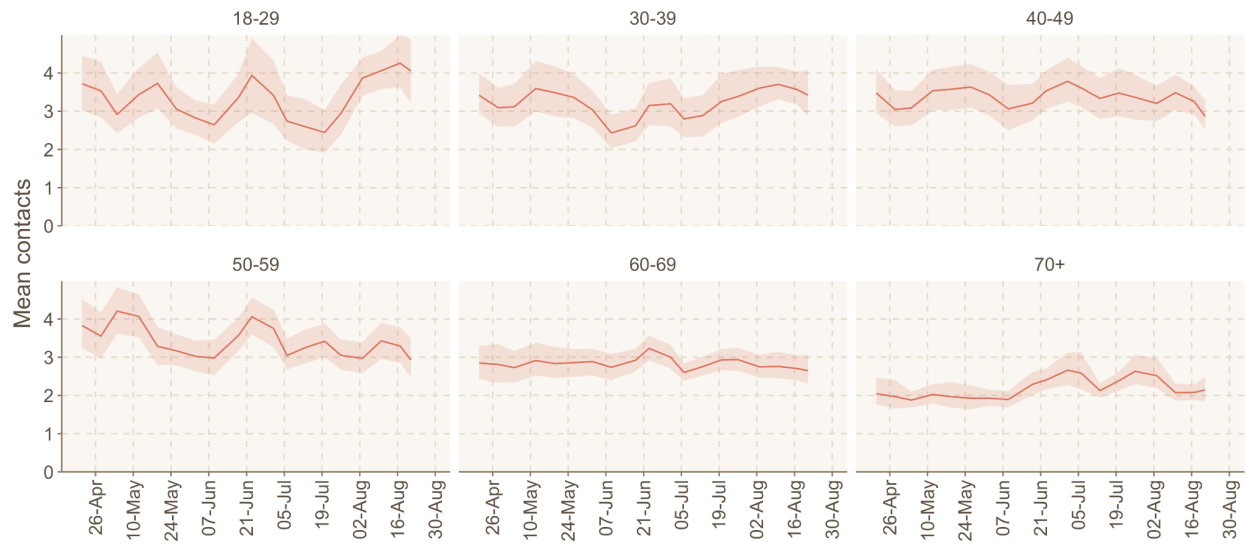
The increase in mean contacts for adults recorded over the last few weeks appears to have stabilised (Figure 1). Much of this previous increase appears to have been driven by younger adults (18-29 years old) that has appeared to have leveled off now (Figure 2). Children's contacts remain low and stable reflecting the school holidays (Figure 3). Children in Scotland, where school has started, have reported increased rates of contact (Figure 4).

The proportion of children and adults in isolation or quarantining remain stable at around 5% (Figure 5). Individuals who are isolating in most age groups report fewer contacts than those who are not (Figure 6). The difference in mean contacts for all age groups for isolating and not isolating participants is quite small (Figure 6), reflecting relatively low rates of reported contacts for those who are not isolating..

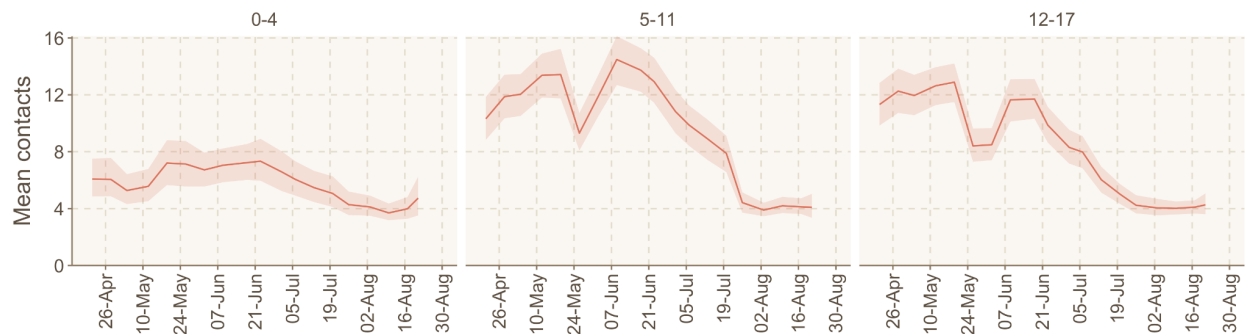
Wearing a face-covering fell since the easing of restrictions in England on July 19th and has been stable over the last few weeks. Overall levels of mask wearing remain high at around 75% to 80% for those who have at least one contact outside of the house (Figure 7).



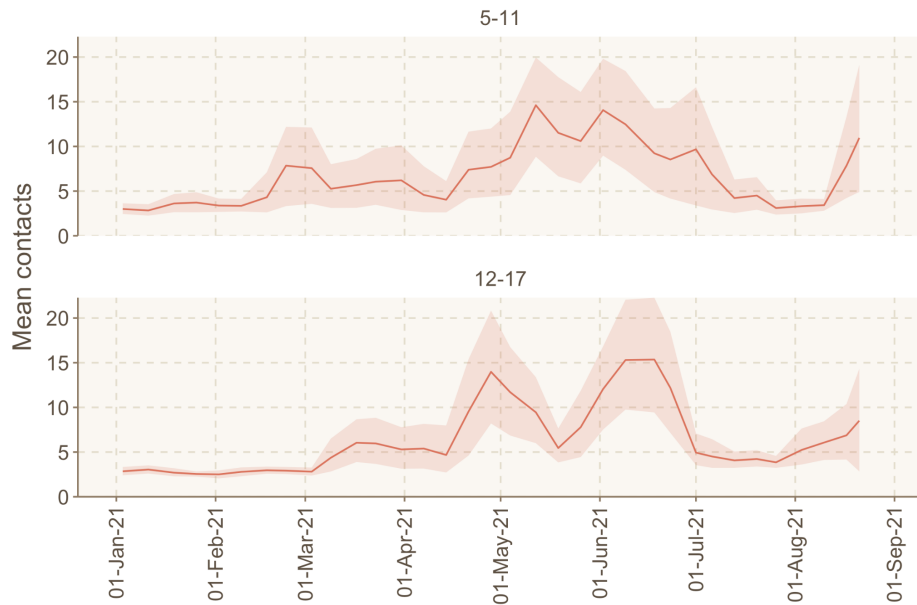
**Figure 1: Mean contacts in the UK since the 23rd March 2020 for adults and children (all participants) and adults only (18 year +).** Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.



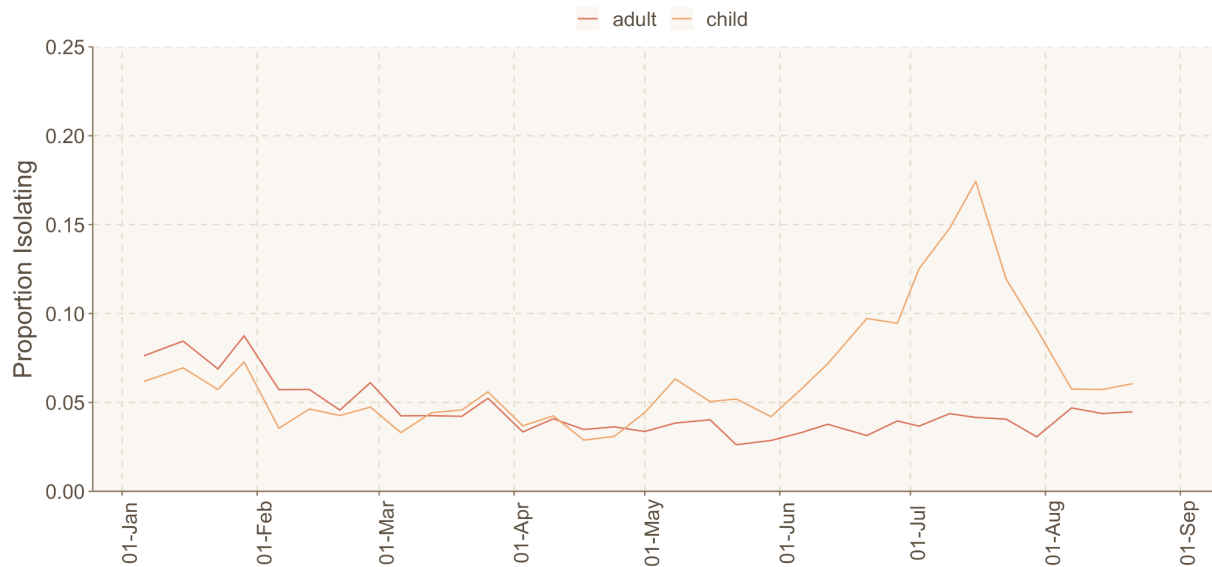
**Figure 2: Mean contacts in all settings by age-group for adults over time.** Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.



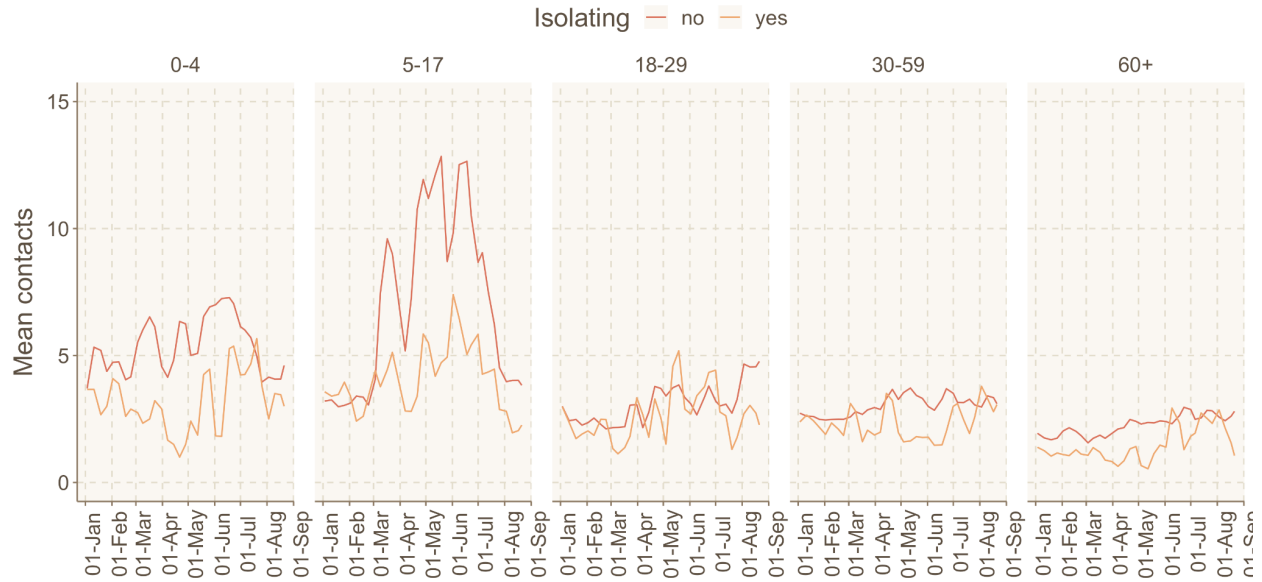
**Figure 3: Mean contacts in all settings by age-group for children over time.** Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.



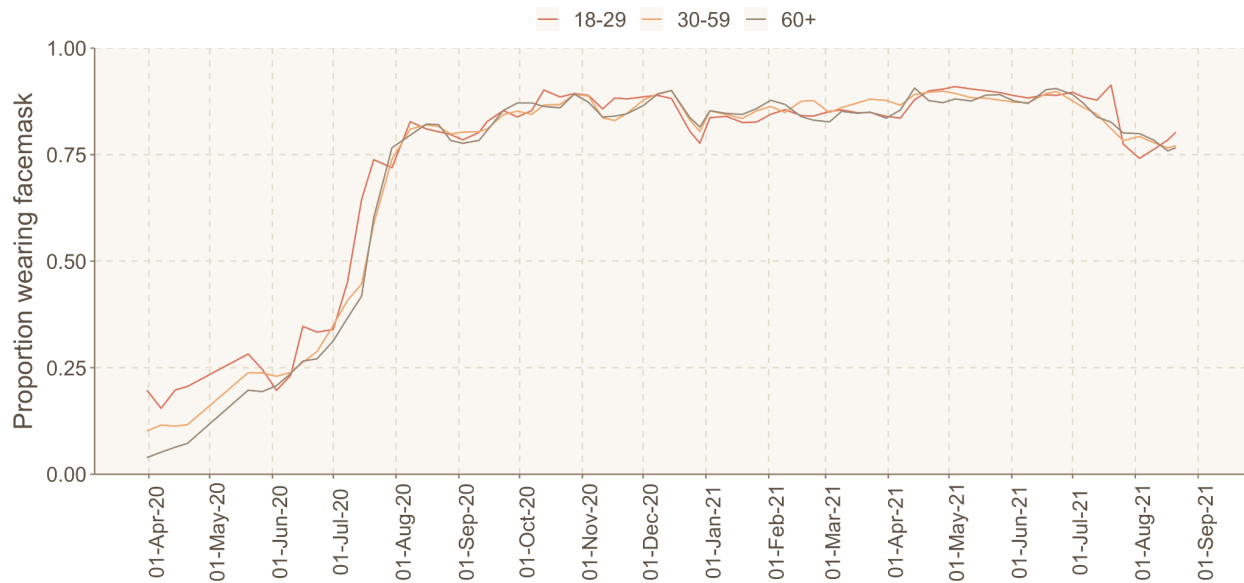
**Figure 4: Mean contacts in all settings by age-group for school-age children in Scotland over time.** Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.



**Figure 5: Proportion of sample isolating by adults and children over time in England since Jan 2021.**



**Figure 6: Mean contacts in all settings in England by age and whether participant is in isolation.** Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.



**Figure 7: Proportion of adults wearing a face mask over time (with at least one contact outside of the home).** Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects with all dates representing two rounds of data collection except for the final week, which only contains the latest survey round. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

## **Methods**

CoMix is a behavioural survey, launched on 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. The sample is broadly representative of the UK adult population. Participants are invited to respond to the survey once every two weeks. We collect weekly data by running two alternating panels. Parents complete the survey on behalf of children (17 years old or younger). Participants record direct, face-to-face contacts made on the previous day, specifying certain characteristics for each contact including the age and sex of the contact, whether contact was physical (skin-to-skin contact), and where contact occurred (e.g. at home, work, while undertaking leisure activities, etc). Further details have been published elsewhere [1]. The contact survey is based on the POLYMOD contact survey [2].

We calculated the mean contacts using 1000 bootstrap samples. Bootstrap samples were calculated at the participant level, then all observations for those participants are included in a sample to respect the correlation structure of the data. We collect data in two panels which alternate weekly, therefore we calculated the mean smoothed over the 2 week intervals to give a larger number of participants per estimate and account for panel effects. We used a post-stratification method to assign weights, based on the World Population Prospect population estimates for the UK by age and gender, when calculating the mean number of contacts. We calculated the mean number of contacts in the settings home, work and school (including all educational establishments, including childcare, nurseries and universities and colleges), and “other” (mostly leisure and social contacts, but includes shopping). We look at the mean contacts by age, country, and region of England. The mean number of contacts is influenced by a few individuals who report very high numbers of contacts (often in a work context). The means shown here are calculated based on truncating the maximum number of contacts recorded at 50 per individual per day. We compared the mean reported contacts for the most recent data of the survey to the mean contacts reported during ten time periods over the previous year which represent different levels of restrictions.

Participants were asked whether they were in isolation or quarantine on the day they reported contacts. They were also asked whether they wore a facemask on the day of reported contacts, we filtered to participants who had at least one contact outside of the home. We calculated the proportion who said yes for both these categories over those who responded.

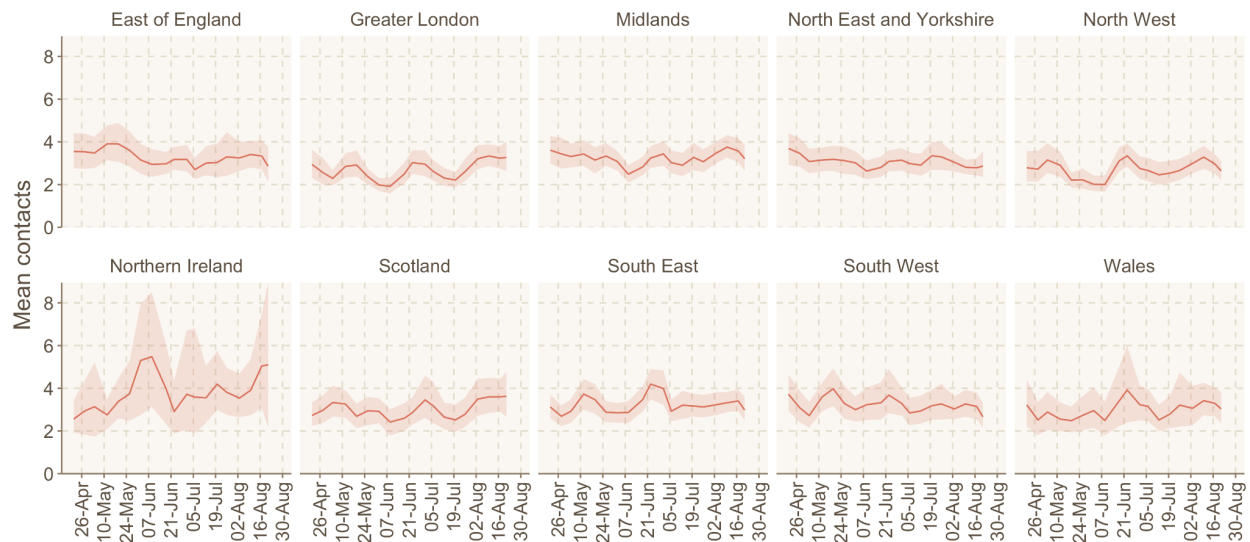
## **Funding**

Medical Research Council (MC\_PC\_19065), the European Commission (EpiPose 101003688) and the NIHR (CV220-088 - COMIX) and HPRU in Modelling & Health Economics (NIHR200908).

## References

1. Jarvis CI, Van Zandvoort K, Gimma A, Prem K, CMMID COVID-19 working group, Klepac P, et al. Quantifying the impact of physical distance measures on the transmission of COVID-19 in the UK. *BMC Med.* 2020;18: 124.
2. Mossong J, Hens N, Jit M, Beutels P, Auranen K, Mikolajczyk R, et al. Social contacts and mixing patterns relevant to the spread of infectious diseases. *PLoS Med.* 2008;5: e74.

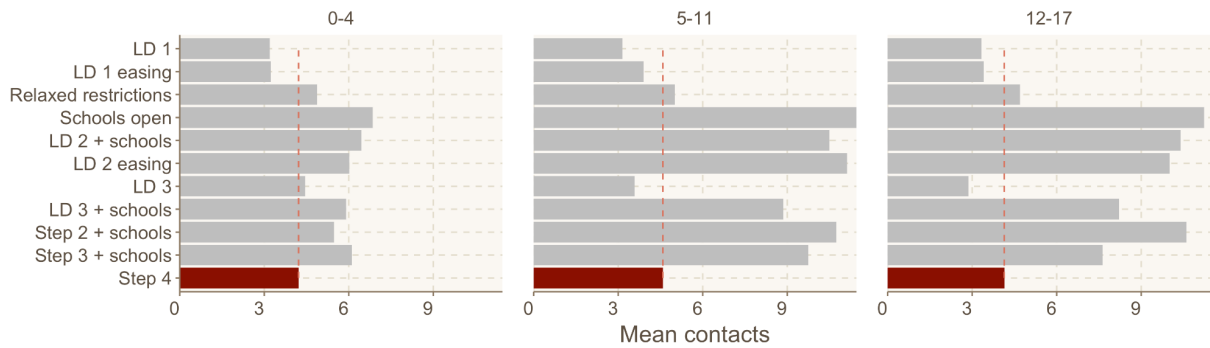
## Additional graphs



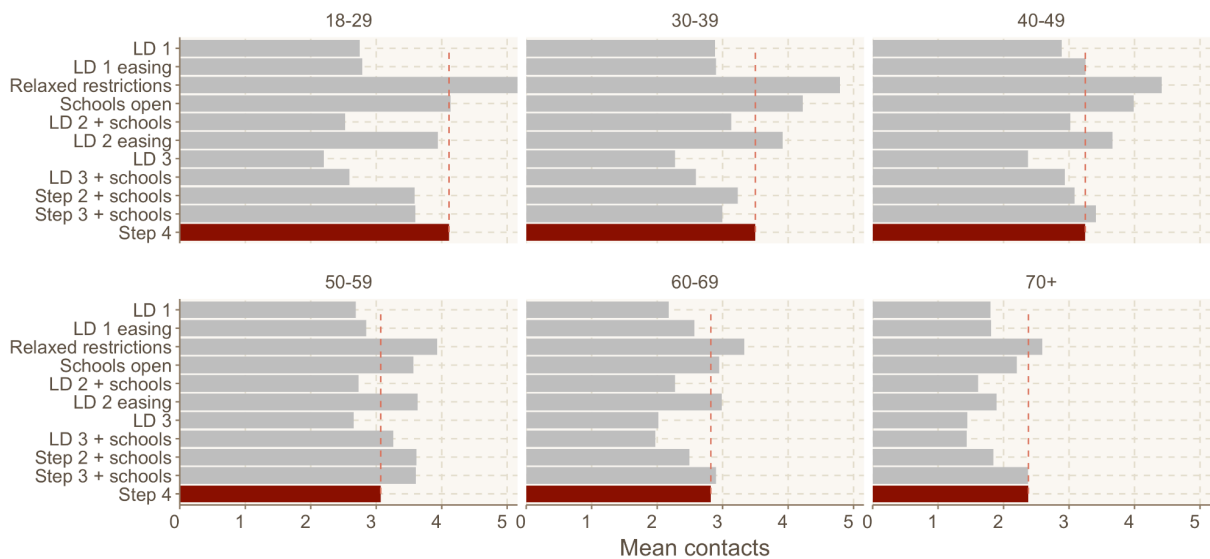
**Figure S1: Mean contacts in all settings in adults for UK nations and English regions over time.** Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

**Table S1. Time periods based on different level of lockdowns and restrictions in England over the previous year**

Period	Date	Period	Date
1. Lockdown 1 (LD 1)	24 Mar 2020 - 03 Jun 2020	7. Lockdown 3	05 Jan 2021 - 07 Mar 2021
2. Lockdown 1 easing	04 Jun 2020 - 29 Jul 2020	8. Lockdown 3 + schools	08 Mar 2021 - 31 Mar 2021
3. Relaxed restrictions	30 Jul 2020 - 03 Sep 2020	9. Step 2 + schools	16 Apr 2021 - 16 May 2021
4. School reopening	04 Sep 2020 - 24 Oct 2020	10. Step 3 + schools	30 June 2021 - 19 July 2021
5. Lockdown 2	05 Nov 2020 - 02 Dec 2020	11. Step 4	19 July 2021 - 24 August 2021
6. Lockdown 2 easing	03 Dec 2020 - 19 Dec 2020		



**Figure S2: Comparison of mean contacts from the 19 July to 24 August to ten previous time periods of different restrictions by age for children.** Current period highlighted in red with dashed line for easier comparison to previous periods.



**Figure S3: Comparison of mean contacts from the 19 July to 24 August to ten previous time periods of different restrictions by age for adults.** Current period highlighted in red with dashed line for easier comparison to previous periods.