

Social contacts in the UK from the CoMix social contact survey

Report for survey week 72

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*Report for SPI-M-O and SAGE, 17 August 2021
Data up to 10 August 2021*

Summary

- Mean reported contacts for adults have increased steadily over the past few weeks, though the overall levels of contact remain similar to those recorded in mid-April and are less than half of pre-pandemic levels.
- Older adults (60+ years) are reporting roughly the same level of contacts as they did in summer 2020. Younger adults are reporting fewer contacts than last summer, although rates in younger adults are increasing.
- Reported contact rates for children appear to have stabilised at summer holiday levels and are consistent with those recorded at the same time last year.
- The proportion of children isolating has continued to decrease and is now approaching the fraction of adults that are isolating with both close to 5%.
- The proportion of people wearing face-coverings has fallen since July 19th in all adult age groups, but appears to have now stabilised. Overall mask-wearing remains high.

Main

Reported mean contacts remain lower than the levels reported in August last year and far lower than pre-pandemic levels (around 10-11 contacts per person per day). Adult contact rates have fluctuated over the last few months and are similar to those reported in mid-April (Figure 1 & 2). There is some evidence that they may be increasing, however, particularly in younger adults (<40 years of age; Figure 2). Despite this, reported contact rates for working aged adults (18-60 years) remain lower than was recorded last summer; recorded rates for older adults (60+) are similar to those reported last summer (Figure S3).

Children's contact rates have stabilised after falling with the onset of the summer vacation period (Figures 1 and 3). Reported contact rates for children are at a similar level to last summer and at much lower levels than when schools are open (Figure S2). The average reported contact rates for adults and children is now very similar, as was the case last summer (Figure 1).

The proportion of children in isolation or quarantining has decreased considerably in the last three weeks and is now similar to the levels seen in adults with both at about 5% (Figure 4). Individuals who are isolating report fewer contacts than those who are not (Figure 5), though now that the schools are closed the difference for all age groups is quite small (Figure 5).

Wearing a face-covering fell since the easing of restrictions in England on July 19th and was stable over the last two weeks, though overall levels remain high (Figure 6). The more rapid drop in face-covering use in young adults (18-29 year olds) is still present after including a greater number of 18-29 years olds in our sample (Figure 6).

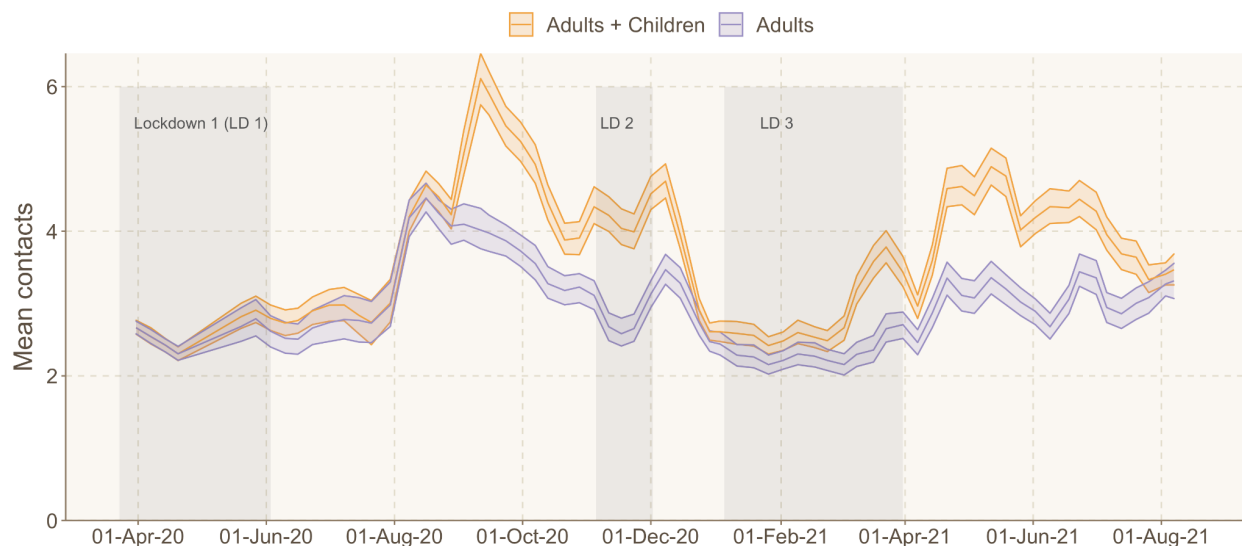


Figure 1: Mean contacts in the UK since the 23rd March 2020 for adults and children (all participants) and adults only (18 year +). Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping.

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.

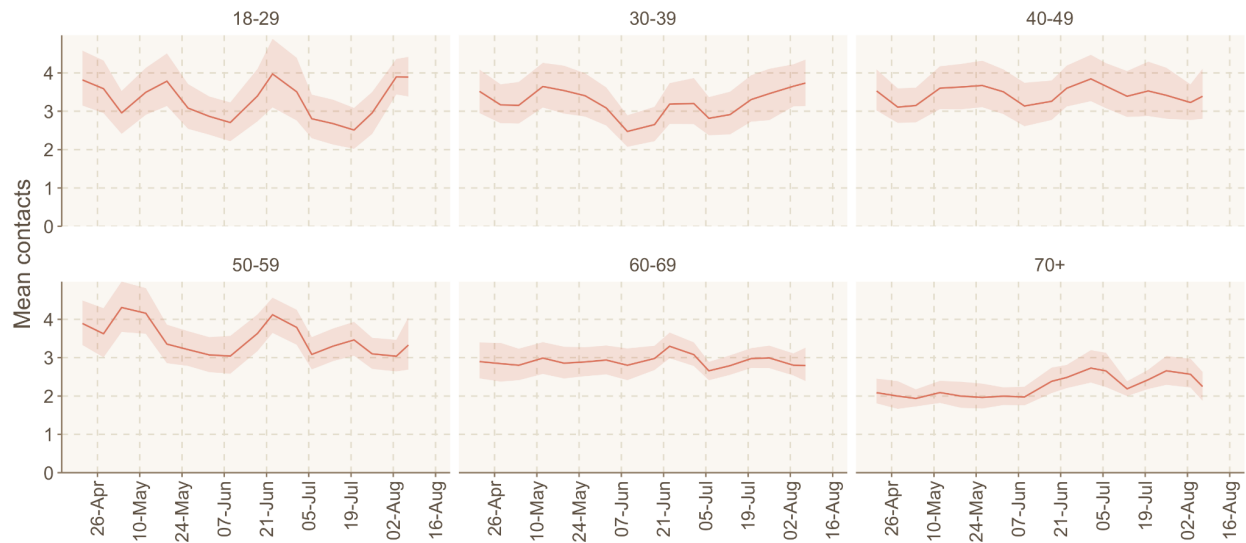


Figure 2: Mean contacts in all settings by age-group for adults over time. Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

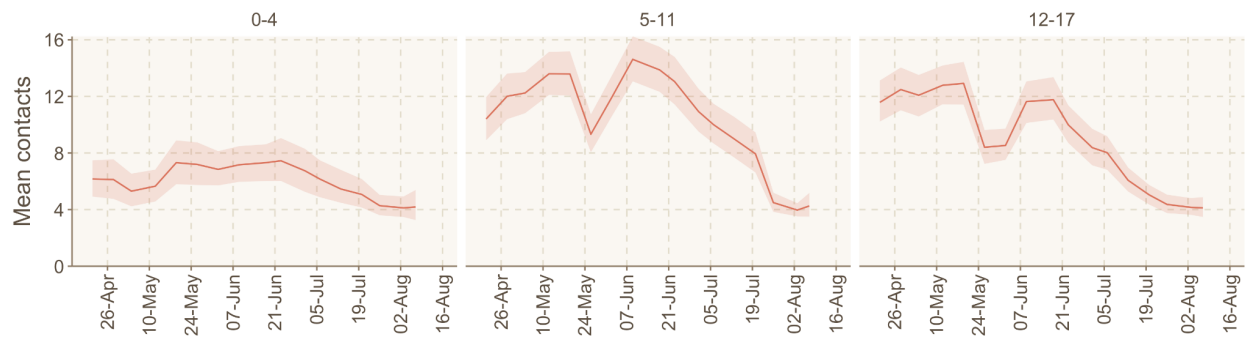


Figure 3: Mean contacts in all settings by age-group for children over time. Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

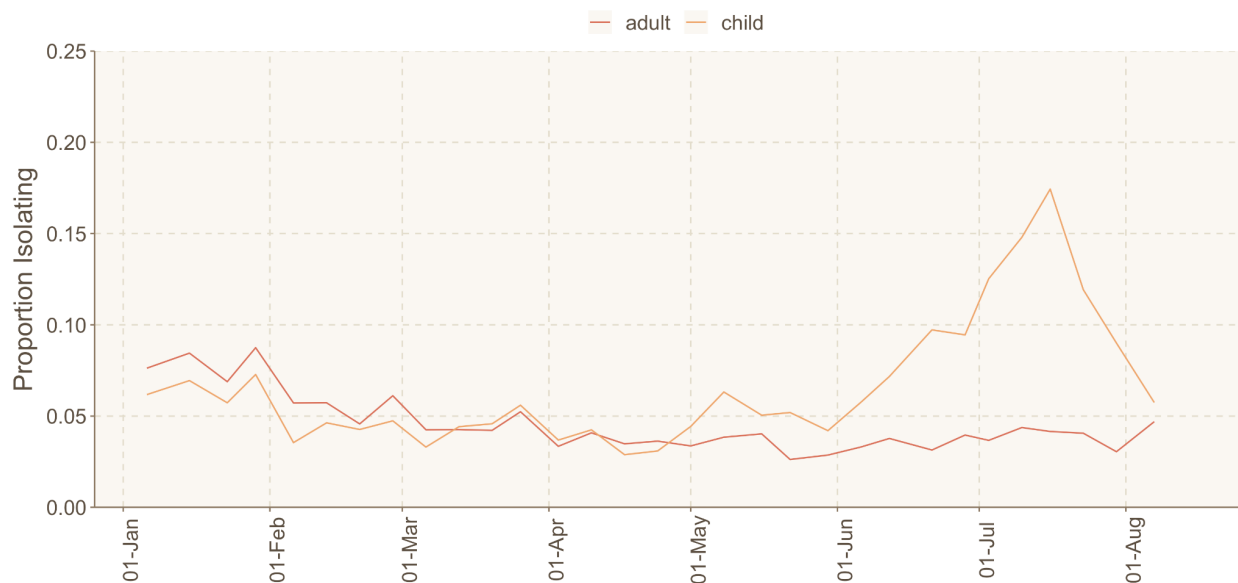


Figure 4: Proportion of sample isolating by adults and children over time in England since Jan 2021.

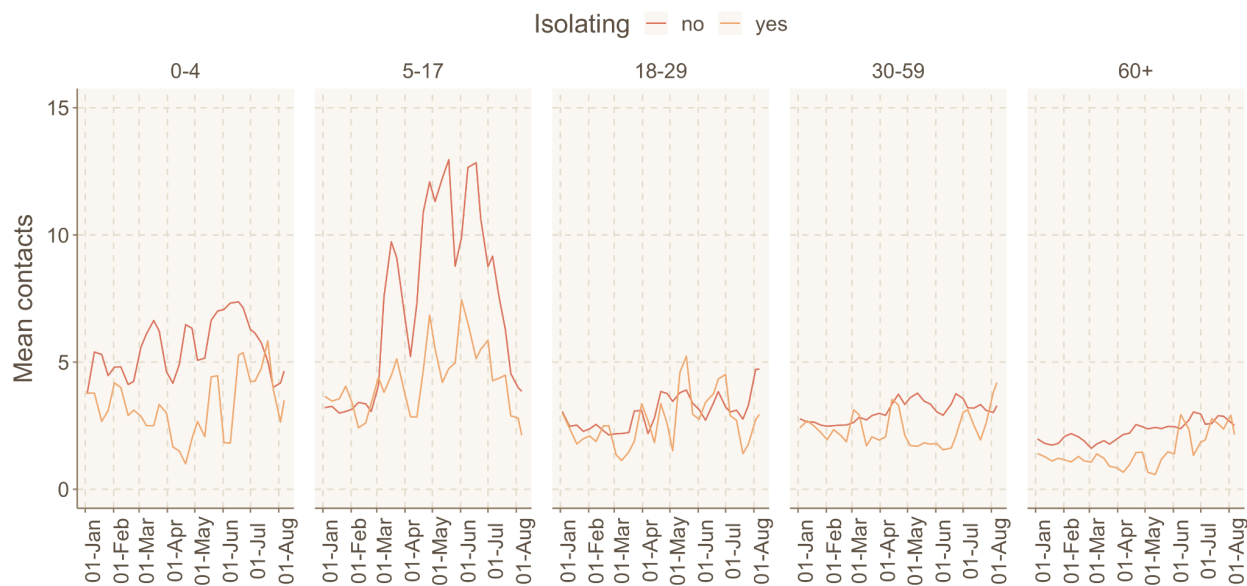


Figure 5: Mean contacts in all settings in England by age and whether participant is in isolation. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

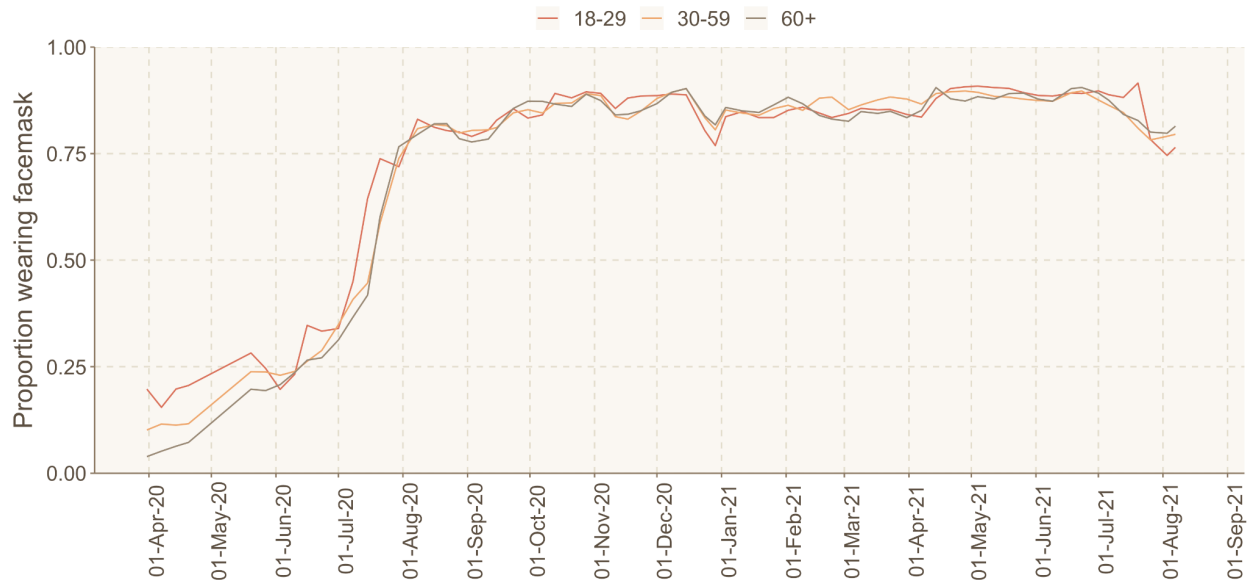


Figure 6: Proportion of adults wearing a face mask over time (with at least one contact outside of the home). Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects with all dates representing two rounds of data collection except for the final week, which only contains the latest survey round. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

Methods

CoMix is a behavioural survey, launched on 24th of March 2020. The sample is broadly representative of the UK adult population. Participant's 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

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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

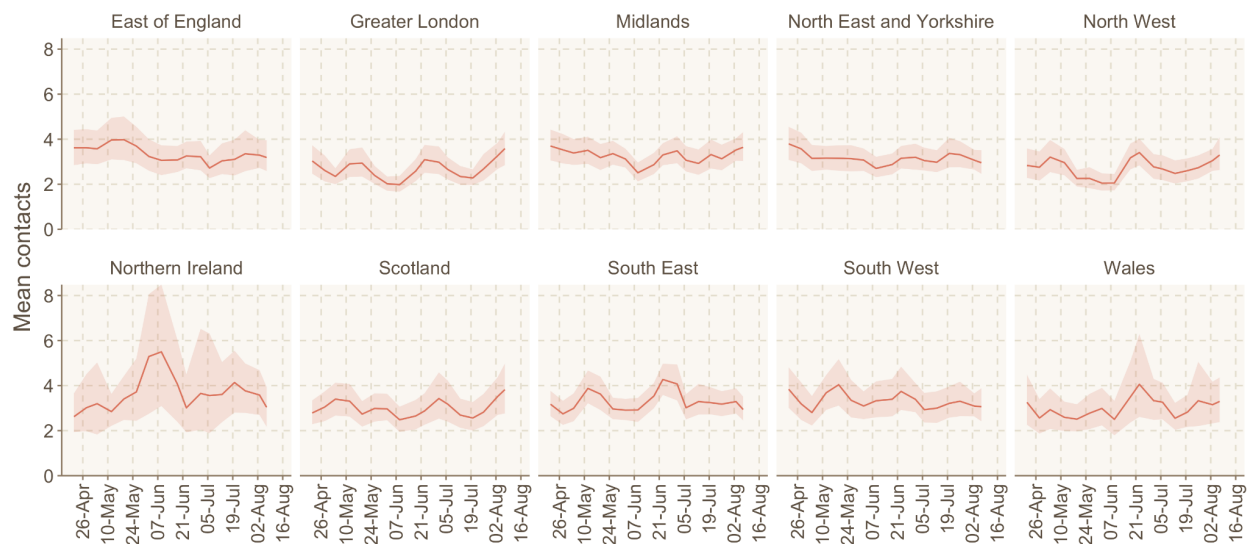


Figure S1: Mean contacts in all settings in adults for UK nations and English regions over time. Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint 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 - 10 August 2021
6. Lockdown 2 easing	03 Dec 2020 - 19 Dec 2020		

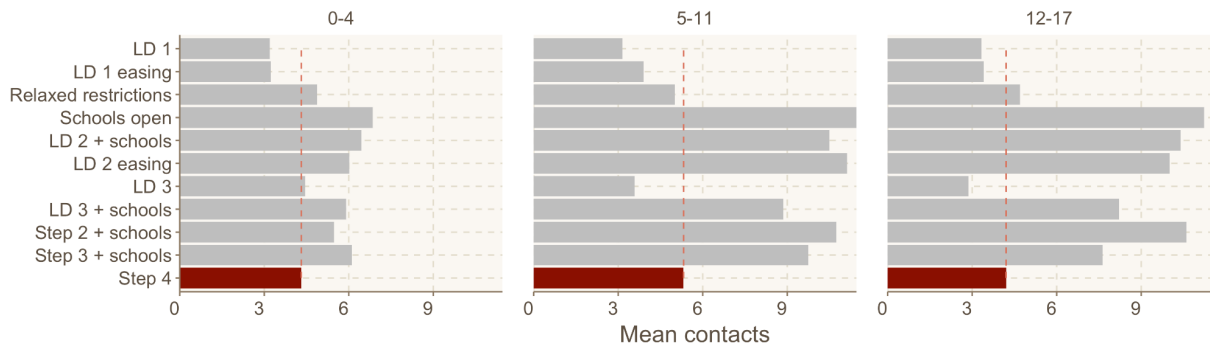


Figure S2: Comparison of mean contacts from the 19 July to 10 August to ten previous time periods of different restrictions by age for children. Current period highlighted in red with dashed line for easier comparison to previous periods.

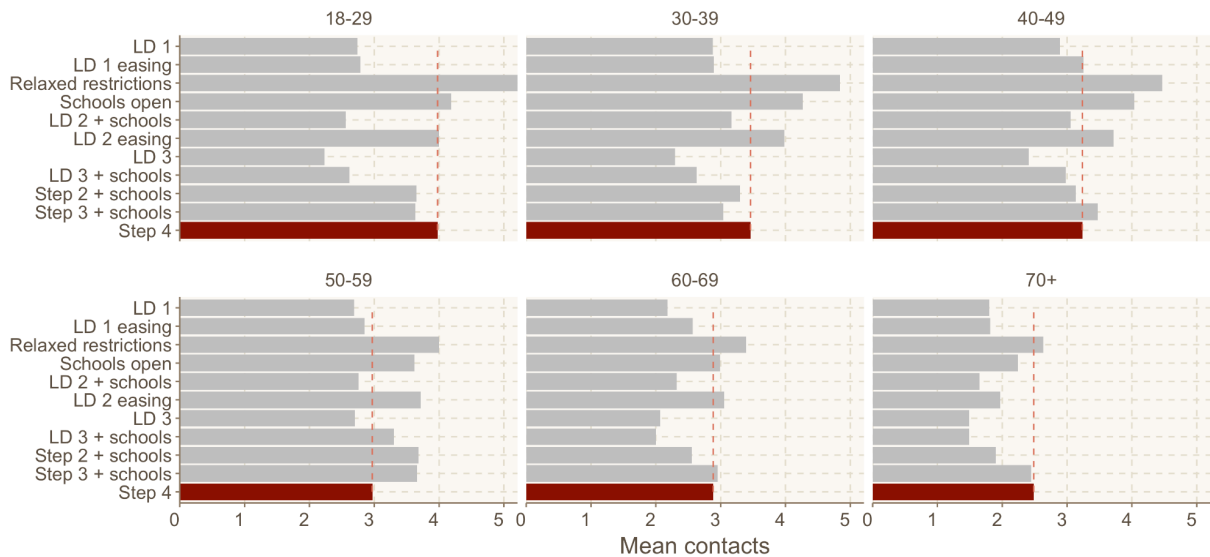


Figure S3: Comparison of mean contacts from the 19 July to 10 August to ten previous time periods of different restrictions by age for adults. Current period highlighted in red with dashed line for easier comparison to previous periods.