

Social contacts in the UK from the CoMix social contact survey

Report for survey week 96

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Data up to 30 January 2022*

Summary

- The mean number of contacts reported by adults has stayed mostly constant during December and January at just below 3 contacts per day after reducing slightly prior to December.
- The proportion of children ages 5-11 years in isolation reached a high of 16% in January while the proportion of children aged 12 to 17 years in isolation has remained between 7 and 8%.
- The proportion of adults aged 18-59 years in isolation is down to 6% from 10% in late December and is less than 2% for those over 60 years of age.
- Wearing face coverings (masks) remains high after increasing from early December at approximately 85%.
- Adults who attended their workplace continue to report approximately twice the mean number of contacts than employed adults who did not attend their workplace.

Main

Mean reported contacts for adults remain similar to those seen throughout December and January (Figures 1-3). Contacts remain quite consistent across the regions of England and different nations of the UK (Figure S1). Children's contacts during the new spring term are in line with those seen in previous school terms, after reducing over the winter holidays (Figure 4). The percentage of children aged 5 to 11 in isolation peaked at 16% and was approximately 10% in the latest round (Figure 5), which is consistent with ONS estimates for the proportion of infected children [3]. The proportion of children aged 12 to 17 isolating has hovered around 7% to 8% in January. The fraction of adults over 60 years old reached nearly 4% and is now less than 2%. The fraction of adults aged 18 to 59 reporting being in isolation is 6% after peaking at nearly 9%.

In England, the overall reported facemask use for those with at least one contact was 85%. Participants in England ages 18 to 29 report the lowest use of facemasks at 81% (for those making at least one contact outside the home) (Figure 6), while 83% of 30 to 59 year olds and 88% of those over 60 reported wearing a face mask if they made a contact outside the home (Figure 7).

Those who attended work over the last year have reported consistently higher contacts compared to those whose work is open, but they did not attend (Figure 8). The proportion of those reporting going into work when their workplace is open fluctuates over time, most recently with a decrease in the proportion over the Christmas holidays and a relative increase in January (Figure 9). Younger adults are more likely to attend the workplace when it is open than older adults (Figure 9). The proportion of employed participants with their workplaces open also decreased during December to a low of 76% and increased in January to 83% (Figure 10).

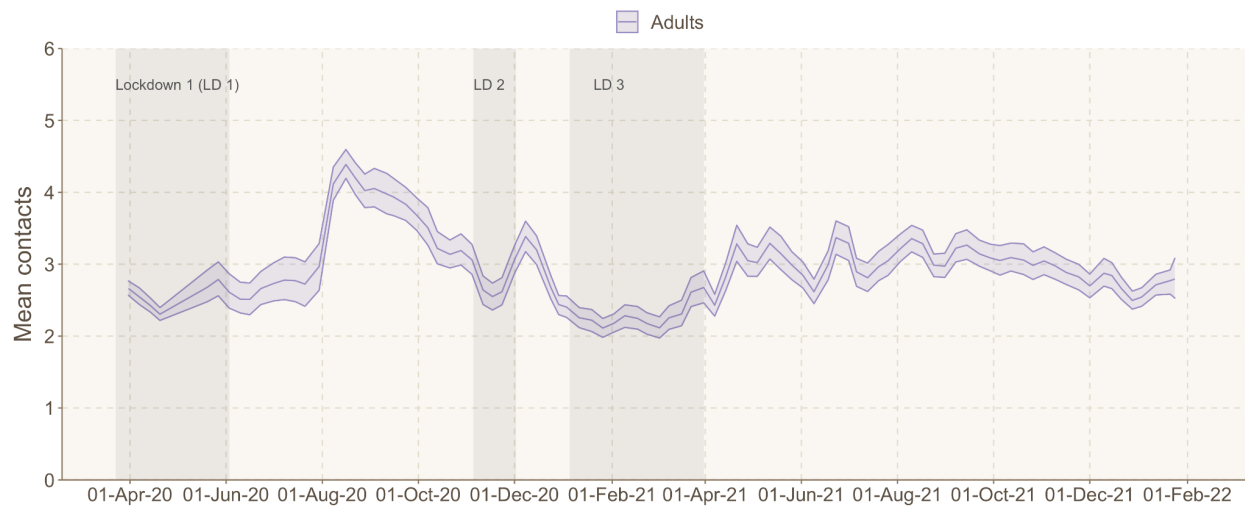


Figure 1: Mean contacts in the UK since the 23rd March 2020 for adults. Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

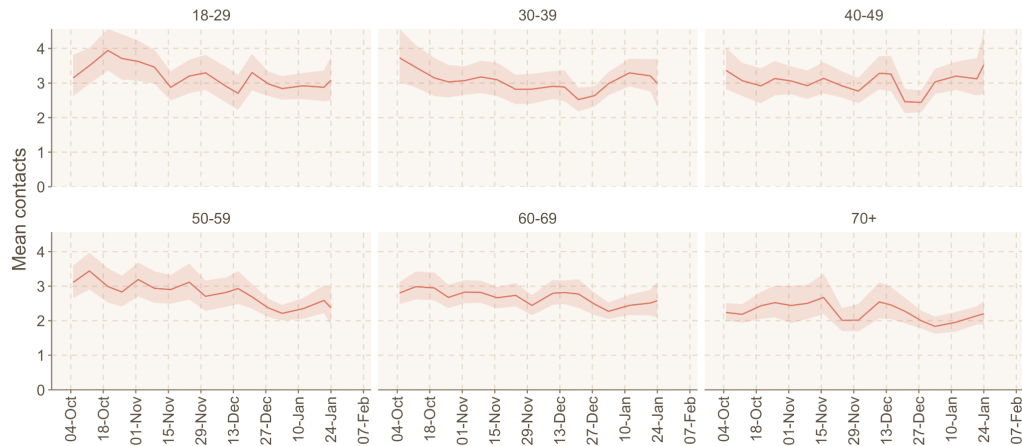


Figure 2: Mean contacts in all settings by age-group for adults over time. Uncertainty calculated using bootstrapping. Contacts truncated to 50 contacts per participant. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.



Figure 3: Mean contacts by settings and by age-group 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.

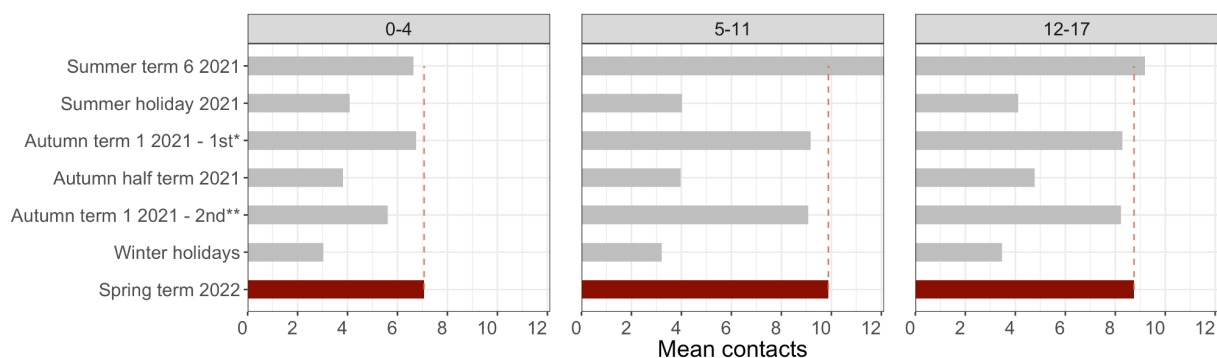


Figure 4: Comparison of mean contacts from the autumn half term to previous school term and holidays periods by age for children. Current period highlighted in red with dashed line for easier comparison to previous periods. * Autumn term 1 2021 - 1st half Includes data from 1st September to 28th September 2021 inclusive. ** Autumn term 1 2021 - 2nd half includes data from 3 November to 21 December 2021 inclusive.

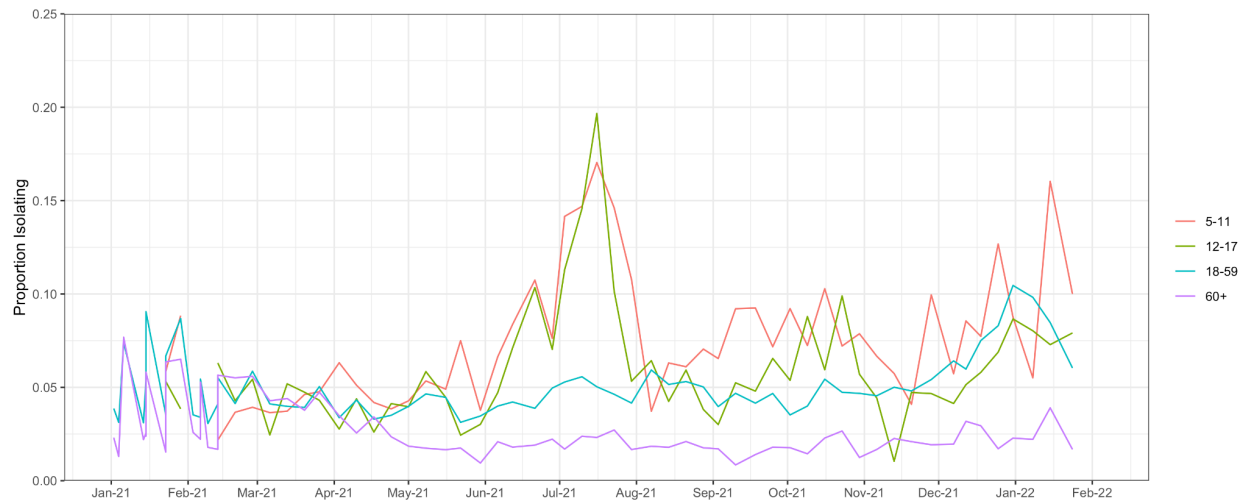


Figure 5: Proportion of adults or children in isolation or quarantine. Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects apart from the most recent week of data. Date on x axis refers to the midpoint of the survey period.

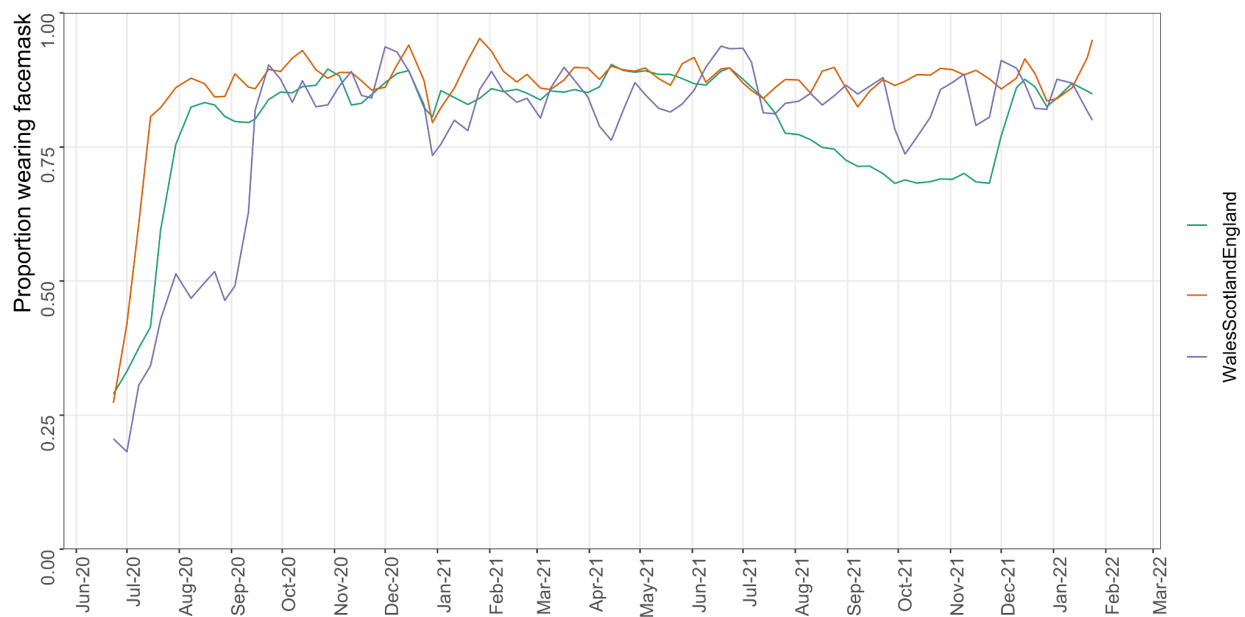


Figure 6: Proportion of adults wearing a face mask over time by country (with at least one contact outside of the home). Observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects apart from the most recent week of data. Date on x axis refers to midpoint of the survey period.

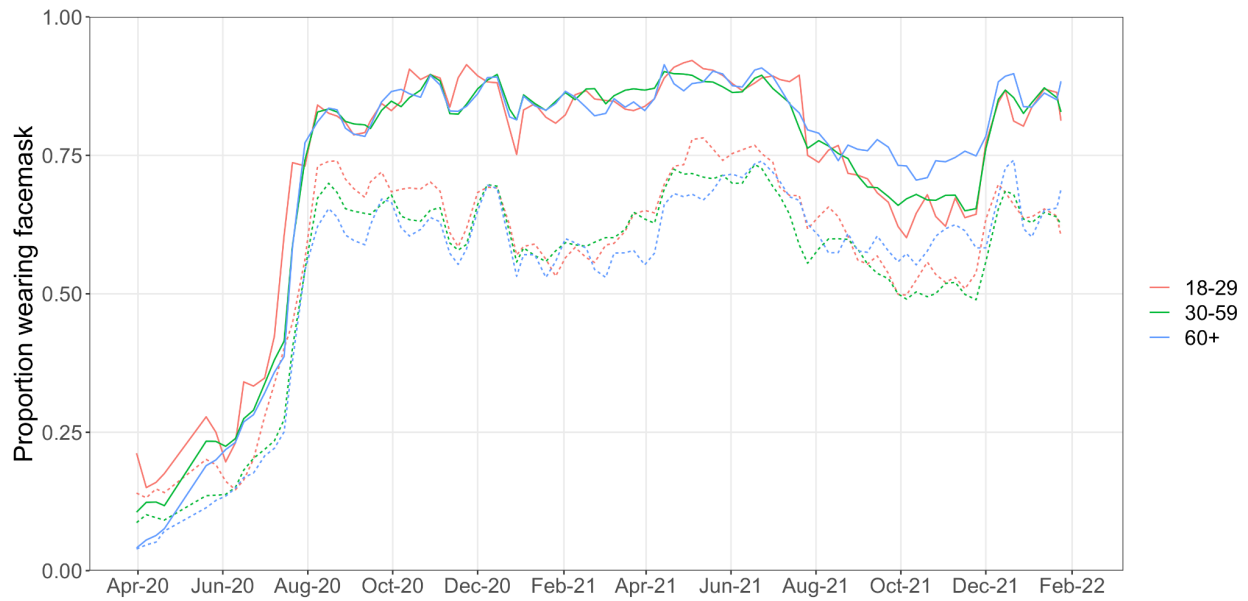


Figure 7: Proportion of adults wearing a face mask over time in England (Solid line = with at least one contact outside of the home, dotted line = all participants). Date on x axis refers to midpoint of the survey period.

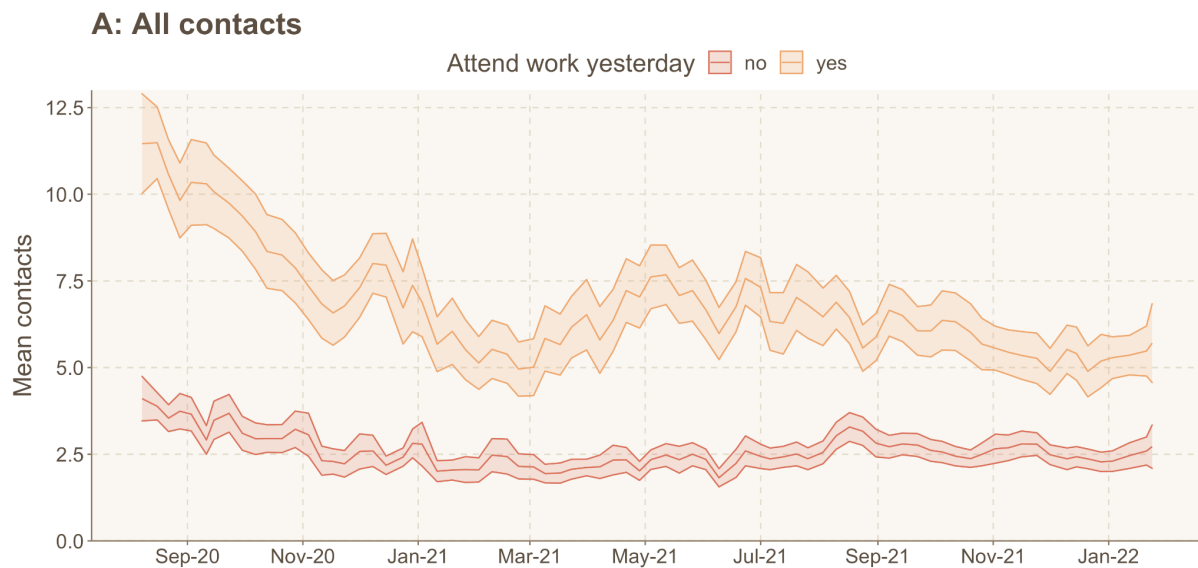


Figure 8: Mean contacts in the UK since August 2020 for individuals attending or not attending work on the day of the survey for people that are employed and their work is open. 95% Uncertainty interval calculated assuming a standard normal mean of two times the standard error of the mean. Contacts truncated 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. The final observation only includes data for the most recent survey wave.

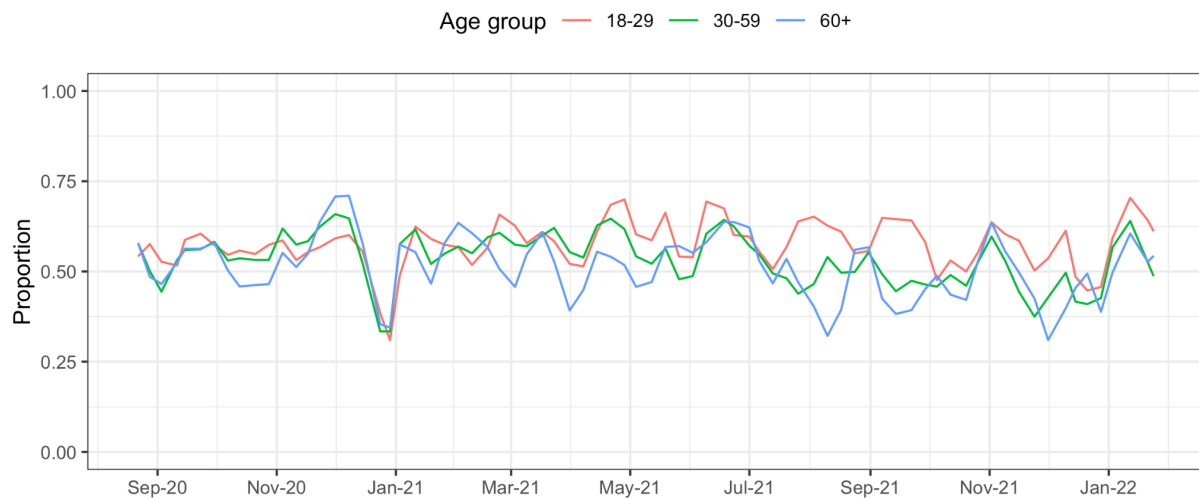


Figure 9: Proportion of adults in the UK since August 2020 for individuals attending or not attending work on the day of the survey for people that are employed and their work is open by age group. Date on x axis refers to midpoint of the survey period, observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. The final observation only includes data for the most recent survey wave.

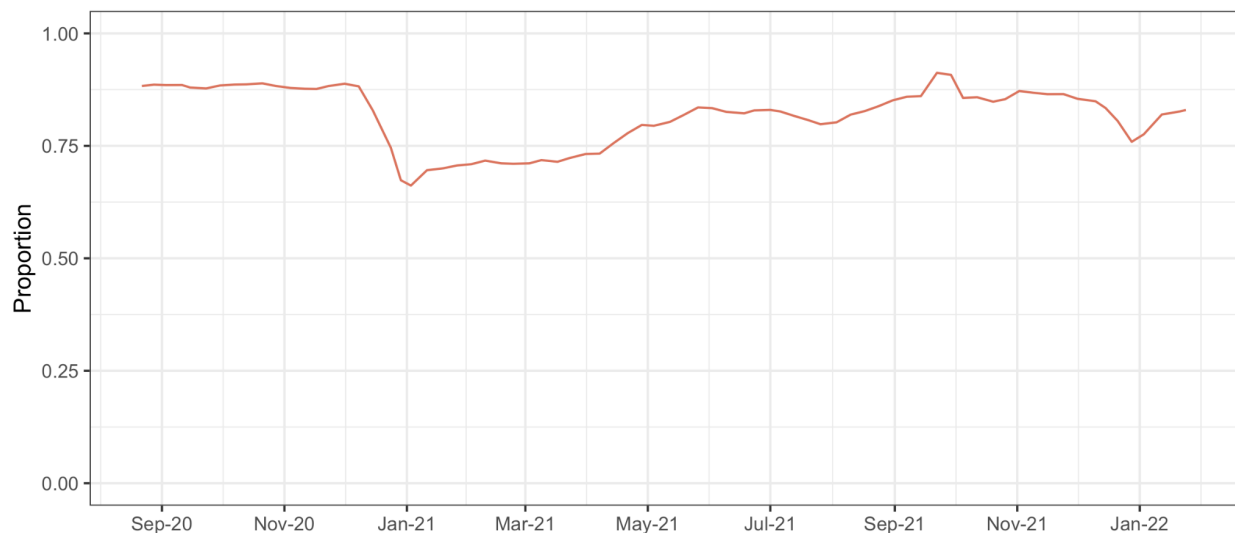


Figure 10: Proportion participants that reported their workplaces are open in the UK since August 2020 for individuals who are employed. Date on x axis refers to midpoint of the survey period, observations are smoothed over two weeks to account for panel effects. The final observation includes data for only the most recent survey wave.

Methods

CoMix is a behavioural survey, launched on 24th 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

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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.
3. Coronavirus (COVID-19) Latest Insights - Office for National Statistics. 2022. Office for National Statistics. <https://www.ons.gov.uk>

Additional graphs and tables



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.