

COVID-19

Your Experiences of Accessing Care & Support during the Pandemic

Report, August 2021

Report produced by the
Healthwatch St Helens Support Team



Background

Following our survey in 2020 about local people's experiences of accessing support and treatment during the pandemic, Healthwatch St Helens felt it was important to run the survey again, to understand what people were experiencing a year on.

The report from work we did in 2020 can be accessed by visiting our website at: www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk.

Healthwatch St Helens would like to make it clear that this survey was intended to allow local people to voice their concerns and providers and commissioners to understand what challenges they might encounter further down the line, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. It was, in no way, intended to criticise or put providers under added pressure, during this unprecedented time.

How did we collect your views?

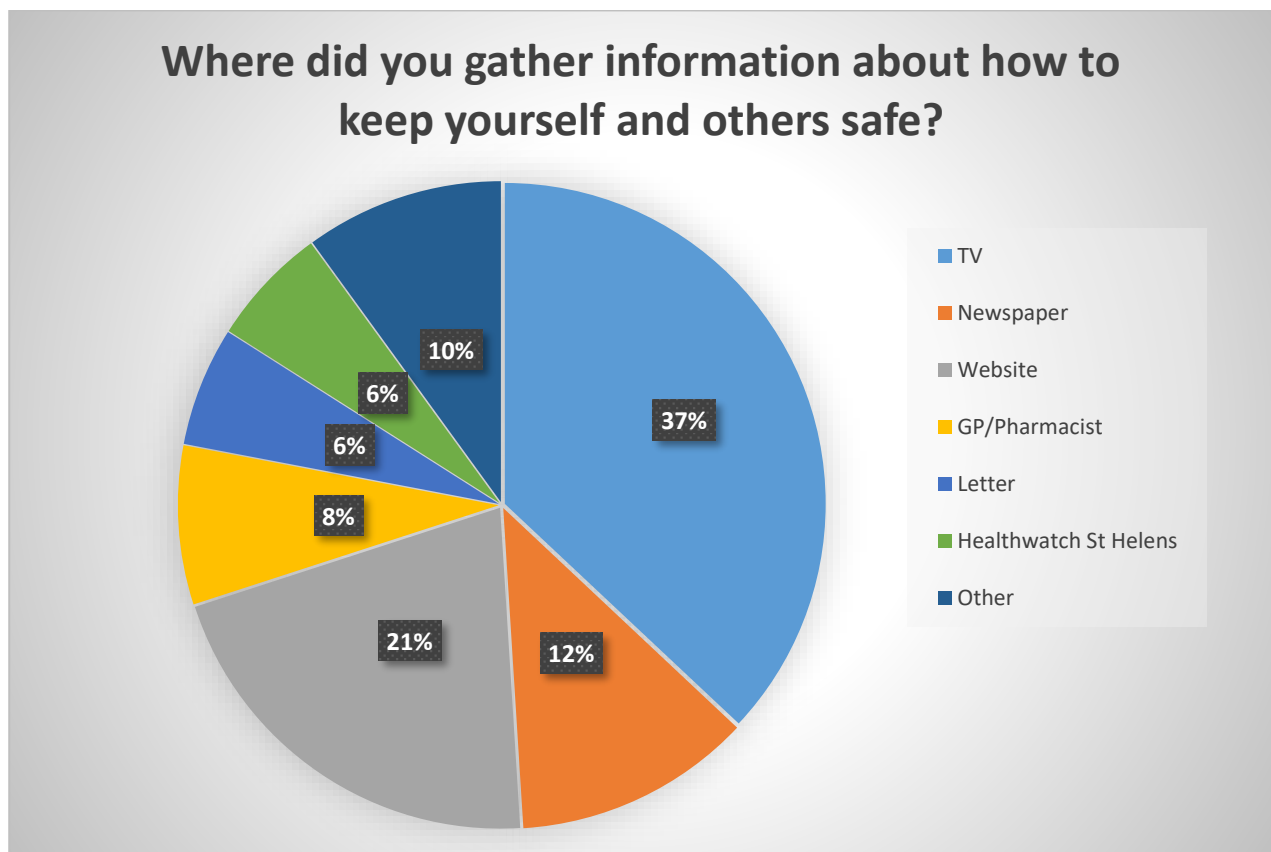
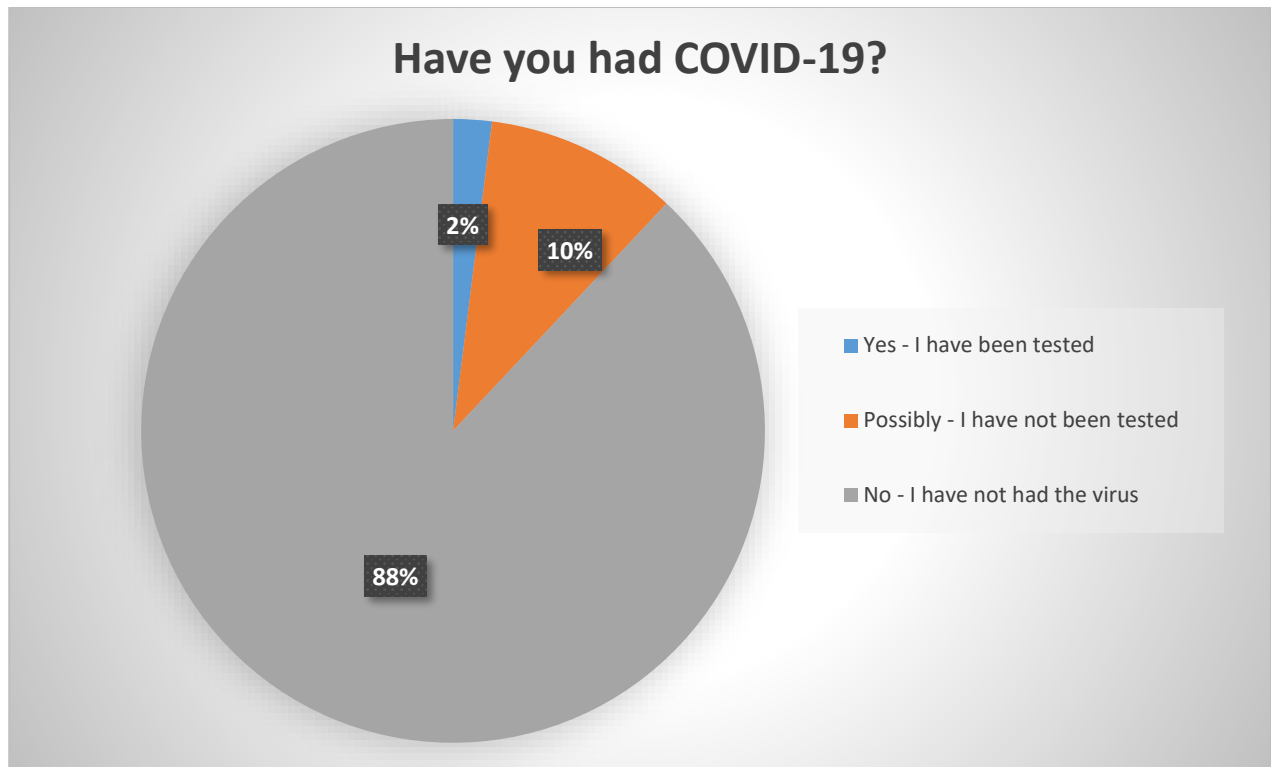
We would like to express our appreciation to Healthwatch Liverpool, who developed the original survey which they shared with the Cheshire & Mersey Healthwatch Network, so that what we were doing was consistent.

The survey was published on our website and was promoted widely via Twitter, Facebook, our monthly newsletter and our various usual communication channels. We contacted all GP Practice Managers in St Helens who sent out the link to the survey, via text, to all of their patients.

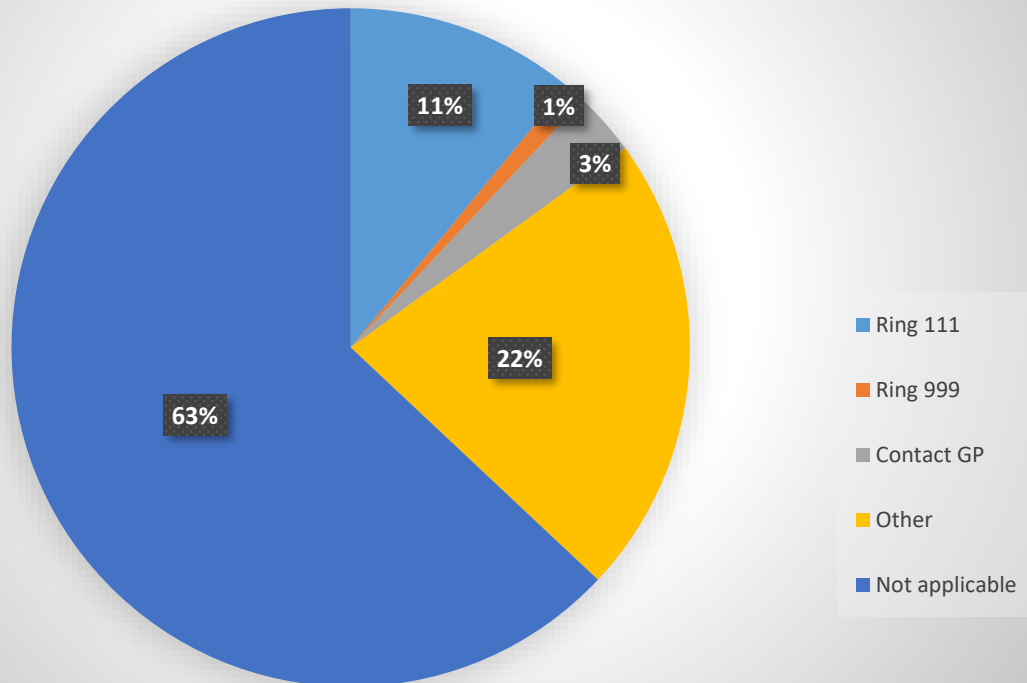
What did you tell us?

We received 1562 responses to the survey, with over 10% of people choosing to give us additional information about their experiences. Some people left their contact details because they wanted to tell us more or they wanted help or support. Everyone was contacted by the Support Team and were signposted to other organisations for support where necessary.

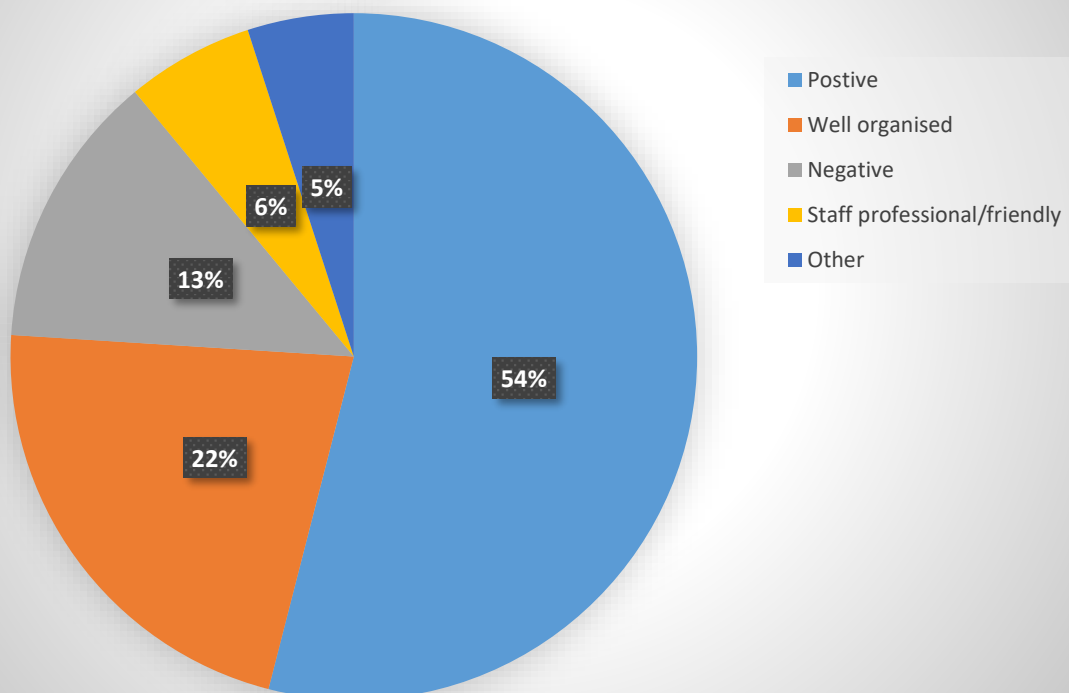
The survey



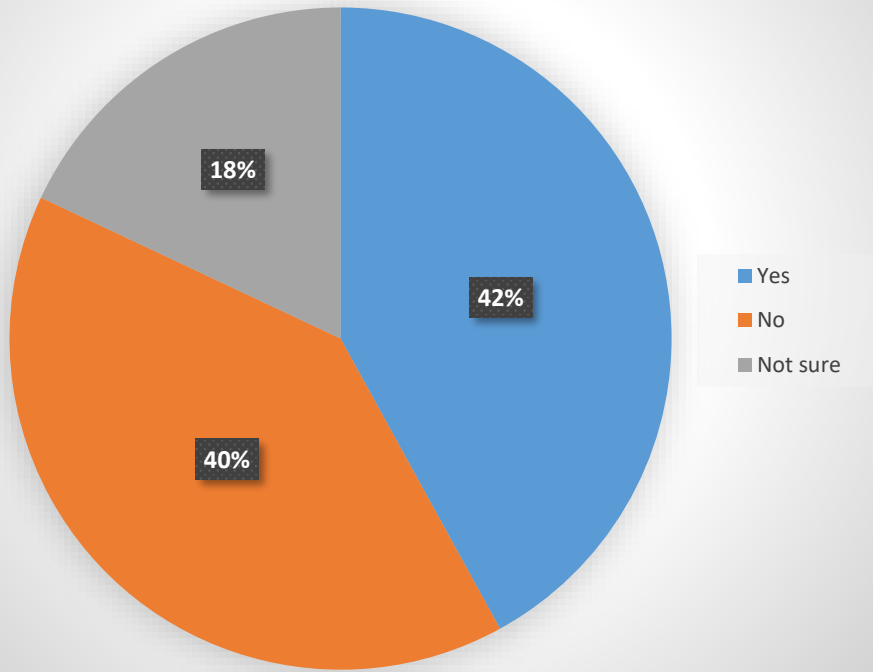
If you tested positive or had symptoms of COVID-19, where did you seek advice?



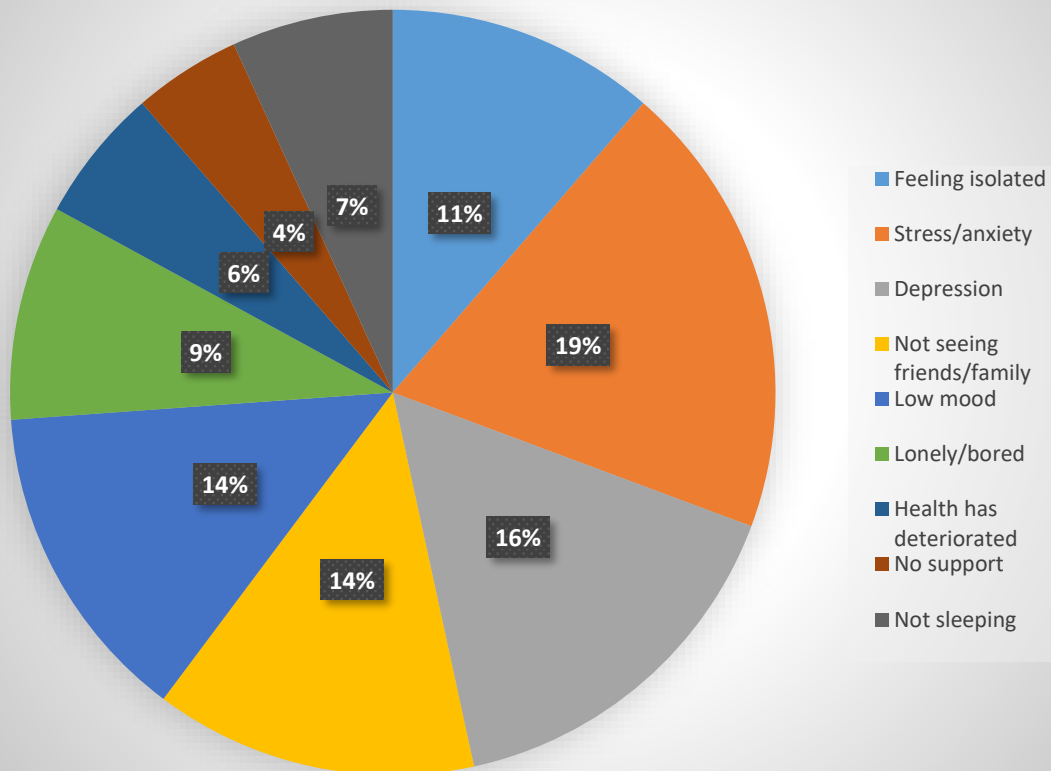
If you had, or tried to get a COVID-19 test, tell us your experience of it.



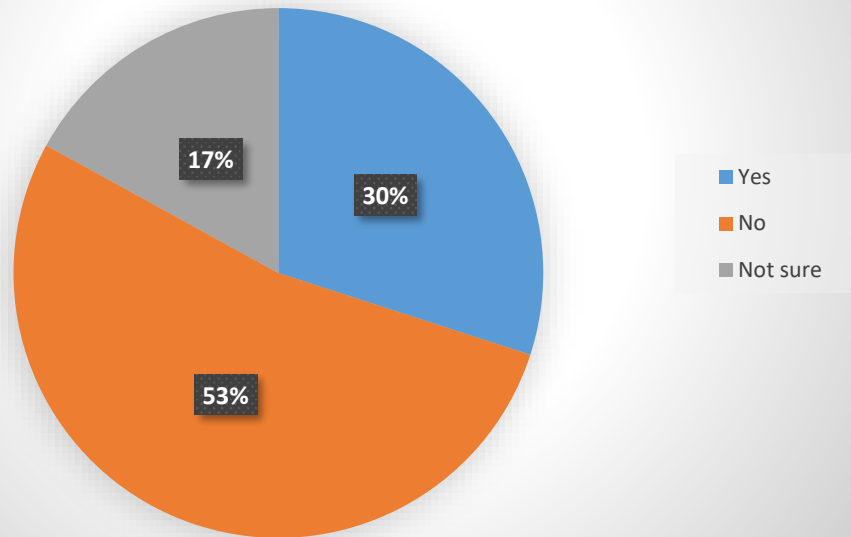
Do you feel your mental health has got worse since the beginning of the pandemic



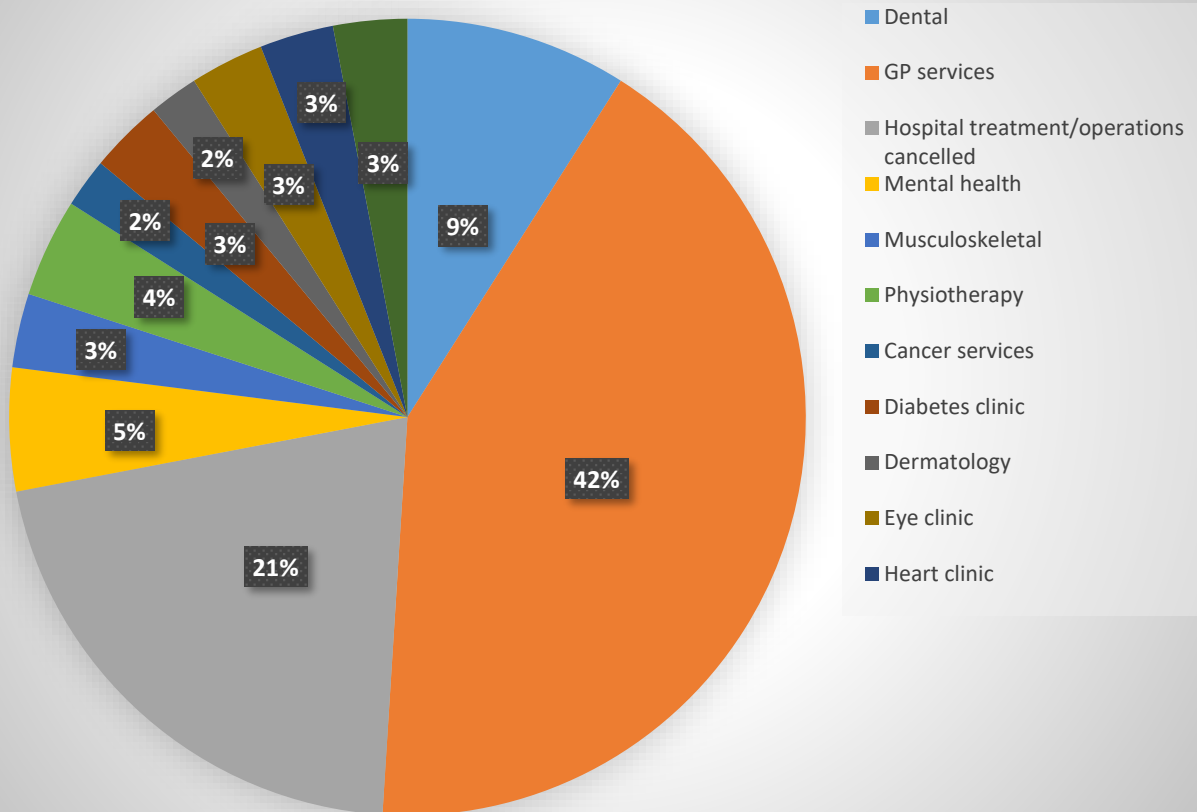
How your mental health was affected



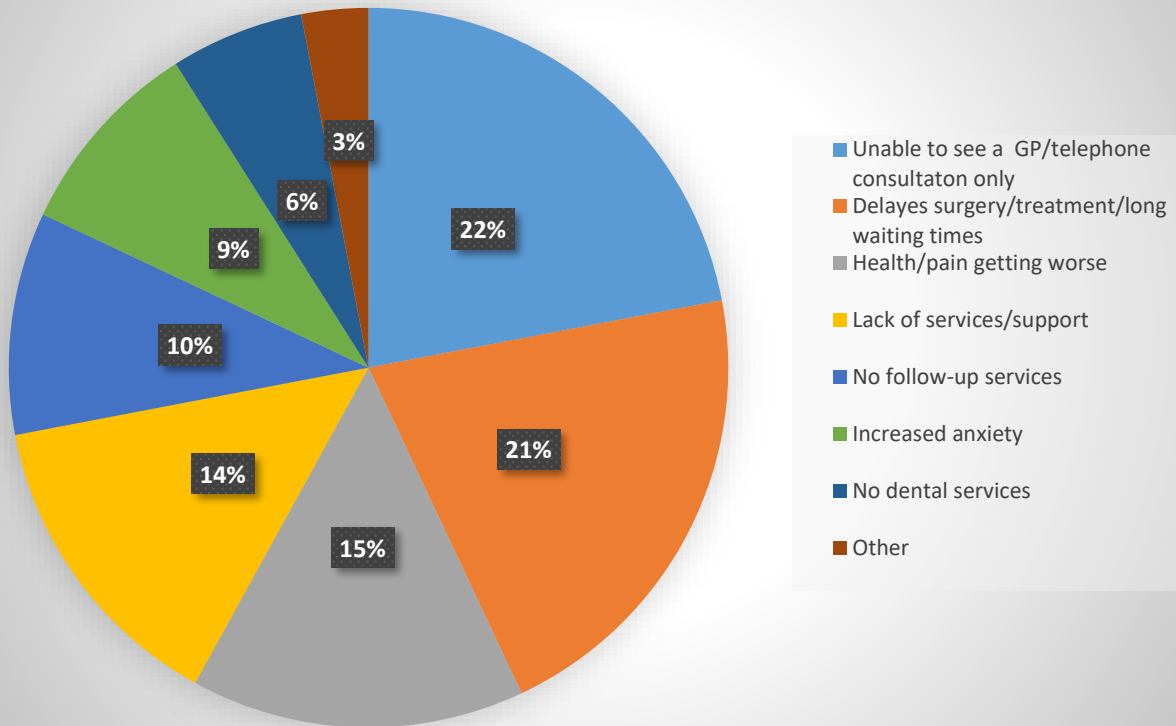
Do you feel that any other medical conditions you have, not related to COVID-19, have been affected by a reduction or change of service?



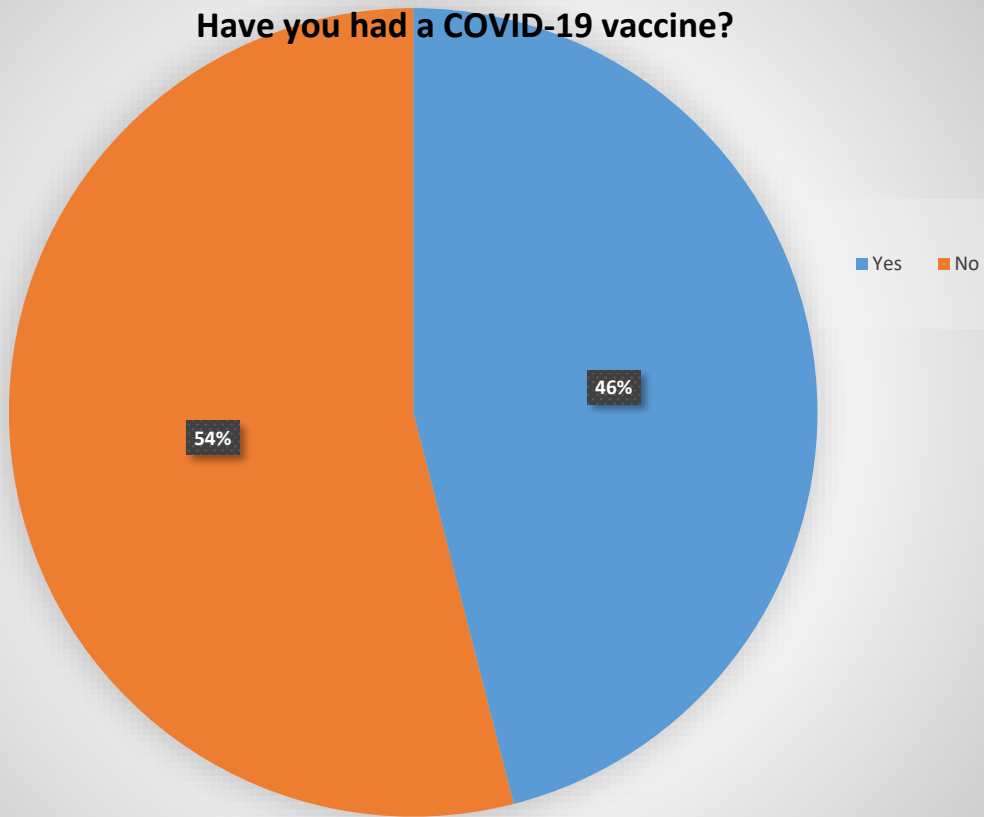
What was the service that was affected?



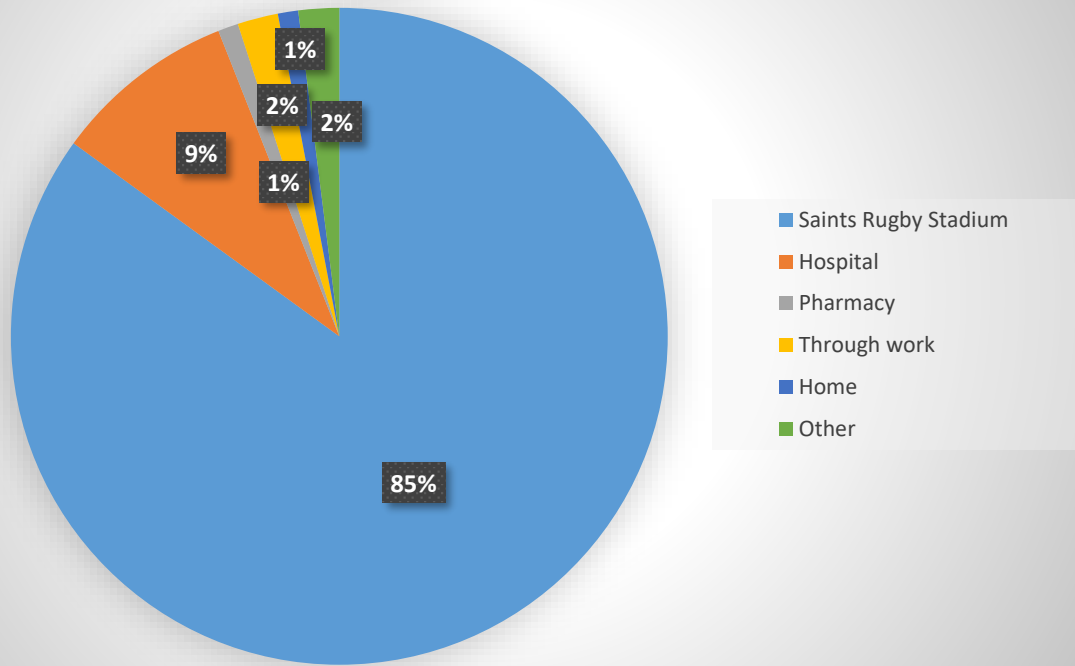
How has it been affected?



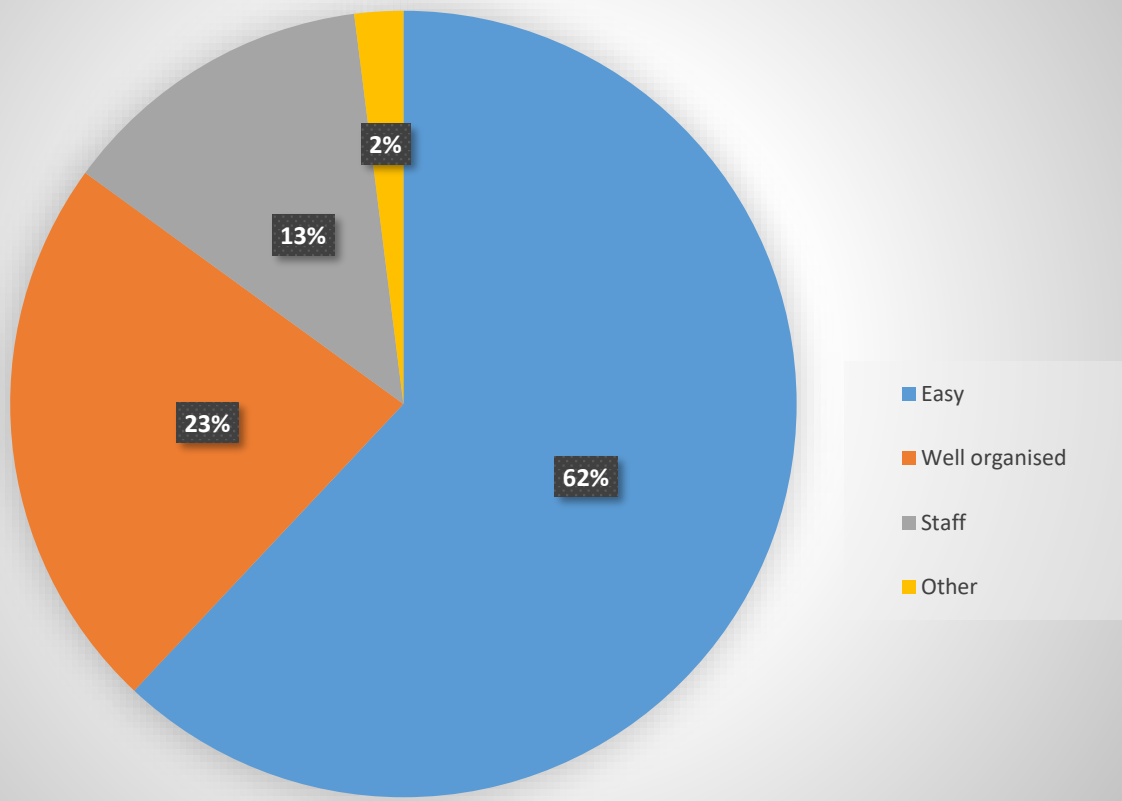
Have you had a COVID-19 vaccine?



Where did you get the vaccination?



How easy was the process?



Summary

We received over 150 comments as part of the survey, from people who wanted to tell us more about what they were experiencing.

Some people mentioned concerning symptoms that were going unchecked, while others told us they felt bad about taking up a health professional's time, feeling like they were a burden on services, causing a strain on already stretched resources.

Some of the comments included access to dental treatment, with some people telling us how they were in a great deal of pain, while others lost teeth as a result of not being able to get a dental appointment.

Comments from people with young children ranged from the challenges faced by being isolated and without support while at home with a young baby, to hearing from women who had accessed maternity services during the pandemic. All comments relating to maternity services have been shared with the St Helens Maternity Voices Partnership.

The levels of mental health concerns have ranged from feeling a little bit anxious, to having suicidal thoughts, or thoughts of self-harming. People told us how isolation, lack of contact with friends and family and increased pain due to not getting treatment, had impacted on their mental wellbeing.

Not being able to take a friend or relative to appointments caused problems for some people, particularly those people who were receiving results.

Most significantly, is that almost half of the people who responded to the survey felt that their mental health has been affected, as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We chose not to include an appendix of all the comments in order to ensure that confidentiality was maintained.

In your words

“ I was due to have a root canal on the day we went into lockdown, which had to be cancelled. I couldn't see a dentist until August by which time I had to lose the tooth. It was also quite painful throughout lockdown. ”

“ Gynaecologist - I waited 18 months for an 'urgent' hospital appointment and have now been waiting a further 3 for treatment to start. ”

“ Every day seeing how many people have passed away fuels my anxiety and depression. I don't eat because too scared to go out. Ordering food, you get groceries out of date, which affects my bowels constantly. Going through 3 or 4 colostomy bags a day with worry and water coming out my medication if not taken at correct times because very bad mood swings. ”

“ I'm a single mum with three children who range in age and ability and my youngest son has been diagnosed with ASD and it's been emotionally and physically draining, so obviously my mental health was suffered. ”

“ Skin become incredibly sore due to not being able to receive cream or steroids. Sleep was disrupted and movement was painful. ”

“ Post heart attack follow-up, not had one since stents fitted last June 2020. ”

“ Waiting for surgery for replacement shoulder. Increased pain and loss of movement. ”

“ Hospital appointment with a consultant following major surgery. The appointment was changed from face to face to telephone consultation, which was then cancelled. Three further appointments have also been cancelled. ”

“ I feel like I'm alone in nothing but desert as far as the eye can see, like a lost child even though I'm a 48 year old woman. ”

“ Appointments at hospital have been better. Easy parking and on time ”

“ Having worked the entire pandemic it is like I have had no mental break. There are people out there making misinformed and stupid comments regarding the virus and it takes its toll on NHS staff witnessing this first hand ”

“ I feel the need to stay away from doctors and protect the NHS and myself more than the treatment I need. ”

“ I feel like I am not living my life anymore. I am only surviving and feel like a prisoner, can't do anything, can't see anybody. I haven't seen my family since July 2020. My mum had cancer and died in June 2020 and I could not see her last couple of months before she died as she lived in Czech Republic. These restrictions are absolutely stupid and crucial. I see only one purpose of it - to control people ”

“ It feels as though no other health conditions are important now. I understand the severity of the pandemic however I feel as though peoples' health is declining and symptoms are not being checked or treated because you can't have a face to face appointment. ”

“ Not going anywhere near GP, walk-in, A&E because afraid of catching covid. Example, recently badly sprained ankle which I would ordinarily have had checked out. ”

“ I have started with pain in joints, more so my knees, and think I would need a blood test to test for arthritis but don't know if this would happen in this time. ”

“ I'm now on medication for depression and anxiety. On 3 medications due to this pandemic. ”

“ Been unwilling to bother GP with non-urgent, less important medical issues. Not through any fault of GP but more a feeling that if it isn't covid related problem it can wait. ”

“ Online does not result in a good service. Sometimes you need a physical examination. ”

Conclusion

We feel that the comments made in our survey gave a clear picture of how strongly our local people were affected by COVID-19 and the impact it had on all of our lives.

Our survey is intended to give commissioners and providers of service an insight into what local people feel, and to ensure that local people's experiences are taken into account in the design and delivery of services, going forward.

We look forward to feedback from commissioners and providers as to what they will be doing, to make sure that local people's needs are met by the services they use.

Acknowledgements

We would like to offer our thanks to:

- ❖ Everyone who completed the survey
- ❖ Local partners who distributed the survey
- ❖ Annie Lawrenson (Halton & St Helens VCA and CommunicART).

This report will be published on our website, and shared with key partners across the Borough, including commissioners, providers, Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission.

Disclaimer

Please note that the information contained in this report does not reflect the opinions of staff or volunteers from Healthwatch St Helens. It relates entirely to the views and experiences of the local people who completed the survey.

Appendix 1

1) Have you had COVID-19?

- Yes - I have been tested
- Possibly - I have not been tested
- No - I have not had the virus

2) Where did you gather information about how to keep yourself and others safe

- TV
- Newspaper
- Website
- GP/Pharmacist
- Letter
- Healthwatch St Helens
- Other

Please select all that apply

3) If you tested positive or had symptoms of COVID-19, where did you seek advice?

- Ring 111
- Ring 999
- Contact GP
- Other

4) If you had, or tried to get a COVID-19 test, tell us your experience of it

5) Do you feel that your mental health has got worse since the beginning of the pandemic?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

5a) If you have answered yes, please tell us more

6) Do you feel that any other medical issues or conditions you have, not related to COVID-19 have been affected by a reduction or change of service?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

6a) If you have answered yes in the above, what was the service?

6b) How has it been affected?

7) Have you had a COVID-19 vaccine?

- Yes
- No

7a) If yes, where did you have the vaccine?

7b) How easy was the process? Please tell us about it.

How old are you? *

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- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-49
- 50-64
- 65-79
- 80+
- Rather not say

Thank you for completing our survey. If you would like us to contact you about any aspects / issues you have raised, please supply contact details below (Name and email address /phone number)

If you would like to become a member of Healthwatch St Helens and receive regular information about health and social care services in St Helens, please supply your name and email address below

Contact us

Healthwatch St Helens

The Beacon, College Street, St Helens, WA10 1TF

Telephone: 0300 111 0007

Email address: info@healthwatchsthelens.co.uk

Twitter: @HWStHelens

Facebook: facebook.com/@Healthwatchsthelens

Website: www.healthwatchsthelens.co.uk

Please note that the Healthwatch St Helens Support Team are currently working from home but we can still be contacted by telephone, email or through our website.