



**GP Premises Survey  
Post COVID-19**

**September 2020**

## Acknowledgments

This survey was sponsored by a non-restricted grant by Assura, a company who design, build and maintain healthcare buildings.

Thanks to Marie Curie who promoted the survey on their website and to Healthwatch England.

Thank you to all who took the time to complete the online survey.

## Contents

|                                  |    |
|----------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary .....          | 3  |
| Introduction .....               | 4  |
| Aims And Objectives .....        | 4  |
| Methodology .....                | 5  |
| Findings .....                   | 5  |
| Evaluation .....                 | 10 |
| Conclusion.....                  | 11 |
| Recommendations .....            | 11 |
| Appendix: Survey Questions ..... | 12 |

## Executive Summary

The survey had two aims, firstly to look at patients' experiences of using GP services during lockdown and secondly to see what measures patients wanted to see in place in their GP practice/ healthcare building once these started to re-open. This was an important measure to find out how patients felt about returning to GP practices and what would make them feel safe.

A number of people had made contact with their GP practice during lockdown and a few had been to the building in person. Generally, it was felt that the staff were very helpful in most cases with only a few finding them not helpful at all. Many were offered a telephone appointment which resolved their concern in the majority of instances, however this was not the case with video calls. Only a small number were offered a video call and in the majority of cases their concern was not resolved. In some cases this was due to the technology not being in place but the main reason was that the patient felt that they needed to be seen in person.

When asked in the second part of the survey how they thought a virtual GP appointment or consultation compared with a face to face appointment the majority of people stated that they would prefer face to face but quite a number said that they would not mind a virtual appointment. In these cases people felt that sometimes it speeded up their appointment time and they did not have to travel to the GP premises. However, there were those who were unsure and not at all confident.

In the second part of the survey patients were asked about how they felt if they were to return to their GP practice / healthcare building post COVID-19 and about what measures they wanted to be in place to give them confidence to return. When entering the building many were happy to have an intercom system to alert staff of their arrival and most preferred the reception staff to be behind a Perspex screen. They wanted staff to be welcoming and to point out the changes to the building eg hand sanitisers, social distancing, wearing of masks. The waiting area was the part of the building where people wanted to feel that they were not too close to others and that there were not too many people waiting at the same time. The spacing of the seating and the type of seating were important measures that they wanted to see in place with the majority of people wanting separate areas in which to wait.

Patients were asked what the single most important thing that would give them confidence about returning to their GP practice/ healthcare building would be. The key themes were that people wanted clear information about the measures that had been put in place and that government guidance was being followed. This needed to be prior to, as well as on, coming to the building ahead of their appointment. Staff were key to making people feel confident by being welcoming, reassuring, leading by example, particularly with encouraging face coverings being worn. People wanted to be given directions when moving round the building with clear signage where changes had been made. A reduction in the number of people coming into the building and particularly in the waiting area would give more confidence.

When patients were asked at the end of the survey, after considering all of the questions, how confident they felt now about using their GP practice/ healthcare building there was a slight rise in confidence as compared to how they felt when first asked at the beginning of the survey.

## Introduction

Assura, a company that designs, builds and maintains healthcare buildings, had approached the Patients Association, pre COVID-19, with the aim of developing a questionnaire to find out what patients felt about the current environment in their GP practice/ healthcare building. This was to be an annual survey to be trialled in one of Assura's managed premises. It also aimed to find out what would improve the patient experience of the overall environment within healthcare buildings. A focus group was held in January 2020 to get patients input into the development of the questionnaire. A questionnaire was prepared and was about to be trialled when lockdown came into force.

Unfortunately with COVID-19 causing a national lockdown, this questionnaire had to be put on hold and it was then decided to carry out a survey to get a snapshot of how confident patients might feel when returning to their GP/healthcare building once they began to reopen. The Patients Association also wanted to find out about the experience patients had of using GP services during lockdown. This was in part a response to a number of calls to its Helpline regarding GP services during lockdown.

## Aims and objectives

- To find out how many patients had used GP services during lockdown
- To find out what their experiences had been of those services
- To find out what would give patients the confidence to return to their GP practice/ healthcare building once they began to re-open
- To find out what patients would like to have in place in their healthcare buildings in the future post COVID-19
- To share recommendations with Assura
- To share recommendations with primary care bodies
- To share with other stakeholders
- To publish the report of the findings

## Methodology

A survey was developed and put onto Survey Monkey with the aim of running it for six weeks. The purpose of the survey was to get a snapshot of how patients experienced GP services during lockdown and how they were feeling about visiting their GP practice/ healthcare building in the future. It was hoped to be able to get a list of recommendations based on what patients said and the suggestions they made regarding feeling safe and confident when accessing GP practice/ healthcare buildings. The survey was promoted via the Patients Association weekly newsletter, and by reaching out to a number of national organisations eg Marie Curie and Healthwatch England, and to local Healthwatches and individuals who had either attended events or focus groups in the past and some members of Patient Participation Groups (PPGs).

513 people took part in the survey and the full questions can be found in Appendix 1.

## Findings

The first question asked was to gauge how confident people felt now about returning to their GP practice / healthcare building. 36% felt very confident, 31% somewhat confident, 22% unsure and 11% not at all confident.

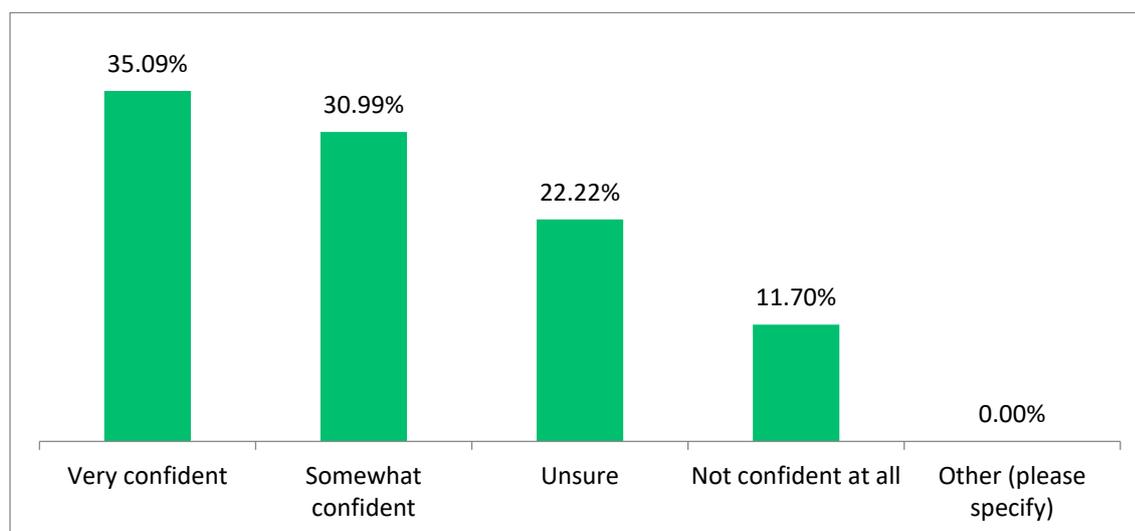


Figure 1 How do you feel at the moment about visiting your GP practice/healthcare building?

### Patients who used GP services during COVID-19

The first part of the survey was a set of 11 questions for those who had used services during COVID-19. 79% of respondents had used GP services during COVID-19 either with regard to repeat prescriptions, signposting or physical or virtual appointments. Of those people 57% had found staff helpful when they had contacted the GP practice with 30% finding staff fairly helpful, 11% not very and 2% not at all helpful. 78% of those who responded were offered a telephone

appointment of which 62% said that their concern had been resolved whereas 38% did not. The main reasons cited for their concern not being resolved were that they needed a blood test in many cases, they were not called back, anxiety felt whilst waiting for a call, the inability to speak freely as family members were present which meant there was a lack of privacy and finally not feeling reassured following the call.

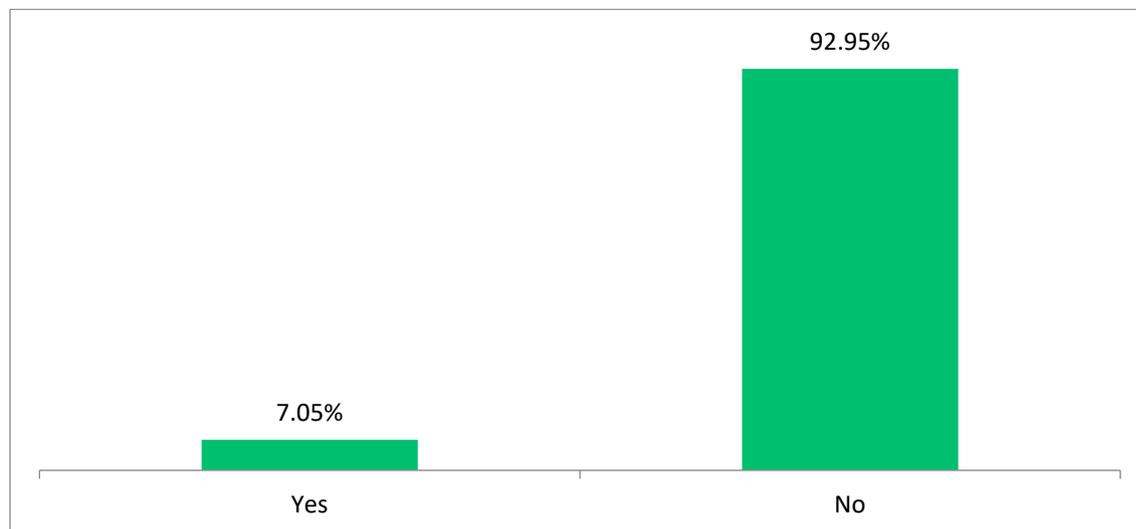


Figure 2 Were you offered a video call?

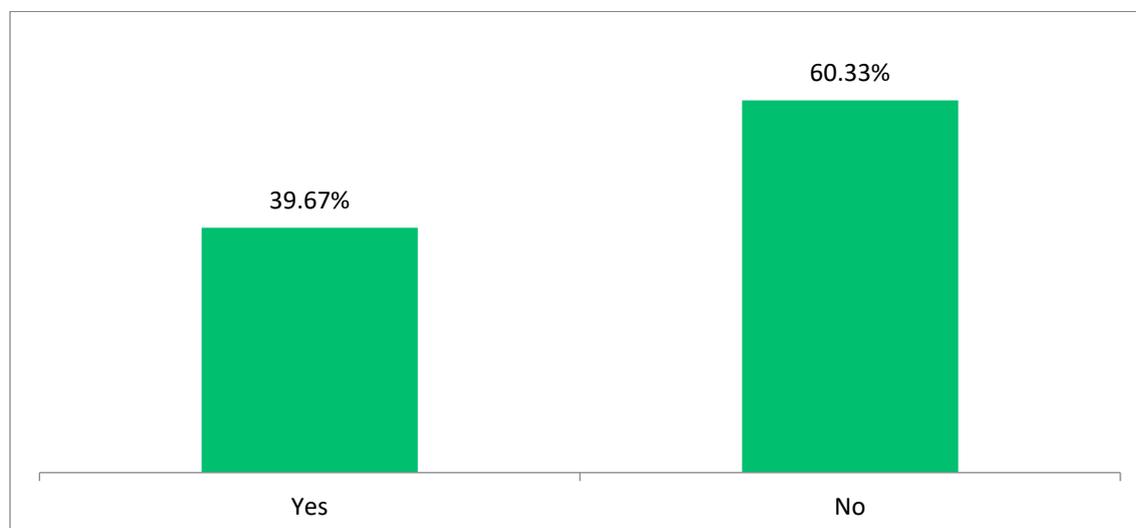


Figure 3 Did this resolve your concern?

When asked about video calls only 7% of patients were offered a video call and 39% had their concern resolved whilst 60% did not. The main reasons for the non-resolution of their concerns were lack of correct technology, the GP not having the facility, the need to be seen in person and feeling that they were less able to explain their concern. The assumption that 'one size fits all' solution was felt to be 'ludicrous' especially for older patients

When asked if they were signposted to another service by their practice 32% of people were, with the main services being pharmacist, dentist, optician, physiotherapist, 111 service and hospital including A&E and outpatients.

Of those who responded to the question of whether they had come into the surgery in person, it was an even 50/50 split. When asked how they felt when entering the GP / healthcare building 75% felt welcome, 83% felt safe, 70% felt confident with 20% feeling anxious. 40% were the only patient in the surgery.

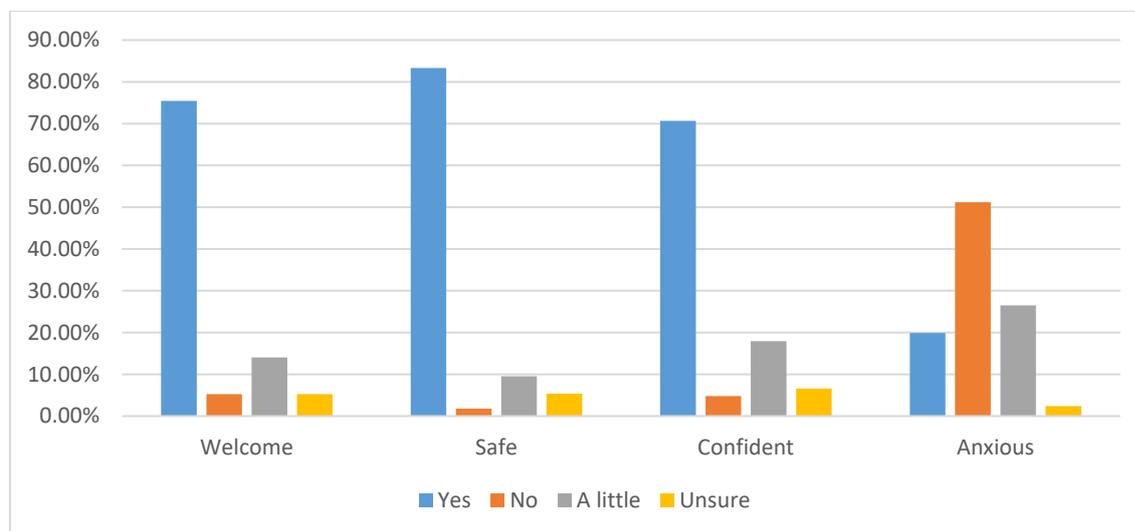


Figure 4 How did you feel when entering the GP/Healthcare building?

When asked how their overall experience had been of using GP services during COVID-19, 11% said excellent, 49% good, 19% adequate and 20% poor.

### Patients' views on using GP services post COVID-19 restrictions

The second part of the survey was about post COVID-19 restrictions. When asked how happy they would be using an intercom system to alert staff to their arrival 77% said yes, with 11% saying no and 11% unsure. There were obvious concerns over the length of time it might take staff to answer and about touching buttons thereby possibly spreading infection.

Patients were asked if there were certain things which they would like to see in their GP practice/ healthcare building in order to give them confidence. They were given a choice of six options of what they would not go into a building without, with 67% of people putting hand sanitising area as the most important, 52% reminders about wearing a face covering, 47% clear directions, 43% safety information, 33% a one way system to enter and exit the building and 32% floor marking for social distancing.

When asked if patients would like to see a welcome area rather than a formal reception desk 33% said yes whilst 55% said no with some people not sure what a welcome area would look like.

When asked to what degree they would feel safe, confident, comfortable or anxious if reception staff were behind a Perspex screen similar to those used in

shops and public transport, 63% said they would feel very safe, 61% confident, 69% comfortable and 3% anxious.

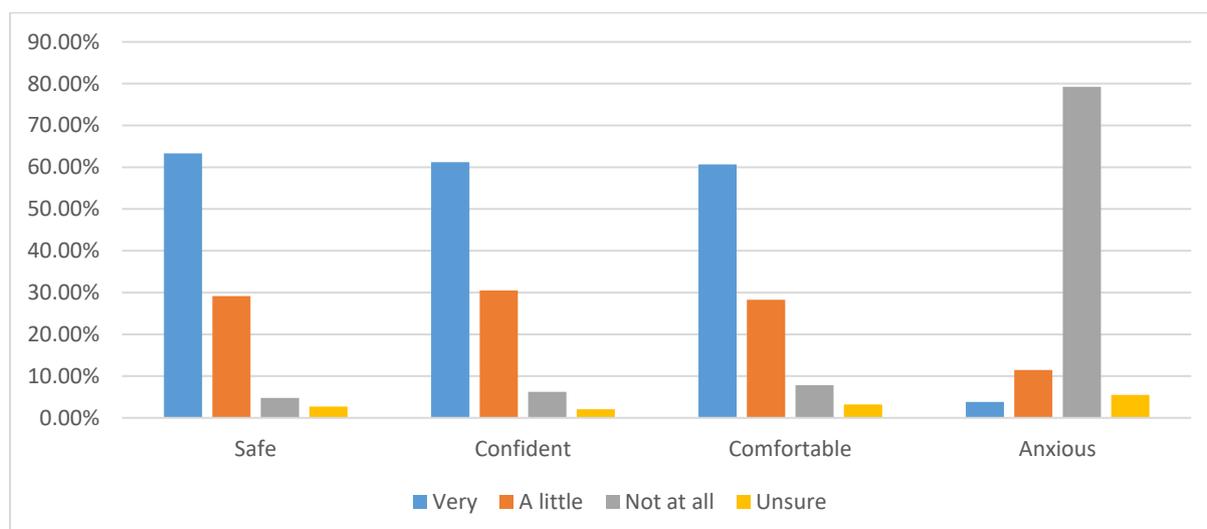


Figure 5 If the reception desk staff were behind a perspex screen along with other counters in the building (similar to that in shops and public transport) how would that make you feel?

When asked what they thought reception staff could do to make them feel more confident people talked about being welcoming, reassuring, taking time to explain the new procedures in place, ensure social distancing is observed, being more understanding when at the reception area to make patients feel comfortable.

They were also asked what they would like to see in the reception area to give them confidence that safety measures post COVID-19 had been put in place. The majority of people wanted prominent hand sanitiser stations, information about new procedures, Perspex screens, clear signage and encouragement to make sure face coverings were worn.

Similarly, they were asked about what would make them confident when in the waiting area. The majority wanted to see seats well-spaced apart and with clear signs as to which were in use, face masks being worn, hand sanitiser, fewer people and better information.

When asked whether they would like to see a separate seating area with chairs more spaced apart 92% said yes, with a further 59% saying that there should be a separate waiting area for children and 51% would like a quiet area if possible.

When asked if they would like to change anything in their current waiting area 44% said yes and 56% no. Those who said yes stated that they would like better targeted information, better sound proofing of floors, fully wipeable seats, no music, more cheerful décor and removal of magazines and any printed matter.

Patients were asked how they will feel in the consulting/treatment rooms where clinical staff are wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) 72% said that they would feel very safe, 73% would feel very confident, 66% would feel very comfortable and only 4% would feel very anxious.

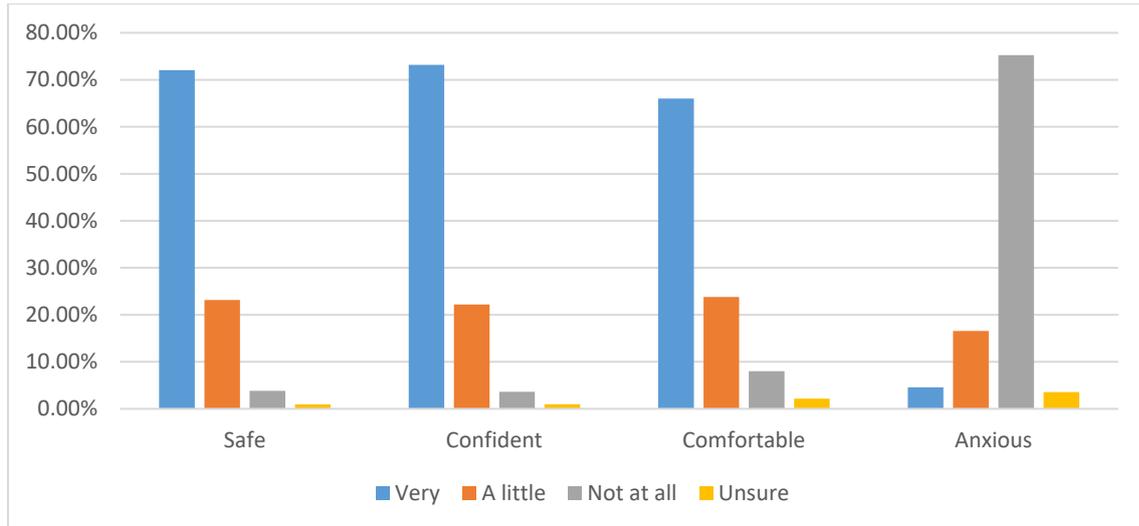


Figure 6 How will the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by the doctor/nurse/ healthcare professional treating you make you feel?

When patients were asked what the non-clinical staff working in the GP practice/ healthcare building could do to give them reassurance they wanted them to be more helpful, more understanding and to be role models and wear face masks when moving round the building. They also wanted them to point out information such as hand sanitising availability and give directions when necessary.

Patients were asked if they had experienced using GP services remotely (by telephone or video) as a result of COVID-19. 57% of patients had and 43% had not. Those that had were asked if they preferred a face to face appointment of which 47% would, 36% did not mind a virtual appointment, 7% would prefer a virtual one and 9% were unsure.

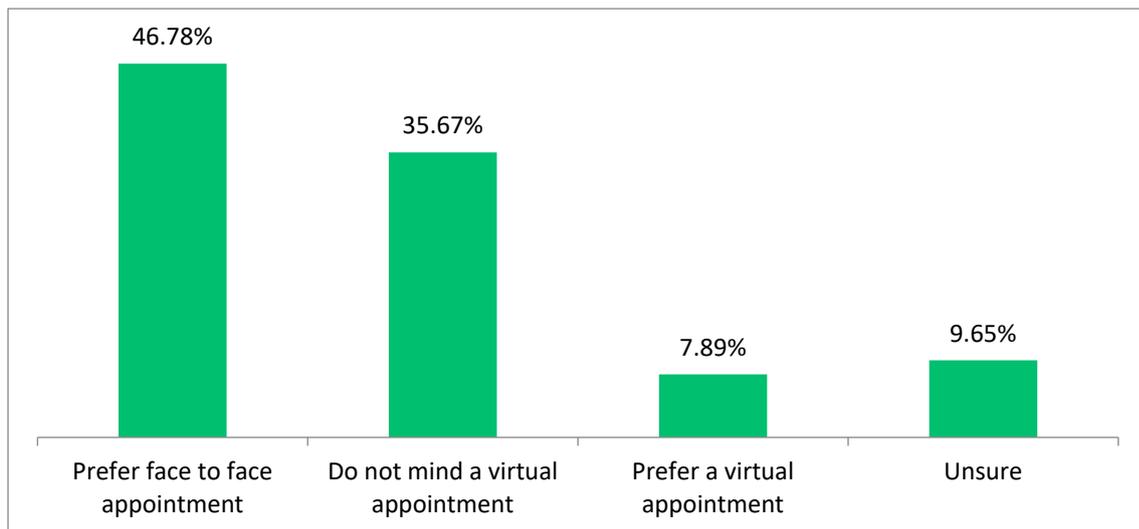


Figure 7 If you have had a virtual GP appointment/ consultation, how do you think it compares to a face to face appointment?

When asked how confident they felt now, after considering some of the questions, about using their GP practice/ healthcare building following COVID-19. 40% were confident, 34% were quite confident, 19% were unsure with 7% being not at all confident.

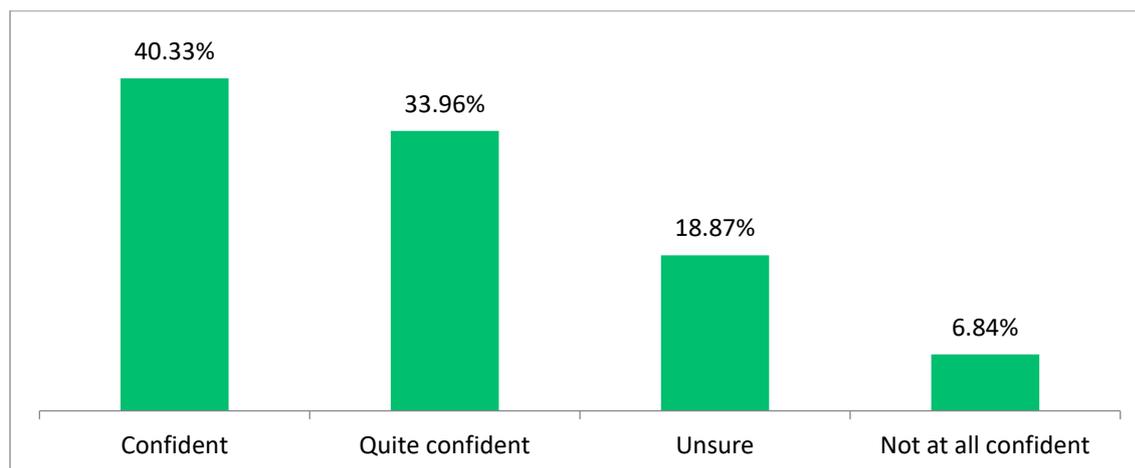


Figure 8 Having considered some of the questions above, how do you feel now about using your GP practice/ healthcare building following COVID-19?

When asked if there were any other precautions/measures they would like to see in place not mentioned previously, the majority cited automatic doors, and good ventilation with windows opened – weather permitting. A one-way system in and out of the building and evidence of deep cleaning regime were also felt to be important.

Finally, patients were asked what they felt the single most important thing they would like to see in their GP practice/ healthcare building was. Apart from those already mentioned suggestions were for dedicated clinics to avoid too much mixing, visible hygiene measures by clinical and non-clinical staff, temperature taken on arrival, patients without access to online services being treated compassionately and reduction in waiting times.

## Evaluation

The survey set out to gain a brief overview of how patients felt pre and post COVID-19 when using their GP practice / healthcare building. Patients were asked a number of questions so that a better understanding could be had of what went well and what improvements could be made to make people feel safer when using these buildings in the future. The majority of the patients who took part in the survey had accessed GP services during lockdown and overall their experience had been a positive one. However, it was clear that not all their concerns had been resolved whether due to not being seen in person when needed, not being able to use the technology or not being offered a remote appointment. Going forward there were a number of basic measures which patients wanted to see implemented in their GP practice/ healthcare building to give them confidence to visit them again.

## Conclusion

The lockdown due to COVID-19 and then the easing of lockdown changed the way that GP practice/ healthcare buildings had to operate, which was difficult for both practice staff and patients. New systems have had to be put in place and many practices are struggling to implement safety precautions due to the nature of their building. Patients clearly want reassurance that all possible measures are in place to keep them safe and to give them confidence. It was interesting that when asked before completing the survey how they felt about visiting their GP practice / healthcare building, 35% were confident and at the end of the survey that had risen to 40%. This was also reflected in those who were unsure which reduced from 22% to 19%.

## Recommendations

### Practice staff

- Be welcoming and reassuring when dealing with patients
- Act as role models in respect of hand hygiene and wearing face coverings in public areas
- Ensure that there are visible instructions for patients when entering the building and moving round the building and in reception and waiting areas
- Ensure that hand sanitisers are readily available and kept topped up
- Offer patients a choice of appointment time
- Offer patients a choice of whether their appointment is face to face or remote, where appropriate
- Offer reassurance that all measures possible are in place in the GP practice / healthcare building
- Install Perspex screens at Reception
- Where possible introduce a one-way system around the building
- Ensure that seating is wide apart and regularly cleaned.

## Appendix: Survey questions

### Introduction

With the gradual reduction in cases of COVID-19 and some lockdown restrictions being relaxed we want to find out from patients how they will feel about visiting their GP surgeries in future.

We want to know what changes or adjustments you would like in place to give you confidence that you will be safe when coming to the building for your appointment. (In this survey we refer to GP Practice/ Healthcare building as the location where you are seen by your GP).

This survey has been commissioned by  
Assura.

### Demographics

\* 1. What age group do you fall under?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65-74
- 75 or older
- Prefer not to answer

\* 2. What is your ethnicity?

- White British
- White Irish
- White Other
- Black British
- Black African
- Black Caribbean
- Black Other
- Asian British
- Asian Indian
- Asian Pakistani
- Asian Bangladeshi
- Asian Chinese
- Asian Other
- Mixed multiple ethnic groups
- Prefer not to say
- Don't know

\* 3. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer to self describe
- Prefer not to say

\* 4. Where do you live?

- East Midlands
- East of England
- London
- North East
- North West
- South East
- South West
- West Midlands
- Yorkshire and Humberside
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Non-UK based
- Prefer not to say

\* 5. Which of the following options best describes your sexual orientation?

- Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other sexual orientation not listed
- Prefer not to say

\* 6. How do you feel at the moment about visiting your GP practice/healthcare building?

- Very confident
- Somewhat confident
- Unsure
- Not confident at all

GP Premises Survey Post COVID-19

\* 7. Have you used GP services during Covid-19? (including for appointments physical and virtual, repeat prescriptions, signposting)

Yes

No

\* 8. When you contacted your GP practice how helpful were the staff when you made contact?

Very helpful  Fairly helpful  Not very helpful

Not helpful at all

9. Were you offered a telephone appointment?

Yes

No

10. Did this resolve your concern?

Yes

No

If no can you say why?

11. Were you offered a video call?

Yes

No

12. Did this resolve your concern?

Yes

No

If no can you say why?

13. If you did not need to see a GP or a nurse at the practice were you signposted to another service e.g. Pharmacist, NHS 111, optician?

Yes

No

If yes which service?

GP Premises Survey Post COVID-19

14. Did you come into the GP surgery/healthcare facility in person?

Yes

No

15. How did you feel when entering the GP/Healthcare building?

|          | Yes                   | No                    | A little              | Unsure                |
|----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Welcom   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Safe     | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Confiden | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Anxious  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

16. Were you the only patient there?

Yes

No

17. What has been your overall experience of using GP services during COVID-19?

**Accessibility**

18. When approaching your GP Practice/ Healthcare building would you be happy to use an intercom system before entering the building so that your GP practice know that you have arrived?

Yes

No

Unsure

Please explain your answer.

19. Are there certain things you would like to see at your GP practice building that will make you feel confident using the building?

|   | I would not go into a building without this | This would give me more confidence, but not essential | This would not make any difference to me | This would make me feel less confident | Not sure              |
|---|---|---|--|--|-----------------------|
| Reminders about wearing face coverings      | <input type="radio"/>                       | <input type="radio"/>                                 | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Floor markings for social distancing        | <input type="radio"/>                       | <input type="radio"/>                                 | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Clear directions                            | <input type="radio"/>                       | <input type="radio"/>                                 | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Safety information                          | <input type="radio"/>                       | <input type="radio"/>                                 | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| Hand sanitising area                        | <input type="radio"/>                       | <input type="radio"/>                                 | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> |
| A one way system to enter and exit building | <input type="radio"/>                       | <input type="radio"/>                                 | <input type="radio"/>                    | <input type="radio"/>                  | <input type="radio"/> |



**Reception**

\* 20. Would you like to see a welcome area rather than have a formal reception desk?

Yes

No

Please explain your answer.

\* 21. If the reception desk staff were behind a perspex screen along with other counters in the building (similar to that in shops and public transport) how would that make you feel?

|            | Very                  | A little              | Not at all            | Unsure                |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Saf        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Confident  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Comfortabl | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Anxious    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

\* 22. What do you think reception staff could do to make you feel more confident when you are in the building?

\* 23. What would you like to see in the reception area to give you confidence that safety measures post COVID-19 have been put in place?



**Waiting area**

\* 24. What would make you feel confident when you are in the waiting area?

25. What would you like to see in the waiting area?

|   | Yes                   | No                    | Unsure                |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Separate seating area with chairs more spaced out | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Separate waiting area for children                | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Separate quiet area if possible                   | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

\* 26. Is there anything you would like to change in the current waiting area for your GP practice/ healthcare building?

- Yes
- No

If yes can you say a little more about why?



**Consulting/treatment rooms**

\* 27. How will the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by the doctor/nurse/ healthcare professional treating you make you feel?

|            | Very                  | A little              | Not at all            | Unsure                |
|------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Saf        | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Confident  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Comfortabl | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Anxious    | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

\* 28. What could the non-clinical staff working in GP Practice/healthcare buildings do to reassure you at this time?

\* 29. Have you had experience of using GP services remotely (by telephone or video) as a result of COVID- 19?

Yes

No

30. If you have had a virtual GP appointment/ consultation, how do you think it compares to a face to face appointment?

Prefer face to face appointment  Do not mind a virtual appointment  Prefer a virtual appointment

Unsure

\* 31. Having considered some of the questions above, how do you feel now about using your GP practice/ healthcare building following COVID-19?

Confident

Quite confident

Unsure

Not at all confident

\* 32. Are there any other precautions/ measures you would like to see in your GP surgery building as a result of COVID-19?

\* 33. What is the single most important thing that would give you confidence about returning to your GP Practice /healthcare building?