

# **Blind people suffering extra stress during the pandemic**

**The Royal National Institute of Blind People Scotland commissioned a survey of those with sight loss to assess how difficult life had become for them in recent weeks.**

**The problem of social distancing are adding to the stress that many blind and partially sighted people experience.**

**Simply attending to basic needs like shopping can be quite difficult, and three quarters of those who responded said they**

James Adams, director of RNIB Scotland warned: "This first nationwide survey of how people with sight loss are coping during the current lockdown situation suggests it might be impacting particularly severely on them.

"Three in four respondents to our survey reported being very or quite concerned about getting access to food. Uncertainty and confusion over access to shopping and information – compounded by isolation and the barriers to being guided because of social distancing – all add to the stress many people are feeling.

"We are working with supermarkets to ensure those who can't leave the house, or who can't see to easily social distance themselves from other shoppers, do have access to basic food supplies."

People with sight loss can struggle to maintain social distance as they can't always see other shoppers approaching them, pointed out Mr Adams.

*Social distancing can be challenging for blind and partially sighted people.*

*If you see someone with a cane or a guide dog please give them more space at the moment, and be understanding of people who are trying their best to keep a safe distance.*

[pic.twitter.com/JZi9P0qD2o](https://pic.twitter.com/JZi9P0qD2o)

– RNIB (@RNIB) [May 14, 2020](#)

RNIB has posted the short film above on social media highlighting the challenges blind and partially sighted people face.

Eighty per cent of people replying to the RNIB survey said that the way they do shopping has changed since lockdown. Before, 28 per cent said they had done their own shopping. Now, half that proportion do. And while only 18 per cent had previously relied on someone to shop for them, now 49 per cent do. 25 per cent said there was no one in their household who could guide them around a shop.

Shopping online has also proved a problem. 67 per cent of respondents had experienced difficulty finding a supermarket delivery slot, while 26 per cent said they couldn't access the supermarket booking web-page. RNIB has pressed government and supermarkets to add blind and partially sighted people to the priority delivery list.

The survey has also revealed that the isolation imposed by lockdown has hit blind and partially sighted people particularly hard.

78 per cent said they had less contact with 'the people who matter to me'; one in five people reported that they now rarely speak to people either over the phone, on video calls or in person since lockdown; while five per cent did not know how to contact many of the people they would normally be in touch with at least once a week.

Accessible information was another worry. One in four respondents had struggled to get written information in a format that they could understand. "We have urged government and public bodies to ensure that often vital information is available in formats such as audio and braille," said Mr Adams.

"While social distancing is an important health measure, the consequences for those who are less able to comply can be difficult, especially if other people wrongly assume they are just being lackadaisical. We need to give more thought to how we ensure people with sight loss don't end up becoming prisoners of lockdown.

"Our RNIB Helpline is available to help and support all blind and partially sighted people and their families and carers on 0303 123 9999. We want people with sight loss to know they are not alone and that help is available."

Kirin Saeed from Edinburgh spoke to us about her need to ration food during the lockdown period. This is quite common as one in five respondents to the RNIB survey said they have had to do this.

Kirin is registered blind. She said: "I've found myself limiting the food I eat as I'm never that sure when my next food delivery will be.

"I have a paid carer who lives some distance away and I'm

conscious I don't want to burden her with too much shopping. Also, as I'm in the black and minority ethnic group and possibly more vulnerable to the coronavirus virus, I need to limit contact with others.

"If I went to a shop myself social distancing would be a massive problem. Touching things to ascertain what they are would, too. Blind people live in a world where touching things is important – but how long does the virus stay on things we touch?

"I don't think this situation is going to change anytime soon. Everyone's scrambling through the here and now – but what about the here and after? There will still be social distancing. The hope I have is that shops and supermarkets agree a standardised policy for customers with sight loss, so that we know how to safely get around shops and so do staff. That would be the best way forward for everybody."

We spoke to James and to Kirin about the difficulties blind people encounter and how other sighted people might be able to help. You can listen to our podcast [here](#).