

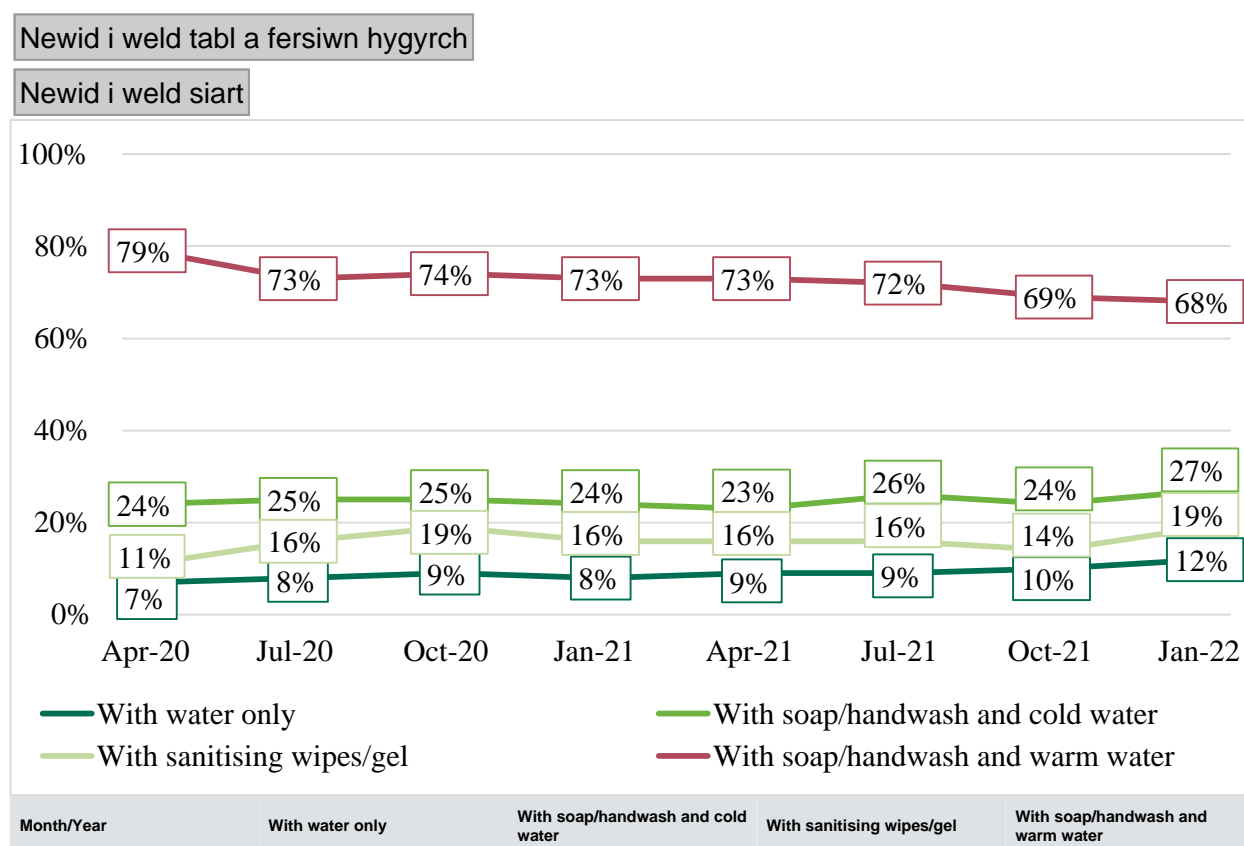
# Consumer handwashing: Main Findings

## Handwashing methods

Handwashing guidance from [CDC](#) states that handwashing should use either warm or cold water with soap. Guidance from [NHS](#) and [CDC](#) state that use of hand sanitising gel should be used if you do not have access to soap and water.

Across all waves of the handwashing tracker, participants were most likely to report washing their hands with soap and warm water when compared to other methods (with water only, with hand sanitising wipes/gel, with soap and cold water). However, the proportion who reported handwashing with soap and warm water 'always' or 'most of the time' declined over time (79% April 2020, compared to 68% in January 2022). In contrast, handwashing with water only significantly increased over the same period (7% April 2020 to 12% in January 2022), although this has remained the least common method of handwashing throughout all waves of the tracker (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Participants who reported washing their hands using various methods 'always' or 'most of the time' (April 2020 to January 2022)**



Apr-20	7	24	11	79
Jul-20	8	25	16	73
Oct-20	9	25	19	74
Jan-21	8	24	16	73
Apr-21	9	23	16	73
Jul-21	9	26	16	72
Oct-21	10	24	14	69
Jan-22	12	27	19	68

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Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75, 10-13 April 2020 (2,039), 10-14 July 2020 (2,068), 16-20 October 2020 (2,067), 15-18 January 2021 (2,062), 16-19 April 2021 (2,049), 16-19 July 2021 (2,051); 15-19 October 2021 (2,017), 14-18 January 2022 (2,066). Combined 'always' and 'most of the time' responses shown.

## Time spent handwashing

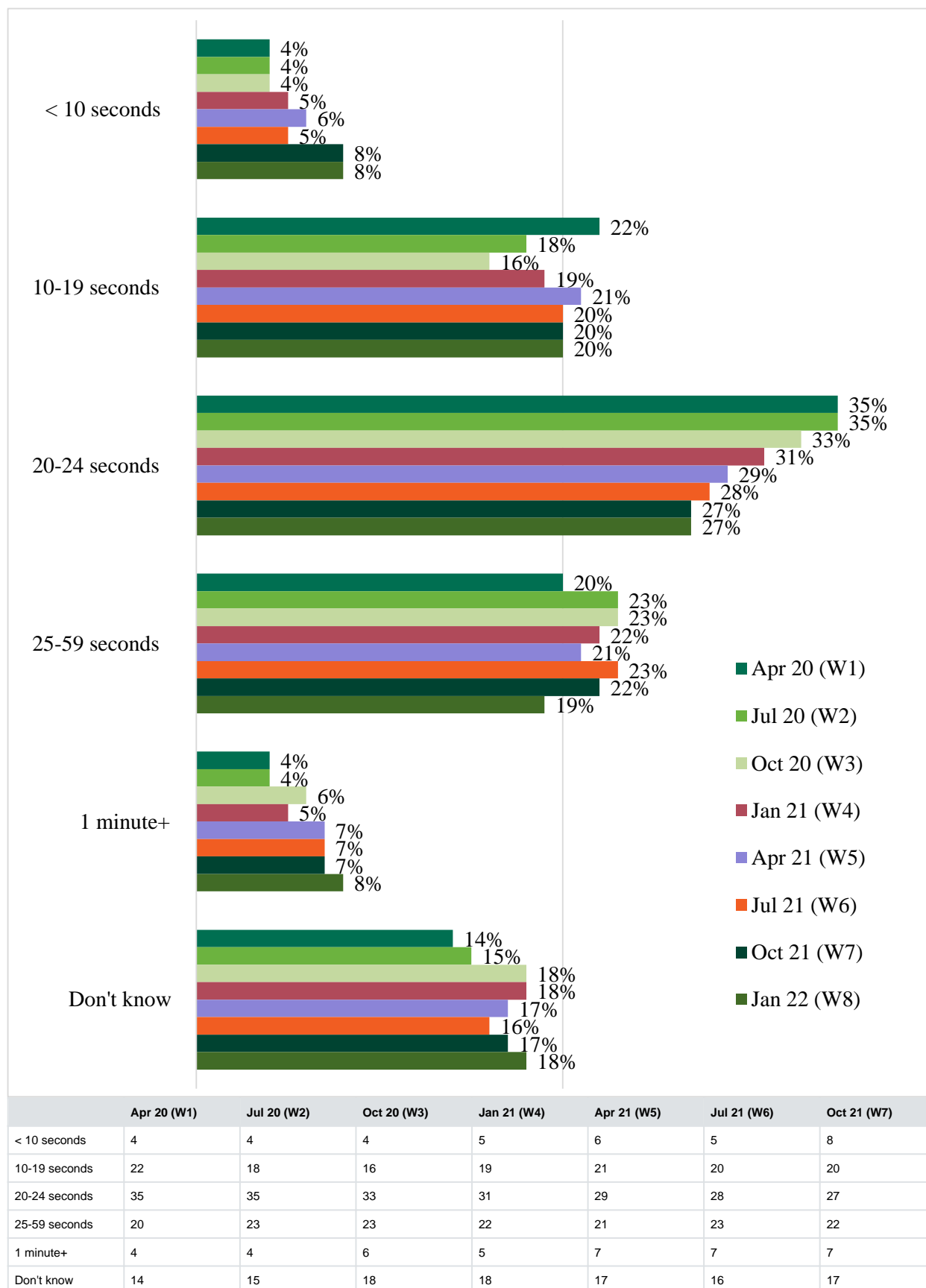
Guidance from [NHS](#) and [CDC](#) indicates that handwashing should last for at least 20 seconds.

In the handwashing tracker survey, participants were asked how long they spend washing their hands each time they do so. Most reported washing their hands for between 20 and 24 seconds across all waves, however, the proportion who reported this significantly declined over time (from 35% in April 2020, to 27% in January 2022). The proportion of participants who reported washing their hands for one minute or more, or for 10 seconds or less also significantly increased (see Figure 2). Throughout the tracker, a sizeable proportion of participants also reported that they 'don't know' how long they wash their hands for (Figure 2).

## Figure 2: Reported time spent washing the hands each time – Quantitative handwashing tracker survey (April 2020 to January 2022)

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Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75, 10-13 April 2020 (2,039), 10-14 July 2020 (2,068), 16-20 October 2020 (2,067), 15-18 January 2021 (2,062), 16-19 April 2021 (2,049), 16-19 July 2021 (2,051), 15-19 October 2021 (2,017), 14-18 January 2022 (2,066).

## Handwashing scenarios

Guidance from [NHS](#) and [CDC](#) states that handwashing should take place before/after a variety of scenarios. For example:

- after using the toilet or changing a nappy
- before and after handling raw foods like meat and vegetables
- before eating or handling food
- after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing
- before and after treating a cut or wound
- after touching animals, including pets, their food or pet waste
- after touching garbage (rubbish)

[CDC](#) guidance also stated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, additional handwashing should also be done during the following scenarios:

- before touching your eyes, nose, or mouth
- after touching your mask
- after leaving a public place
- after touching objects or surfaces that may be frequently touched by other people (for example, door handles and shopping carts)

The handwashing tracker survey asked participants about their handwashing in a variety of scenarios. The results below are divided into 'inside the home', 'outside the home' and 'personal hygiene'.

### Inside the home

Over time, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of participants who reported 'always' washing their hands in the following scenarios inside the home:

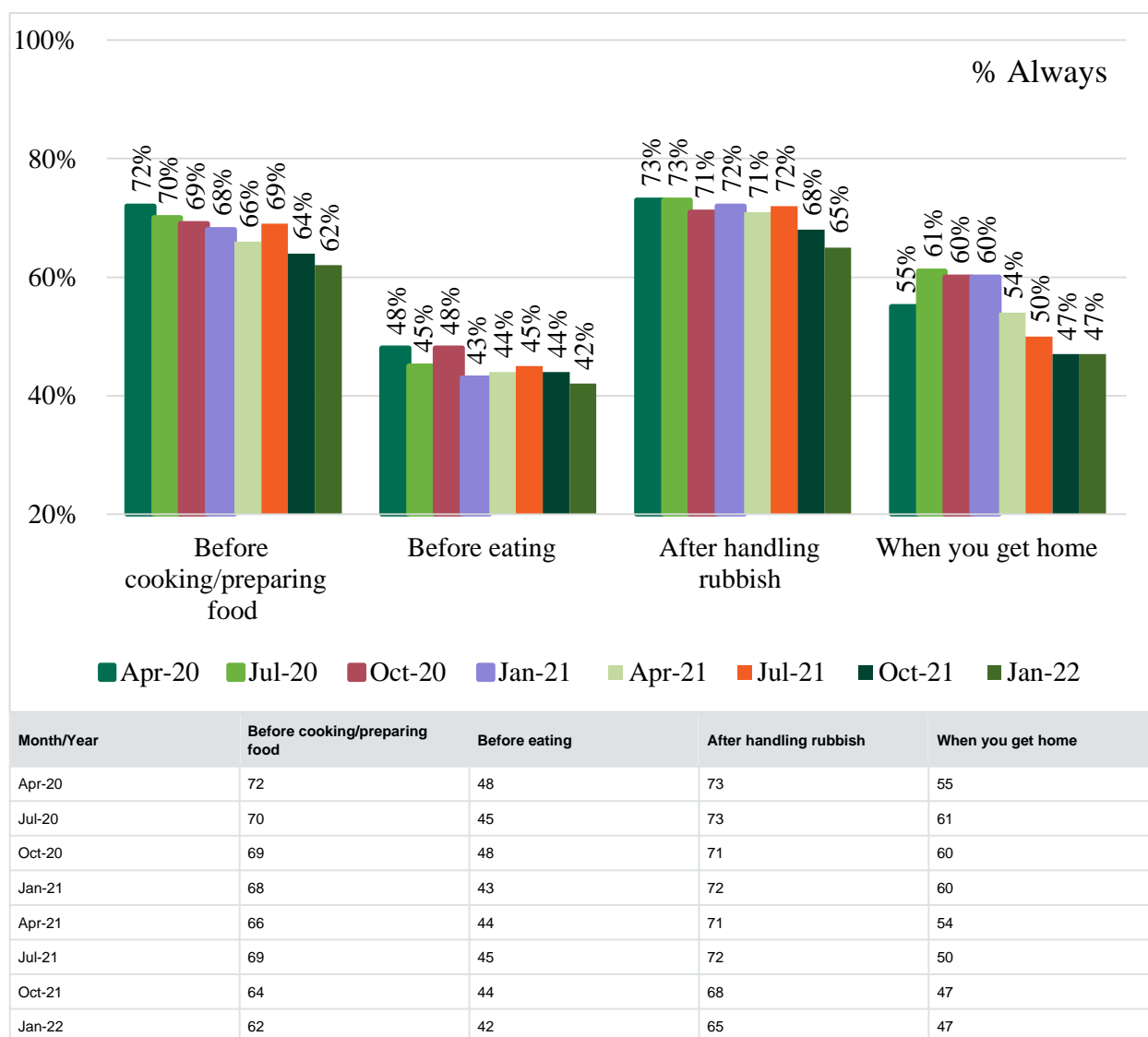
- before cooking/preparing food (72% in April 2020, 62% in January 2022)
- before eating (48% in April 2020, 42% in January 2022)
- after handling rubbish (73% in April 2020, 65% in January 2022)
- when arriving home, for example after a trip outside of the home (55% in April 2020, 47% in January 2022)

Figure 3 illustrates these trends over time. More detailed graphs (which include 'most of the time/sometimes' and 'never' responses) are included in Appendix 4.

## Figure 3: Participants who reported 'always' washing their hands in different scenarios inside the home (April 2020 to January 2022)

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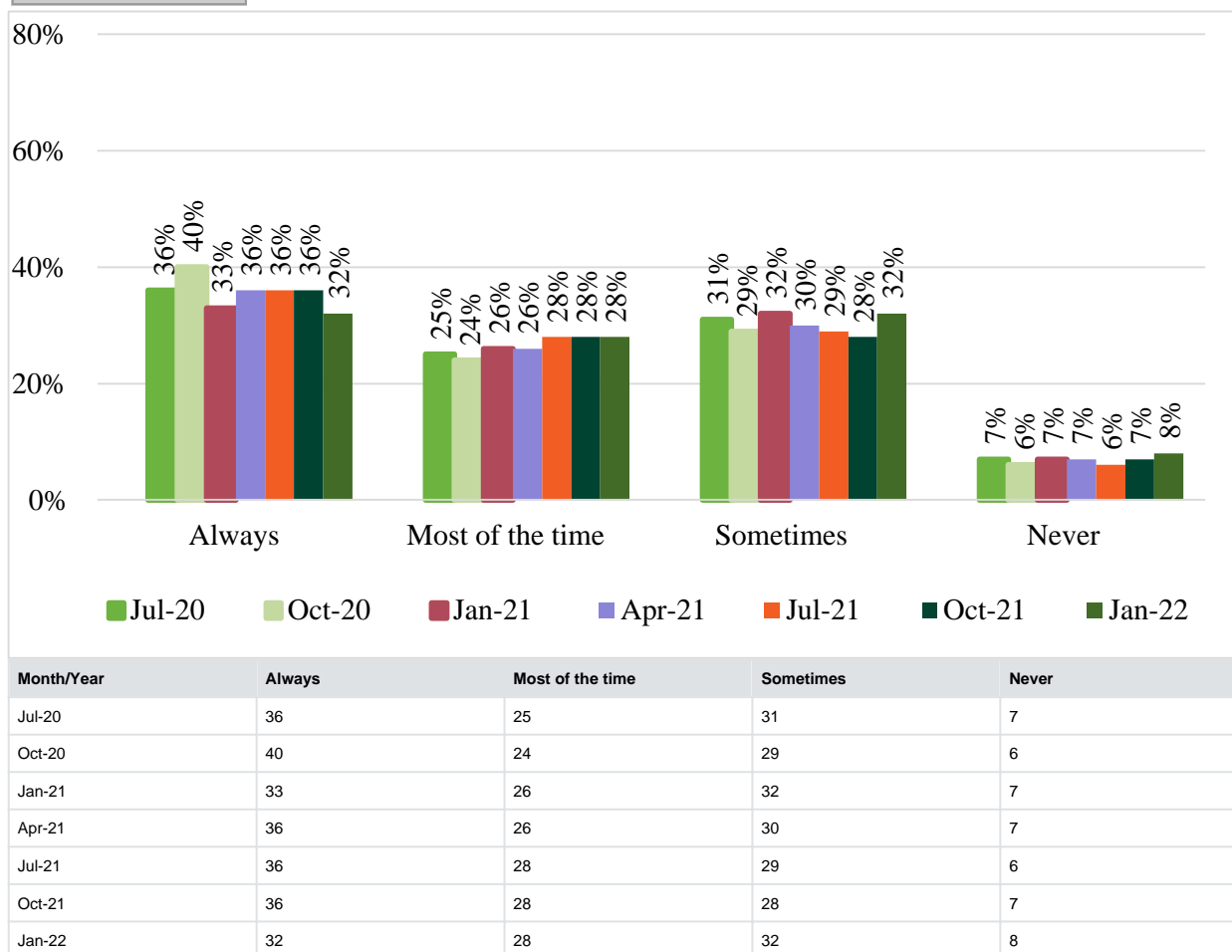
Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75, 10-13 April 2020 (2,039), 10-14 July 2020 (2,068), 16-20 October 2020 (2,067), 15-18 January 2021 (2,062), 16-19 April 2021 (2,049), 16-19 July 2021 (2,051), 15-19 October 2021 (2,017), 14-18 January 2022 (2,066).

Reported handwashing after contact with animals (including pets) remained broadly stable over time. On average, across all waves, 36% of participants with a pet reported washing their hands 'always' after contact with animals, whilst 26% reported doing this 'most of the time' and 30% reported doing this 'sometimes'. On average across all waves, 7% of participants with pets reported 'never' washing their hands after contact with animals (Figure 4). Please note, comparable data is only available for this question from July 2020 onwards.

**Figure 4: Frequency of reported handwashing after contact with animals (including pets) (July 2020 to January 2022). Based on participants who reported having a pet.**

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Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults who have a pet 16-75, 10-14 July 2020 (1,067), 16-20 October 2020 (1,017), 15-18 January 2021 (1,070), 16-19 April 2021 (1,056), 16-19 July 2021 (1,023), 15-19 October 2021 (1,054), 14-18 January 2022 (1,075). Values may not add to 100% as 'not applicable' responses are not shown. Comparable data not collected in April 2020.

## Outside the home

Due to the changing COVID-19 lockdown restrictions, participants were asked about handwashing outside their home. For these survey questions participants could also select 'I am not doing this activity at the moment', and these participants were removed from results. Therefore, only participants who reported doing these activities at the time of the survey are included in these findings. This data is only available from July 2020 (Wave 2) onwards, as the option to select 'I am not doing this activity at the moment' was introduced from July 2020. Over time, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of participants who reported 'always' washing their hands in the following scenarios outside of the home:

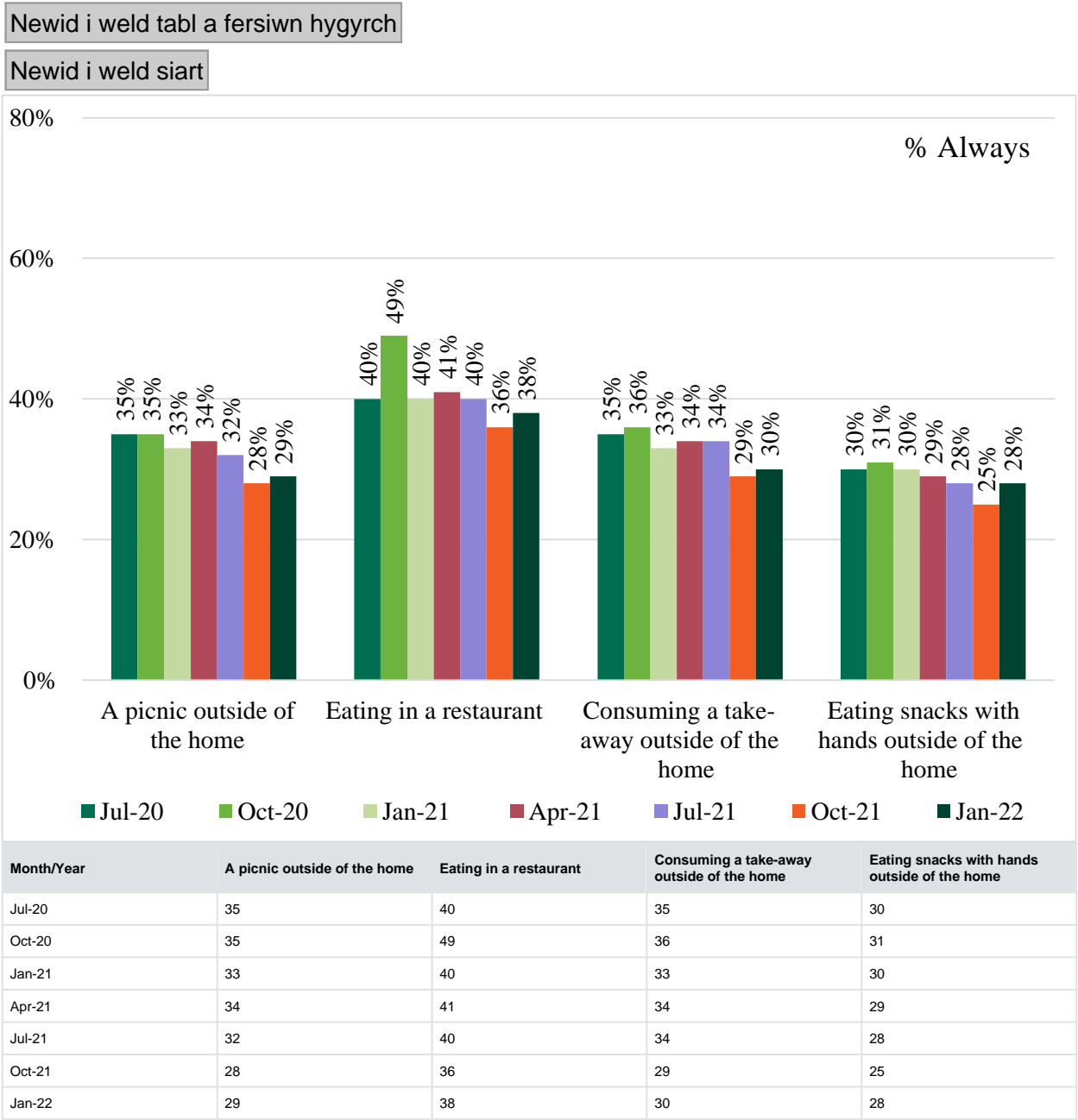
- when eating a picnic outside the home (35% in July 2020, 29% in January 2022)
- when consuming a takeaway outside of the home (35% in July 2020, 30% in January 2022)

The proportion of participants who reported ‘always’ washing their hands before eating in a restaurant significantly increased in October 2020 (49%), but otherwise remained relatively stable over time.

The proportion of participants who reported ‘always’ washing their hands before eating snacks with their hands gradually declined between July 2020 (30%) and October 2021 (25%) but increased slightly again in the final wave (28%, January 2022).

Figure 5 illustrates these trends. More detailed graphs (which include ‘most of the time/sometimes’ and ‘never’ responses) are included in Appendix 5.

**Figure 5: Participants who reported ‘always’ washing their hands in different scenarios outside the home (July 2020 to January 2022)**

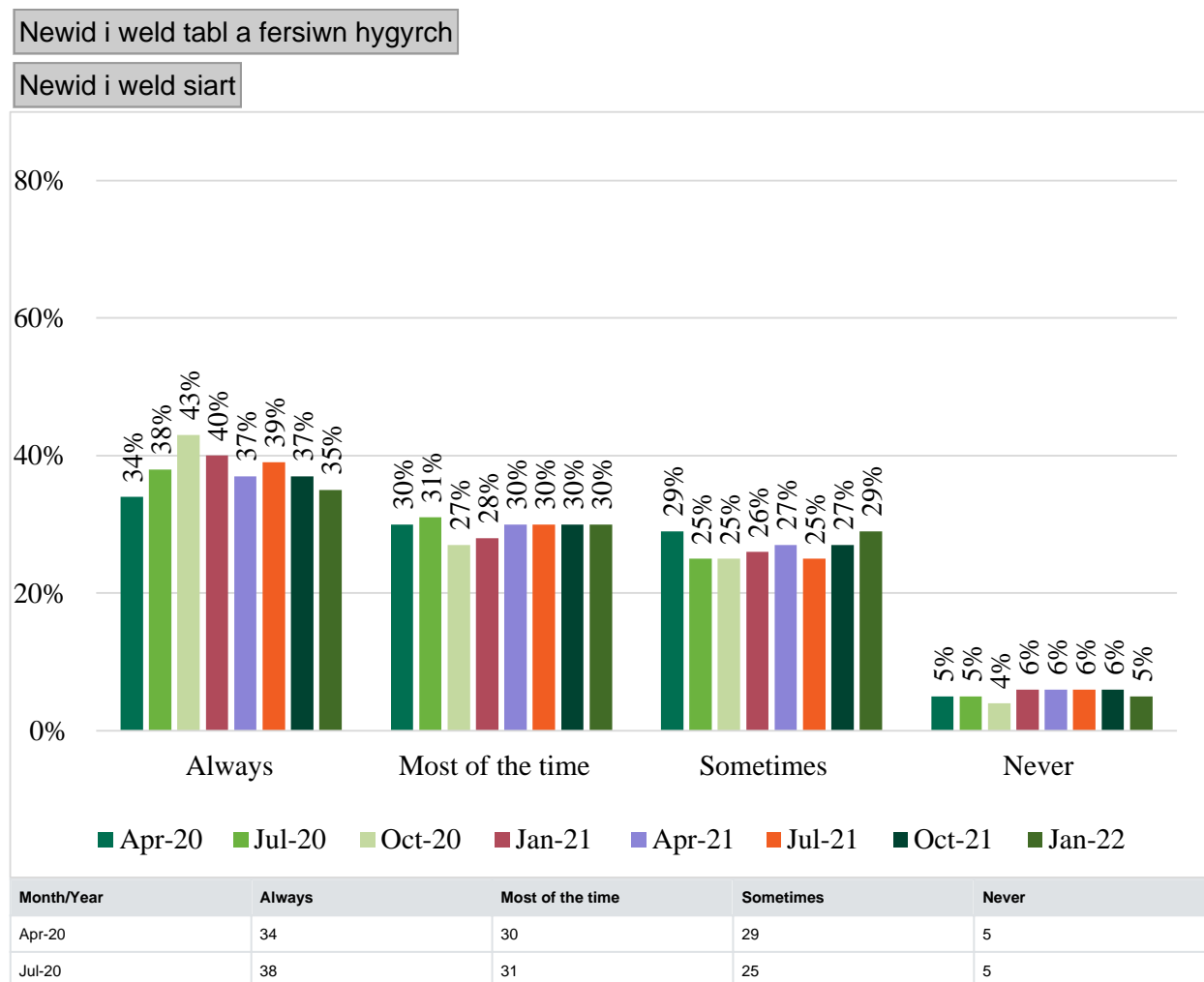


Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75 who reported carrying out these activities at the time of data collection ([footnote 1](#)). Sample sizes for each wave are included beneath the graphs in Appendix 5. Data is only comparable from July 2020 onwards.

## Personal hygiene

Participants were asked how often, if at all, they washed their hands after blowing their nose, sneezing or coughing into their hands. On average, across all waves 38% of participants reported 'always' washing their hands in this scenario. This proportion varied over time; 34% said they always washed their hands after blowing their nose, sneezing or coughing in April 2020, increasing significantly to 43% in October 2020. Since October 2020, the proportion decreased gradually over time, and was significantly lower in January 2022 (35%) than the peak in October 2020 (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Frequency of reported handwashing after blowing your nose, sneezing or coughing into your hands (April 2020 to January 2022)**







Month/Year	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Never
Apr-20	87	8	4	*
Jul-20	85	11	4	*
Oct-20	83	11	4	1
Jan-21	84	10	5	1
Apr-21	83	11	5	1
Jul-21	83	11	5	1
Oct-21	81	13	5	1
Jan-22	80	14	5	1

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Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75, 10-13 April 2020 (2,039), 10-14 July 2020 (2,068), 16-20 October 2020 (2,067), 15-18 January 2021 (2,062), 16-19 April 2021 (2,049), 16-19 July 2021 (2,051), 15-19 October 2021 (2,017), 14-18 January 2022 (2,066). \*% indicates less than 1%. Values may not add to 100% as the "Prefer not to say" option is not charted.

## Barriers to handwashing

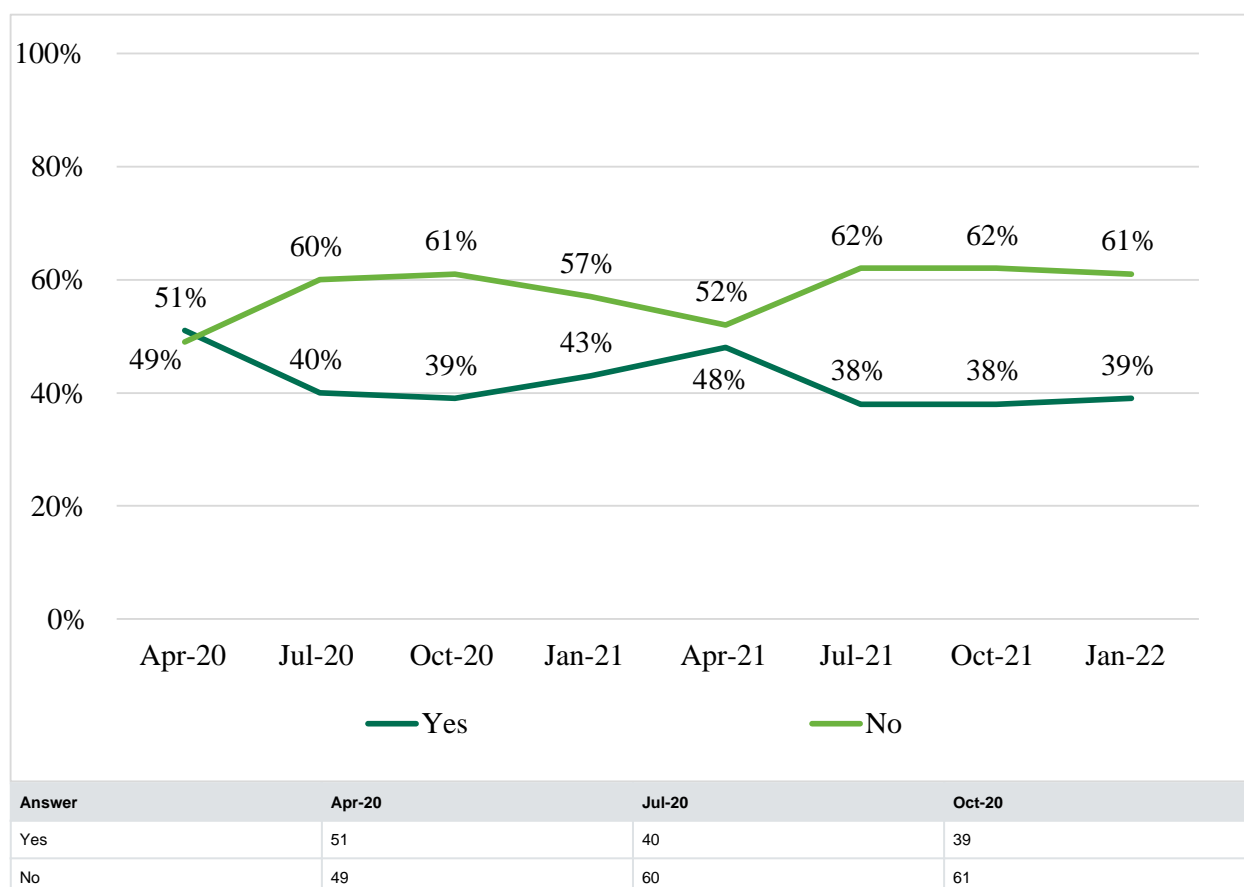
### Sore hands

Participants were asked if they experienced sore hands because of handwashing. In April 2020, 51% of participants reported having sore hands because of handwashing, and this was the only wave where most participants said this was the case. In all other waves, most participants reported that they did not have sore hands due to handwashing. The proportion of participants who reported having sore hands was significantly higher in April 2020 (51%), January 2021 (43%) and April 2021 (48%) compared to the other waves but has remained stable since July 2021 (38%) (Figure 8).

## Figure 8: Participants who reported having, or not having, sore hands as a result of handwashing (April 2020 to January 2022)

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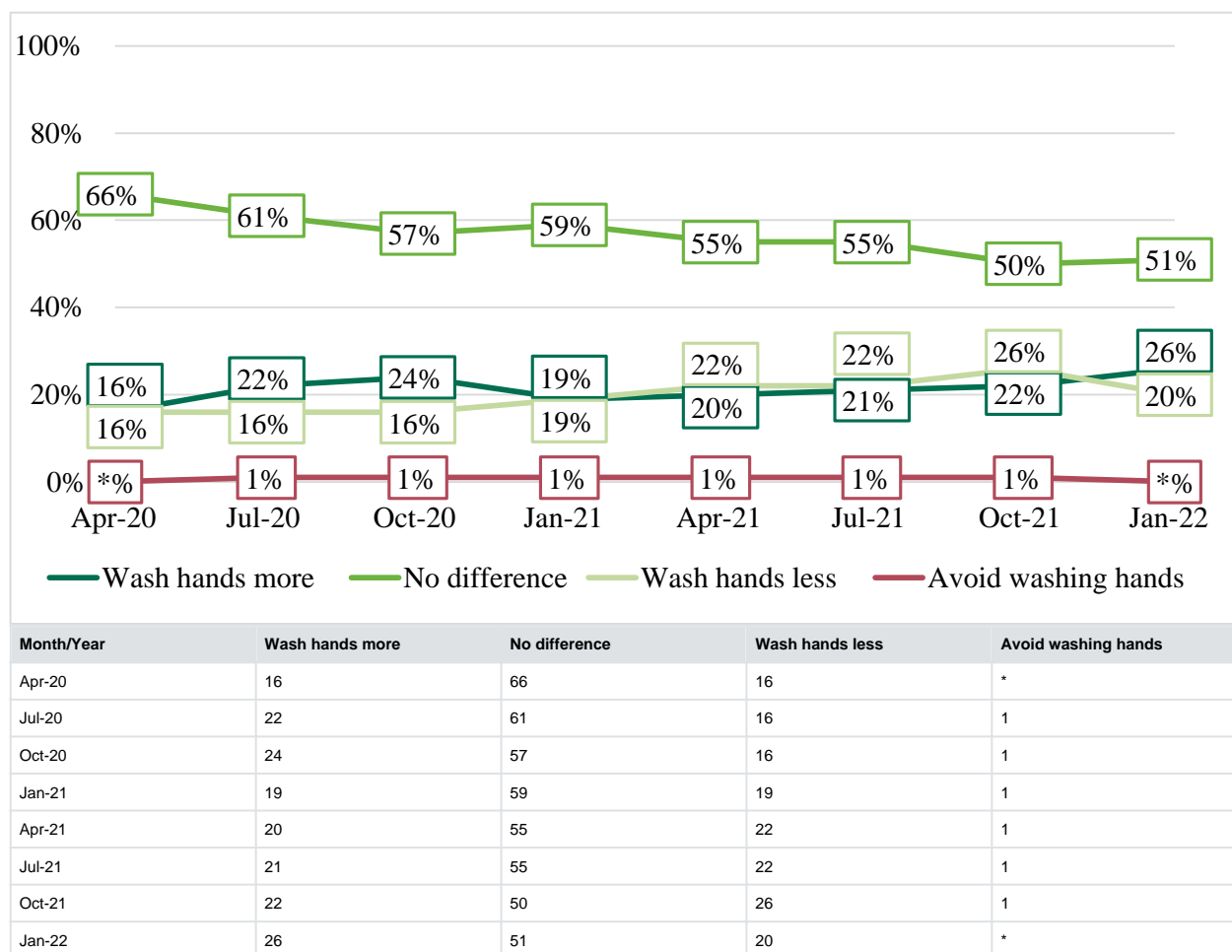
Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75, 10-13 April 2020 (2,039), 10-14 July 2020 (2,068), 16-20 October 2020 (2,067), 15-18 January 2021 (2,062), 16-19 April 2021 (2,049), 16-19 July 2021 (2,051), 15-19 October 2021 (2,017), 14-18 January 2022 (2,066).

Participants who reported having sore hands were asked how this impacted the frequency that they washed their hands. Across all waves, the majority of participants who experienced sore hands as a result of handwashing reported that it made 'no difference' to how frequently they washed their hands. The proportion who reported that it made 'no difference' to their handwashing significantly decreased over time (66% in April 2020, 51% in January 2022) (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Impact of sore hands on the frequency of handwashing (April 2020 to January 2022)**

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Base: Online British adults 16-75, with sore hands from washing 10-13 April 2020 (1,044), 10-14 July 2020 (835), 16-20 October 2020 (803), 15-18 January 2021 (913), 16-19 April 2021 (986), 16-19 July 2021 (790), 15-19 October 2021 (782), 14-18 January 2022 (841). Values may not add to 100% as 'don't know' responses not charted. \* % indicates less than 1%.

## Facilities being unavailable

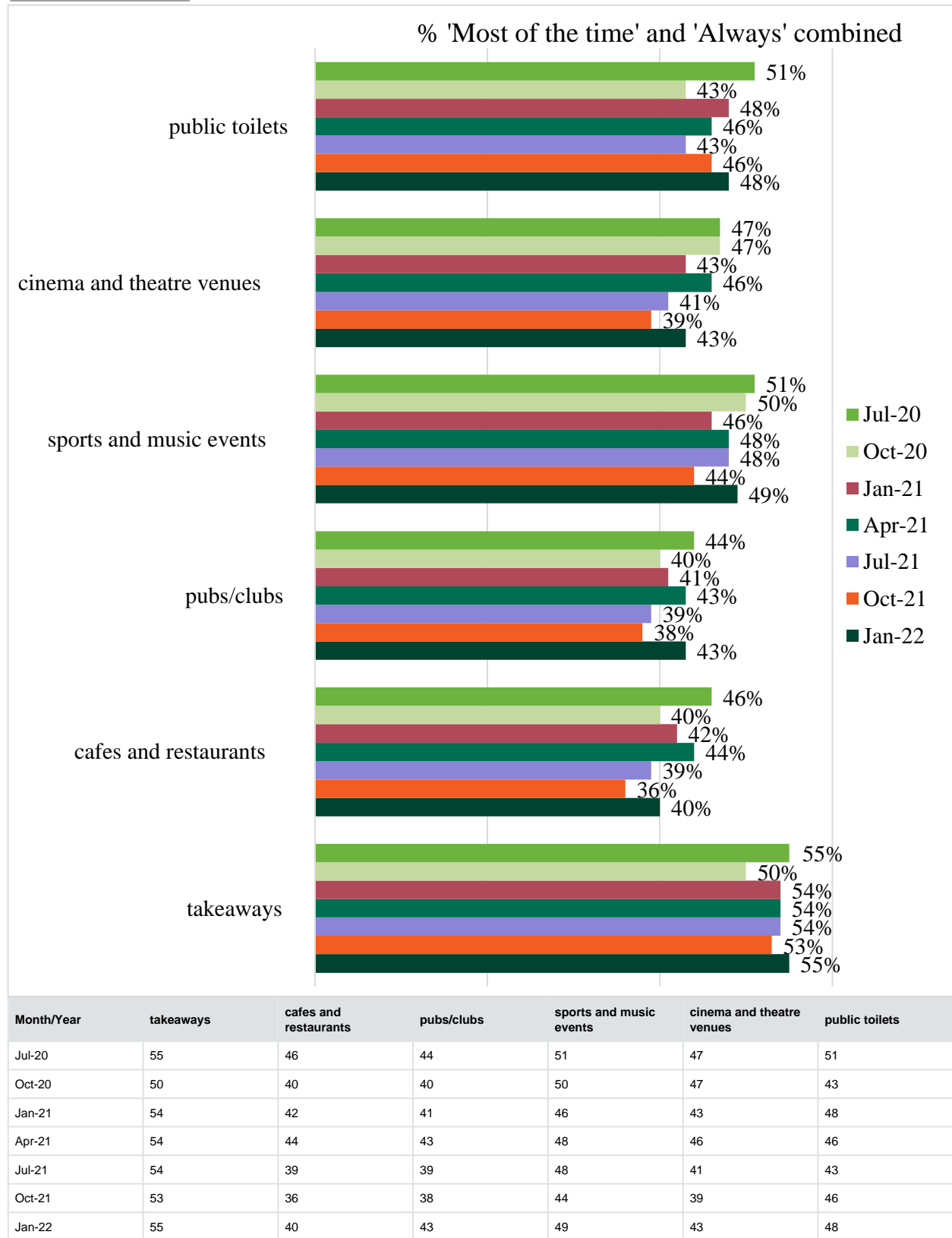
Participants were asked if they ever noticed that handwashing facilities were unavailable in a range of locations outside their home. Across all reported survey waves (July 2020 – January 2022), takeaways were most likely to be reported as having handwashing facilities unavailable 'most of the time', or 'always' (50-55%). In all settings, at least a third of participants reported handwashing facilities to be unavailable or unusable 'most of the time' or 'always' across all waves (Figure 10). This indicates that a lack of handwashing facilities outside the home is a common issue for participants.

**Figure 10: Participants who report handwashing facilities being unavailable or unusable 'most of the time' or 'always' in a range of scenarios outside the home (July 2020 to**

January 2022).

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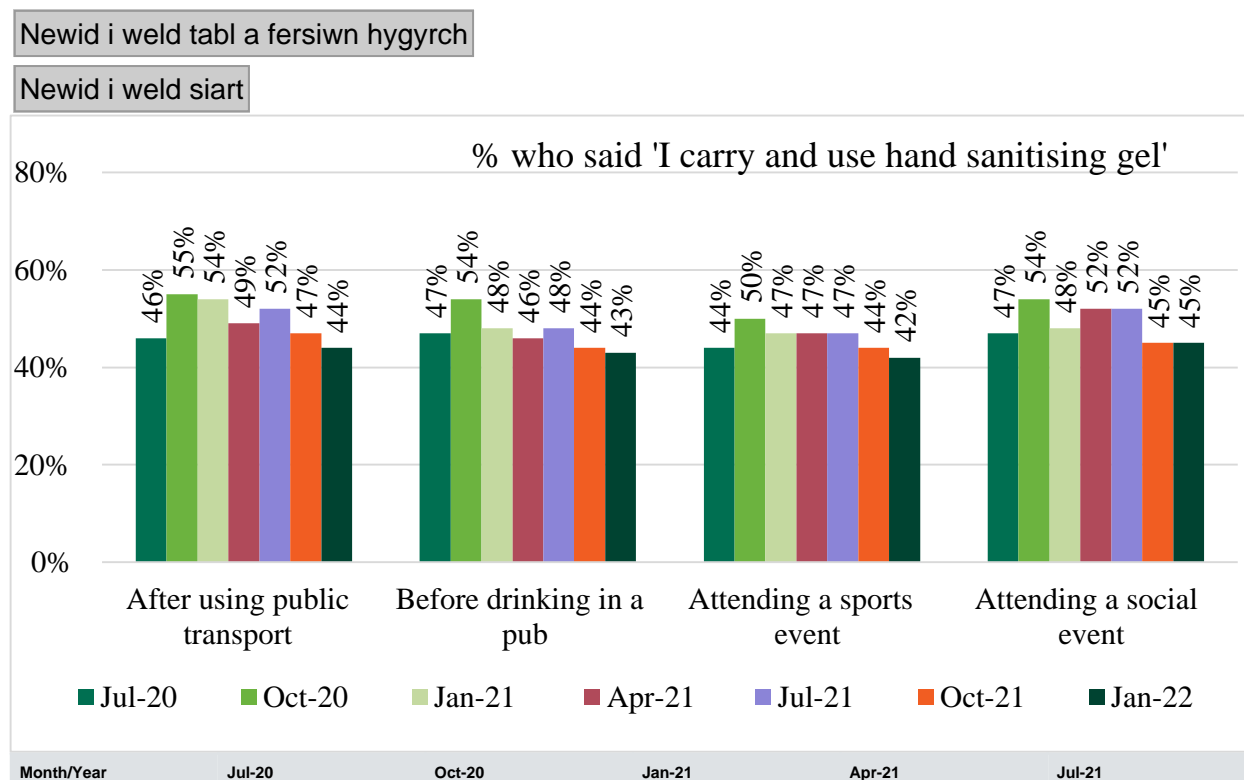
Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75 who reported carrying out these activities at the time of data collection ([footnote 2](#)): A table of sample sizes for each wave are included in Appendix 6. Data is only comparable from July 2020 onwards.

Participants were also asked what action they took, if any, when handwashing facilities were not available in the following scenarios:

- after using public transport
- before drinking in a pub
- attending a sports event
- attending a social event

Across all waves (July 2020 – January 2022), most participants reported carrying and using hand sanitising gel as a hand washing alternative. The highest proportion reported using hand sanitising gel in October 2020, but the proportion of participants then significantly decreased over time. For example, 55% of participants reported using hand sanitising gel after using public transport in October 2020, declining significantly to 44% in January 2022. Similar trends are noted for all scenarios included in the tracker; before drinking in a pub (54% October 2020 vs 43% January 2022), attending a sports event (50% October 2020 vs 42% January 2022), attending a social event (54% October 2020 vs 45% January 2022) (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Participants who reported carrying and using hand sanitising gel in a range of scenarios when handwashing facilities are unavailable (July 2020 to January 2022)**



After using public transport	46	55	54	49	52
Before drinking in a pub	47	54	48	46	48
Attending a sports event	44	50	47	47	47
Attending a social event	47	54	48	52	52

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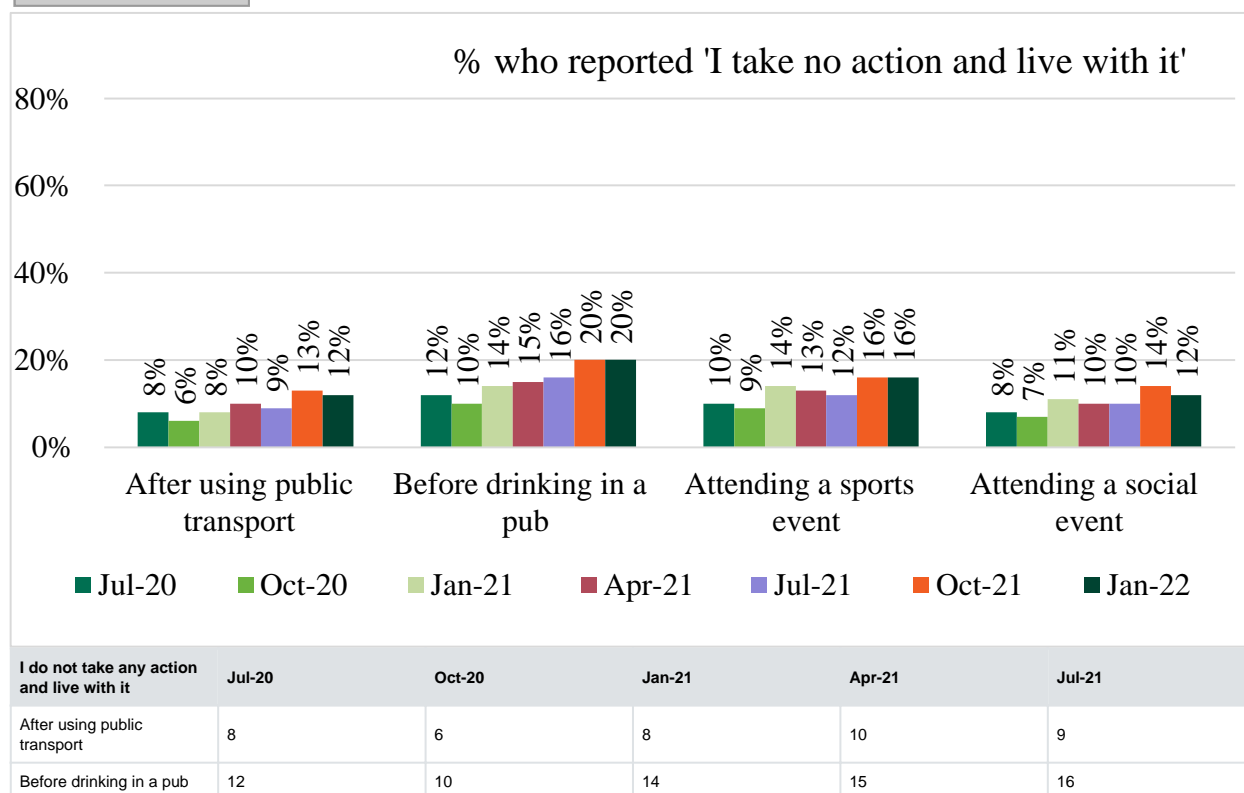
Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75 who reported carrying out these activities at the time of data collection ([footnote 3](#)): A table of sample sizes for each wave are included in Appendix 7. Data is only comparable from July 2020 onwards.

Meanwhile, the proportion of consumers who reported that they 'take no action and live with it' when handwashing facilities were unavailable increased significantly over time in all scenarios. For example, 8% of participants reported that they 'take no action and live with it' after using public transport in July 2020, increasing significantly to 12% in January 2022. Similar trends are noted for all scenarios included in the tracker; before drinking in a pub (12% vs 20%), attending a sports event (10% vs 16%), attending a social event (8% vs 12%) (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Participants who reported 'taking no action and live with it' in a range of scenarios when handwashing facilities are unavailable (July 2020 to January 2022)**

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I do not take any action and live with it	Jul-20	Oct-20	Jan-21	Apr-21	Jul-21
Attending a sports event	10	9	14	13	12
Attending a social event	8	7	11	10	10

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Base: Online England, Wales and NI adults 16-75 who reported carrying out these activities at the time of data collection ([footnote 4](#)): A table of sample sizes for each wave are included in Appendix 7. Data is only comparable from July 2020 onwards.

Some participants also reported carrying and using wet wipes/tissues, or washing their hands at the next available opportunity, but these figures do not show significant changes over time. Detailed graphs are available in appendix 8 for further information.

1. Participants who reported 'I am not doing this activity at the moment' are excluded from the base.
2. Participants who reported 'I am not doing this activity at the moment' or 'not applicable' are excluded from the base.
3. Participants who reported 'I am not doing this activity at the moment' or 'not applicable' are excluded from the base.
4. Participants who reported 'I am not doing this activity at the moment' or 'not applicable' are excluded from the base.