

COVID-19, According to Research, Helps People Connect with Nature

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BRIEF REPORT

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a wide range of effects on people's lives, but how has it impacted our relationship with nature? Forest Research conducted a study and conducted interviews to see if the COVID-19 restrictions affected people's relationships with trees, woodlands, and nature in general, as well as the benefits they obtained from appreciating, feeling connected to, and accessing nature. The work was done as part of the Active Forests Programme, which was financed by Forestry England and Sport England using National Lottery funding. The study highlights the critical role that trees, woodlands, and nature, in general, may play in people's daily lives, as well as in supporting and maintaining their well-being in the face of a global pandemic. It does, however, highlight variations in communities' abilities to access and benefit from nature at this time.

During the era of COVID-19 limits, respondents' use of 'woodlands or forests' and 'fields, farmlands, countryside' remained higher than for other nature places, according to an analysis of survey data. Gardening was also very essential to the majority of responders, who spent more time in their garden under the constraints. The limits enhanced the number of time individuals spent appreciating nature, their sense of connection to nature, and their degree of satisfaction when in nature for the vast majority. Over half of those polled said they were more appreciative of the trees on their

street, in their garden, in their park, long walks, and in woodlands. Interactions with nature increased a variety of benefits, but they were most helpful in giving respondents a "sense of escape and freedom." Concerns about overcrowding and not being able to keep their distance from others, however, were cited by more than half of the respondents as a barrier to enjoying nature. In terms of how they engaged with and benefited from nature, there were some notable disparities between tribes.

Physically active respondents tended to increase their physical activity once the COVID-19 limits were implemented, with more than half believing that any long-term improvements in physical activity would "definitely be sustained." Physically inactive people, on the other hand, tended to cut back on their activities when faced with adversity. Those who were physically active were more likely than those who were not to have maintained their wellbeing to a greater level. Younger people were more likely than older persons to describe a variety of good impacts of nature involvement, and females were more likely than males to report a variety of positive outcomes of nature engagement. Younger and older people were more likely than middle-aged people to report not meeting people they usually met and not being able to use facilities as barriers to spending time in nature, while families with children were more likely to report a lack of facilities due to COVID-19 restrictions as a barrier to spending time in nature.

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