

Wakefield District Boating Community

COVID-19 Vaccine (and general health and wellbeing) Survey

Undertaken by Wakefield Council, Healthwatch Wakefield, Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group and the Canal and River Trust

June to August 2021

Aim: To ascertain if boaters in Wakefield can access a COVID-19 vaccination, and other health and wellbeing services.

Background

An issue came to light from a conversation with two 'constant cruisers'¹ who said they had no intention of having the COVID-19 vaccine as they 'couldn't even see a GP'. It was decided to ask Wakefield District's boating community whether this was a common theme/cause for concern or an isolated issue.

There are three main types of boaters:

1. Those who live on their boats and occupy home /permanent/long term moorings
2. Leisure boaters, who have a home address and occupy home/permanent/long term moorings
3. Constant cruisers who do not have a home address or postcode. These boaters use visitor moorings where boaters can stay for short periods of time, ranging between one hour to 14 days

A National boating count has not been done this year (due to Covid) but the picture in Wakefield is opposite to the national picture with an estimated (from historical records) 160 boaters on the Wakefield branch with 142 having home moorings (so a postcode) at the last audit.

Rapid Literature Review

A desktop exercise took place to ascertain whether any research had taken place elsewhere in the country around COVID-19 vaccine uptake and access to health and wellbeing services, amongst the boating community, which exposed the following:

¹ Constant Cruisers have no home postcode but travel along the country's network of rivers, canals, and waterways

- Healthwatch Oxfordshire Health Needs Assessment (2019)²
- Oxford Boat Dwellers Accommodation Needs Assessment (2018)³
- Friends, Families and Travellers, The Health Status of Live Aboard Boaters (March 2021)⁴
- Bath and North East Somerset Gypsy, Traveller, Boater, Showman and Roma Health Survey (2012/13)⁵
- Best Practice Guide for Boat Dweller Accommodation Needs Assessments under Section 124 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 (March 19)⁶

None of the above were COVID-19 specific, but all highlighted inequalities in access to healthcare. The Health Status of Live-aboard Boaters states:

'37% of Boaters had tried, but previously been unable to register with a doctor or dentist'

Wakefield Council's Housing Team have conducted a Strategic Housing Market Assessment. This assessment is not broken down to specific groups such as the boating community: <https://www.wakefield.gov.uk/Pages/SearchResults.aspx?k=shma%202019>

Partners

The following partners offered their support in planning, practical involvement and had a vested interest in finding out the views of the boating community along with the commitment to collectively address any issues identified:

1. Canal and River Trust (CRT)
2. Healthwatch Wakefield
3. NHS Wakefield Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) Engagement

Wakefield Boating Demographics

The CRT reports⁷ there are '2,000 miles of canals and rivers which play host to over 34,000 boats.

² [New campaign to support boat-dwellers in Oxford - Healthwatch Oxfordshire](#)

³ [Oxford Report](#) and [New campaign to support boat-dwellers in Oxford - Healthwatch Oxfordshire](#)

⁴ [The-Health-Status-of-Liveaboard-Boaters-FINAL.pdf \(gypsy-traveller.org\)](#)

⁵ [B and NES Gypsy Traveller Boater Health.pdf](#)

⁶ [2019-03-12 V7 NBTA Best Practice Guide Boat Dweller Accommodation Needs Assessments S124 HPA2016.pdf \(bargee-traveller.org.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Boating | Canal Boats UK | Canal & River Trust \(canalrivertrust.org.uk\)](#)

Data from the CRT suggests that in stark contrast with the rest of the country, Wakefield has a high proportion of residential moorings.

No national boat count has been done recently (due to COVID-19) but historical records show at the last count, 160 boaters were on the Wakefield Branch with 142 having home moorings (and therefore a postcode).

Survey

It was agreed to survey the areas, in person, focusing on the places where visitor moorings are available, with the aim of speaking predominantly to 'constant cruisers' in addition to residential and leisure boaters to find out:

1. Uptake of COVID-19 vaccine amongst boaters travelling through/living in the Wakefield District
2. Understand reasons why boaters have chosen not to be vaccinated (if applicable)
3. Ascertain whether access to other health services in Wakefield is an issue
4. Record a 'snapshot' of boaters' self-assessment of their health status (respondents asked to rate their health on a scale of 1-5)

A survey monkey questionnaire was devised (agreed by all four partners).

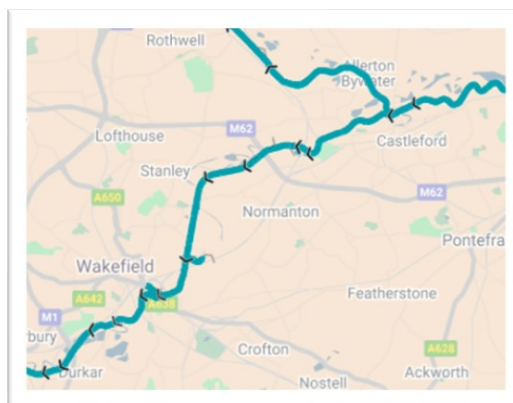
30 posters with a QR code, designed by Healthwatch, were laminated and displayed in prominent places along the towpath at key areas (identified and agreed with by CRT).

Four researchers visited the canals and spoke to the boaters (Tuesday 29th June, Thursday 1st July and Thursday 8th July).

Locations for Survey

The Aire and Calder Navigation and the Calder and Hebble Navigation are the main waterways through the Wakefield District. The following areas were chosen as they have visitor moorings (of between 100 and 150 metres, and Broad Cut 320 metres)

- Stanley Ferry
- Kings Road
- Castleford Cut
- Fall Ings
- Broad Cut Moorings (320 metres)
- Horbury Basin
- Ferry Bridge
- Knottingley



Initial Findings

Attitudes of Boaters



Stanley Ferry: There were two very distinct attitudes of respondents experienced by the researchers. At Stanley Ferry, boaters were generally happy to be surveyed and only one person approached declined to take part in the survey. Most of the boats were unoccupied at the time of doing the research, (which was a theme throughout the Wakefield District).

At the time of the research, (July 2021), a body was found in the Canal at Stanley Ferry [Police called to Wakefield canal after man's body found in water | Wakefield Express](#)



Castleford Cut: At Castleford Cut, the mood of the boaters was very different, with more of the boats being occupied and many people surveyed were reluctant to speak to the researchers initially. Several did not want to engage with the CRT and were suspicious of the intentions of the Council and NHS (lack of investment in the canal infrastructure and the inability to access some NHS services, were given as reasons for not

wanting to engage initially). Generally, it took twice as long to glean information from these boaters, as their trust and understanding of why we were asking questions of them, had to be carefully explained first. It was an asset to have Healthwatch on board as an overtly independent organisation.

Several boaters spoke to researchers about a friend and neighbour of theirs who had recently died because of an accident, falling from his canal boat. One gentleman said he had been there when it happened and had given resuscitation until professional help arrived. His funeral was imminent, and this had highlighted the dangers involved in this lifestyle. A couple also told researchers about someone who had died by hanging (suicide) at the back of their moorings some months previously, which had compounded their sense of bereavement and anxiety.



Broad Cut: At this location, the residents had been advised by CRT in September last year that their long-term residential moorings will be re-designated to short-term summer moorings due to flood risks, this summer. Residents along this stretch had started a campaign⁸ to try to save their home moorings and three boaters said this had exacerbated their existing mental health conditions and they said they were struggling to find alternative moorings. One lady said she would have to leave

the area, her family support network and possibly lose her job.

Ferry Bridge and Knottingley: At the time of the survey, this area was quiet with only a small number of boats moored. Most were unoccupied and the lock was out of action, meaning no boats were passing through.

Access to Health Care

Several boaters at Castleford Cut (7) stated that they had been turned away from xxxx Medical Centre. This was relayed to Senior Officers in Public Health to action.

Several Healthwatch leaflets were distributed. Six NHS leaflets entitled 'How to register with a GP (Gypsy, Traveller, Roma Communities)⁹ along with six NHS 'How can I see a GP if I'm away from home?' documents¹⁰ were also handed out to those who requested the information.

Key Findings

- **65** responses received to the survey (all online)
- **81%** of respondents said that they regularly travel on the waterways/canals in the Wakefield District (52 people)
- **42** Boaters described themselves as 'Live-aboards' (or constant cruisers)
- **8** respondents said they were not registered with a GP (13%)
- **18** people did not know they could access a COVID-19 vaccine anywhere in the country without having to be registered with a GP (28%)
- **17** boaters (26.5%) have not had the COVID-19 vaccination, the majority stating they don't want to have one.

⁸ [Boaters launch petition to save moorings on popular Wakefield canal | Wakefield Express](#)

⁹ [how-to-register-with-a-gp-gypsy-traveller-roma-communities.pdf \(assets.nhs.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [How can I see a GP if I'm away from home? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

- Of those who had received their first COVID-19 vaccination, **37** said they had already had their second dose and **7** had planned their second dose.
- **2** people hadn't made up their minds about their second dose, **1** person needed help to make an appointment and **1** was not intending having a second dose.
- **No-one** needed support to have their vaccinations
- **20** people (31.25%) said they had difficulty accessing health care whilst on the waterways in the Wakefield District. GP appointments and Dentists were the top issues identified.
- When asked about general health, participants were asked to select from a sliding scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent)

1.	Very Poor	3
2.	Poor	14
3.	Neither good or bad	11
4.	Good	25
5.	Excellent	9
6.	Skipped the question –	3

Demographics

- **29** respondents were male/identified as male
- **30** respondents were female/identified as female
- **28** were aged 55 – 64 (47.46%)
- **13** aged between 45 and 54 and
- **12** aged 65+
- **55** people identified as white British/white other
- **2** stated 'other'
- (8 people skipped this question)

Survey Results

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/stories/SM-RWHGJ9JJ/>

Useful Resources (shared with participants at canal side)

¹¹NHS Leaflet – How to Register with a GP, Gypsy Traveller Roma Communities

Help if you are refused registration

Ask the GP receptionist to write the reason why they cannot register you in the box overleaf. You cannot be refused registration because you are a member of the Gypsy, Traveller or Roma community, whether on an authorised or unauthorised site or 'of no fixed abode', because you do not have proof of address, identification or because of your immigration status.

If the GP already has too many patients they can refuse to register you. In this instance they must explain why in writing. If this happens to you, or a helper, you can seek advice on how to access GP services from a local support organisation.

You can make a complaint
By email: england.contactus@nhs.net (for the attention of the complaints manager in subject line).
By post: NHS England, P.O. Box 16738, Redditch, B97 9PT.
By phone: 0300 311 2233 (Telephone Interpreter Service available).

For further information
You may be able to get help and advice from your local Citizens Advice: www.citizensadvice.org.uk or your local Healthwatch: 0300 068 3000 www.healthwatch.co.uk

This information can be made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print and may be available in alternative languages upon request. Please contact 0300 311 2233 or email england.contactus@nhs.net.

NHS England Gateway Reference: 06277

Message to the GP Practice

Thank you for helping to register this patient. We hope the patient was able to show you relevant documents. NHS Guidelines say 'if a patient cannot produce any supportive documentation but states that they reside within the practice boundary then practices should accept the registration'.

There is no regulatory requirement to prove identity, address, immigration status or an NHS number in order to register as a patient and no contractual requirement for GPs to request this.

All Travellers, Gypsies and Roma Community members are eligible to register with a GP practice. All overseas visitors and asylum seekers, whether lawfully in the UK or not, are eligible to register with a GP practice even if they have to pay for NHS services outside of the GP practice.

The patient **MUST** be registered on application unless the practice has reasonable grounds to decline.

GP practices have limited grounds on which they can turn down an application and these are:

- The commissioner has agreed that they can close their list to new patients.
- The patient lives outside the practice boundary.

N.B. A person who is a Traveller, a Gypsy or Roma Community member should not be refused registration on the basis of where they reside, because they do not live in a fixed accommodation or on a fixed site. Some people may move quite frequently, for family or work reasons, from one fixed site to another and family authorised to patients may need to change the place where they live on a frequent basis.

If you require further information or advice, please contact your local NHS England primary care commissioning team (www.england.nhs.uk/about/regional-area-teams/).

Please refer to the NHS England Guidance on Patient Registration: Patient Registration Standard Operating Principles for Primary Medical Care (GP), November 2015: www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2015/11/pat-reg-sop-pmc-gp.pdf

To be completed by the GP practice
If you cannot register this patient, please identify the reasons from the list below and sign and date the form so the patient is informed.

A: Our list is closed to new patients as from (date)

B: The patient states that they live outside the practice boundary and we do not offer an enhanced registration service. as it is not an applicable ground to refuse to register a person from the Gypsy, Traveller or Roma community on an authorised or unauthorised site or 'of no fixed abode' in the vicinity of your practice?

C: We cannot register the patient due to other reasons as stated below:

Name: _____
GP Practice: _____
Other reason (if applicable): _____
Date: _____
Signature: _____

ETHNIC GYPSY, ROMA AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES
How to register with a doctor (GP)

¹²NHS Guidance on seeing a GP when away from home (shared with participants at canal side)

¹³Letter and translations to help people without an NHS number access the COVID-19 vaccine and register with a GP (new guidance, 13th August 2021)

A letter from Dr Nikki Kanani to reassure people without an NHS number, including migrants, about their entitlement to the COVID-19 vaccine and if they wish to, how register at a GP practice has now been translated into 23 languages.

Circulated via the Home Office and local housing, homeless and migrant teams, it explains that COVID-19 vaccines are safe and available to every adult living in the UK, free of charge without any immigration checks.

The letter also stresses that people do not need to have a GP or an NHS number to get the COVID-19 vaccine and what people need to do in these circumstances. You can access the letter and the translations online:

[Guidance overview: COVID-19: vaccine information for people without an NHS number - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

¹¹ [how-to-register-with-a-gp-gypsy-traveller-roma-communities.pdf \(assets.nhs.uk\)](#)

¹² [How can I see a GP if I'm away from home? - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)

¹³ [COVID-19: vaccine information for people without an NHS number - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Translations are available in Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese, Czech, Estonian, Farsi, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese Brazilian, Punjabi, Romani, Romanian, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Turkish, Twi, Ukrainian, Urdu.

Recommendations

- NHS Leaflets re accessing GPs be promoted by Wakefield Council, Healthwatch, Wakefield CCG and the CRT
- GP Practices in the Wakefield District to be provided with a leaflet reminding them of the rights of people to access GPs without home address
- CRT to display NHS Leaflet on the waterways/canals in the District

Thank you

- Paul Mooney (Canal and River Trust)
- Sarah Deakin (Wakefield CCG)
- Ann Marie Maguire (Healthwatch Wakefield)



Supporting Information

- National Barge Travellers Association National Barge Travellers Association – Representing the interests of all itinerant live-aboard boat dwellers (bargee-traveller.org.uk)
- National Association of Boat Owners [NABO Home](#)
- Friends, Families and Travellers [Advice for Boat Dwellers | Friends, Families and Travellers \(gypsy-traveller.org\)](#)
- Residential Boat Owners' Association [RBOA | Residential Boat Owners' Association](#)
- Canal Boat Vaccination Centre: [Canal-boat vaccine centre for boaters unlocks opportunity for service \(churchtimes.co.uk\)](#)

Appendix 1 – Leaflet

Designed by Healthwatch, and distributed along the canals in the District, approximately 30



**Boaters
in Wakefield District**

Wakefield Council's Public Health Team is working with the NHS, Canal and River Trust and Healthwatch to find out more about uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine in Wakefield District and access to healthcare for boaters more generally.

We want to hear from you

Scan here for survey:
www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FCMZ8CT
For a paper copy please phone 07796 987699

healthwatch Wakefield
01924 787379
enquiries@healthwatchwakefield.co.uk
www.healthwatchwakefield.co.uk

wakefieldcouncil
working for you

NHS

Canal & River Trust
Making life better by water

working in partnership

Appendix 2 – Researchers Notes

Researcher Notes: Tracy Leach

Accessing a GP

7 people we spoke to raised problems accessing health care at xxxxx Medical Centre.

Of those, one was a Veteran who said he knew his rights and that the Armed Forces had an agreement with the NHS to treat them as a priority group. He stated this to the Receptionist, (xxxxx Medical Centre) to no avail and he had been unable to register with the practice. He was a residential boater based in xxxxx. His wife confirmed that trying to access healthcare had been '*very difficult and stressful*' for them both. He was given details of a local Veterans Group and mental health support page (Council Website).

One boater said he regularly travelled the whole of the national network, saying '*I've travelled all over the country and the only area I have had a problem accessing health care is. . . [xxxxx Medical Centre]*'.

One lone lady traveller said how difficult it was for her accessing health care. She was based in in xxxxx, but 'had to travel to where she last lived in a house. Her GP there was happy to keep her on the register and she had to spend almost a full day getting there and back for appointments (using public transport), but that was preferable to being turned away from practices and from getting her notes mixed up, which was a worry for her due to the number of medical issues she had.

One couple with a home mooring said they had tried to access a GP from their nearest practice (xxxxx Medical Centre) but had been turned away. They had finally managed to be registered with a GP in Leeds.

Mental Health

Several people we spoke to told us they had poor mental health. One lady explained how she was on medication for mental health issues. As she moved onto a boat her GP allowed her to stay on their books but every few months, she was contacted by the surgery to say as she was living outside the area, she was going to be removed from their patient list. She had to repeatedly explain that she was using her parents' home address for her home base as she was a 'traveller' and that her parents passed on mail to her. After explaining her situation, she was allowed to remain on the books, but the process was '*draining and stressful*'.

There were around 6 single men, who said they had mental health issues including anxiety, depression and some had other medical issues too (Autism, COPD, personality disorder, panic attacks, social anxiety).

One man we spoke to had mental health issues was living with his wife on their boat. He said he was unable to access mental health support because he wasn't registered with a GP. He was given advice on how to access mental health support without the need to have a GP (Wakefield Council mental health support page).

One man had mental health problems and was very angry that he had been asked to attend his GP practice for an annual check and when he got there was told he couldn't

enter the building as he would not wear a mask. He believed that the health service and other authorities were corrupt and not to be trusted.

Several boaters spoke about recent deaths on the canal and the effect this had on them. No one we spoke to said they wanted help. Information on bereavement support was provided to some (in case they did in the future).

Researcher Notes: Ann Marie Maguire

Have used Pinderfields a few times with my partner. Because it is not easy to get to see a GP, I had no other option other than to go there as 111 weren't that great and told me to register with a GP.

I am permanently Ashgrove registered.

I was getting funny feeling and pain in my chest, so I Rang 111 up as was a bit worried about heart. Got an appointment to go to. Just filled out a form and was easy enough to register. I was registered

I broke 2 legs in February and a couple of weeks ago my Physio called to cancel as they had Covid

I had fallen getting off my boat and broke my leg. Luckily, I was able to get my partner to drive me to the hospital as it can be difficult getting an ambulance to find you when you are out of the canals. I went to Pontefract first then had to go to Pinders. They are good, they found it a bit funny that I didn't have an address. But I got sorted basically. Seen straight away at Ponte lovely nurse there. Got X-rays etc there and then plastered up there. She wanted me to stay in overnight, but I wanted to get back to my home on the boat, but she was fine in the end and eventually they allowed me too once they were satisfied I could cope there (my partner was going to look after me.). Can't fault the care at all. Everyone was thoughtful and caring, and I was very well looked after. I was later referred to go to Pinderfields. I was supposed to be in for a day but ended up longer, but they were amazing. Gate 40 care was excellent. The staff were fantastic so committed. Not a fan of hospitals but they were fantastic.

Invited by GP to go for an appointment, test for COPD. I got a text to go. I had to drive 40miles. Got to door they told me not to come I'm as I didn't have a mask on and so refused to let me in. It's my business if I don't want to wear a mask.

Have used the walk-in centre which was great. It is much more convenient than having to find a GP.

I have been a few times to register but told I couldn't. XXXX Health Centre. Last year they told me I couldn't point blank. Even though I am a veteran. They said the laws have changed or something. Receptionist was very rude to me. Ended up I had to speak to the Practice Manager and eventually I got sorted but not without no end of questions and hassle.

Needed tooth out NHS 111 emergency and they sorted me no problem dentist beside they were brilliant.

XXXX Heath centre they say they still haven't got my NHS records- I have been there 3 years. Only gave me username not password. I can't seem to get anywhere with them
Can't get NHS Dentists at all. I have been trying for at least 2 years. It seems to be getting worse.

Mental health services - not appropriate for boaters- transport is an issue. How to find out services, you then have to get into it. If you are reticent about standing your ground about not having an address. Quite often you are just left.

Can't always use zoom etc as the signal is usually rubbish. So, although it sounds great in theory – in practice it is not that easy. Same goes for GPs giving you video appointments even appointments over the phone can be just as tricky as reception again sometimes isn't brilliant.

Quite often I will not want to access services and tend to self-medicate.

People tend not to step outside their own community especially fellow boaters. Boaters who act as carers -the System is not noticing or not looking at this. Boaters tend to look after themselves and no one notices

I'm fine just using the Walk-In centre. I'm in good health so haven't the need to use GP really.

There was a time 6mths ago I dropped trolley on ankle. Called 111 they advised A&E but I live in a boat and can't get there. Also had damaged ankle and couldn't drive. So ended that I don't go anywhere.

Cannot access dental care at all

I feel there should be an intermediary between A &E and GP. I find it difficult to access services especially GP services. I have because been away or have had to stay put somewhere unexpectedly.

Had problems getting GP. Was 10 years since I last had a visit

If I have never had any problems and if I do need to go Walk-in

Problem getting NHS drop-in Dentist for emergency

When we have been out cruising, we have had problems getting GP services as they say we are not in area/catchment or we don't have an address. I don't think this is right and I am sure they have a duty to see you even if you just temporarily are in their area.

Vaccination in Wakefield is brilliant. Went up to Navigation Walk in my boat to get Vaccine. Booked though National booking system. It was great, done and dusted and I already have appointment for 2nd one.

No pretty good, health services never had any probs Crofton Health centre. Doc tells it how it is.

All over the country we have accessed GP services if we have needed to when we are constant cruising. We just go to reception fill form in to say we are passing through and you just get an appointment, and they contact your GP.

On cruise and husband broke leg. Had to phone ambulance. Just happened that guy on a bike was going past and stopped. He was told ambulance how to get to us. Ambulance came and the paramedics were excellent. They took him to Pinderfields

Chapelthorpe easy enough

Even though I am here on canal near XXX I still use Lupset Heath Centre, lived there previously kept GP. I have multiple health problems I find it almost impossible to get a GP anywhere else.

From my point of view, it should no different if I use my permanent [address] don't know what it would be like if I didn't have that

I am registered with GP in Lancashire where I used to have live/ had a permanent address. I went to XXXX and they said I could not register or even see a doctor there

College Lane at Ackworth - I registered there and kept my GP there as it is a good surgery, the staff doctors and nurses are great and really nice and helpful. So, I don't want to change because I live on boat now. Never hear great things about trying to get into GP practices if you don't have a permanent address.

I am worried about not being registered for vaccines – I am not registered locally with a GP haven't been for 5 years and I want vaccine

Very limited people can get mental health help. Sick of it. Mum died in January; I've been trying to get spot for months.

Problems as registered with Stanley

No probs with Warrengate. It's quite far but I would rather I had the hassle of travelling there than not having anywhere else to go to because it's not convenient for them if I am registered where I used to live.

Sometimes get mixed up with address.

Can't get a postcode. This causes troubles as I use a friend's house

If we call for an ambulance at night- the gate locked I wouldn't know where to tell them

Trouble with getting GP a proper address

Waiting for GP to get in contact regarding my long COVID but I haven't heard anything from them.

When I speak to doctor, I expect them to understand me, impossible to share stuff over phone especially mental health services. I don't even know how to get an appointment sick note. No one tells you

Kept own GP if I need owt I travel with my neighbour or someone on canal.

Internet is vital in accessing services

You know that there will always be someone on the canal that knows what to do where to go. You can't knock that especially when it is so difficult trying to get health care whether that is from GP surgery who don't recognise that it doesn't matter if you don't have an address or everything else that is inaccessible because of the nature of the way we live.