



Active Lives: Pandemic hits sport participation

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The number of people playing table tennis unsurprisingly declined in the year to May 2021, according to the latest Active Lives survey by Sport England.

The report covers the period from May 2020 to May 2021, which includes a full year of restrictions in response to the pandemic – three months of full national lockdown, six months of significant restrictions and three months of easing restrictions.

Disruption to the sport and physical activity behaviours of adults (aged 16+) in England caused by the pandemic has been significant, with 700,000 fewer active adults and 1 million more inactive adults compare to 12 months earlier.

While we are on the road to recovery, known inequalities have been widened and not all groups or demographics are recovering at the same rate. This is the case for women, young adults aged 16-34, over 75s, Disabled People and those from Ethnically Diverse Communities. The report also showed those living in deprived and urban areas found it harder to be active.

In table tennis, between May 2020 and May 2021, 198,200 adults aged 16+ participated in table tennis at least twice a month. This is down from 428,500 in the previous 12-month period to May 2020, identified as a statistically significant decrease.

These findings are consistent across all racket sports – table tennis, tennis, squash and badminton.

Only six activities out of a total of 80 reported a significant increase on last year's figures, including skateboarding, hill and mountain walking and garden trampolining – typically activity options which could be done during periods of restriction.

It will remain a strong focus among activity providers including Table Tennis England to respond to the challenges of the pandemic and support people to return to activity in a way that's stronger, more relevant and more inclusive than before.

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