This report focuses on social media conversations and attitudes in English in the UK between 04 and 17 May. For further details, including methods, please refer to ‘Media monitoring report: Social media conversations and attitudes in the UK towards the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak 06 to 19 April 2020’.

**Funding**
This research was funded by the National Institute for Health Research Health Protection Research Unit (NIHR HPRU) in Immunisation (Grant references: HPRU-2012-10096 and HPRU-2019-NIHR200929) at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine in partnership with Public Health England (PHE). The views expressed are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of the NHS, the NIHR, the Department of Health or Public Health England.

**Conversations about the coronavirus outbreak**
There were a total of 5.46M mentions around the coronavirus outbreak on social media, in the UK in English, between 04 and 17 May 2020, representing a 6% decrease to the previous two-week monitoring period (see Figure 1). The majority of mentions in this time period (4.63M, 84.8%) came from Twitter.

*Figure 1. Number of mentions around the coronavirus outbreak in English on social media in the UK between 27 January and 17 May 2020.*
## Key insights

### Continuous decrease in volume of social media conversations
Since the peak on 17 March 2020, the number of social media conversations is continuing to decline, with 6% less mentions between 04 and 17 May 2020 compared to 20 April and 03 May 2020. However, the rate of decline was slower than during the previous monitoring period (6% vs 22% decline).

### Mounting criticisms of Boris Johnson
There were a high number of posts criticising Prime Minister Boris Johnson, as shown by the prevalence of the hashtags #BorisHasFailed (9.9k) and #BorisResign (8.8k). There were many calls for less vague messages, such as to clarify the meaning of ‘staying alert’. Other prominent criticisms were the UK’s high death toll and the handling of the outbreak in care homes.

### Preventive behaviours and accessing of health services
The most common criticism of preventive behaviours and accessing of health services were numerous reports of NHS 111 refusing to call ambulances for patients experiencing coronavirus symptoms, leading to many deaths at home. There were also doubts about the feasibility of children following preventive behaviours if allowed to return to school. The difficulties of maintaining social distancing on public transport, particularly in London, was also a common topic.

### Other prominent topics of conversation
There were many mentions of the UK having the second highest death toll in the world. The decision to reopen schools was a prominent topic of conversation, with many questioning the safety of both teachers and children as a result of this step. Reports of Professor Neil Ferguson, an advisor to the government during the outbreak, breaking social distancing advice, were negatively perceived on social media.

### Social analytics
There was no significant change in social analytics statistics to the previous monitoring period. The main emotion being expressed was love (234.6k), followed by sadness (121.5k). Some of the most common hashtags were #stop, #lockdown, #stayalert, #NHS, #covid19, #stayhomesavelives, #brexit, #marr, #mentalhealth, #extendlockdown and #PPE. The majority of content was classed as negative (46%) or neutral (40%), with 13% classed as positive. The top Twitter authors continue to be news outlets, such as the BBC, football clubs and public figures (the latter two largely due to high numbers of followers rather than high numbers of posts).
Preventive behaviours and accessing of health services

We assessed changing levels of interest and sentiment towards five preventive behaviours: hand washing, social distancing, self-isolation, wearing masks, and using NHS 111. Overall interest in these key preventive behaviours remained at similar levels to the previous 2-week monitoring period (8.8% of all conversations mentioned at least one of these key preventive behaviours between 04 and 17 May 2020 compared with 7.9% between 20 April and 03 May 2020).

Between 04 and 17 May 2020 social distancing continued to be the behaviour with the highest level of interest, followed by wearing masks and self-isolation (Figures 2 and 3). Hand washing and using NHS 111 each continued to be mentioned by less than 1% of all mentions of coronavirus in English in the UK (Figure 2).

*Figure 2. Bar graph of change in the percentage of mentions of preventive behaviours and/or accessing of health services on social media relative to all mentions in English in the UK between 27 January and 17 May 2020.*
We further analysed sentiment towards preventive behaviours and accessing of health services through the automated sentiment analysis provided by Meltwater® which uses natural language processing algorithms. For all five behaviours, the majority of posts were neutral (Figure 4). The behaviours with slightly higher proportions of negative sentiment were using NHS 111, wearing masks and hand washing.

By manually reading through social media and news posts, we further identified some common themes underlying negative content for each of these preventive behaviours.
Social distancing
There were negative reports of Londoners on public transport not following social distancing guidelines. However, many social media users also pointed out that the infrastructure of London makes it impossible to follow social distancing advice and that encouragement by the government to return to work was putting the lives of workers at risk. Others questioned if public transport could be safe even if social distancing was possible. Some also argued that young children could not be expected to follow social distancing advice at school. Reports of Professor Neil Ferguson breaking social distancing advice was perceived negatively.

Wearing masks
There were conflicting opinions on wearing masks. Some social media users argued that not wearing masks was irresponsible and that they play an essential role in stopping the spread of coronavirus. Others argued that they were unnecessary and ineffective. Mask wearing appears to quickly become associated with belonging to certain types of people and to signify more than compliance with public health advice. For example, some argued that male politicians had appeared in public without masks to appear ‘manly’.

Self-isolation
Professor Neil Ferguson, advisor to the UK government, breaking self-isolation advice, was seen as a reason to be suspicious of his lockdown advice and to question the accuracy of his infectious disease models. There were continued criticisms of people arriving at UK airports not being asked to self-isolate. In addition, there were some concerns that hackers could exploit the NHS contact tracing app to send out false alerts causing people to self-isolate unnecessarily. Lastly, there were also concerns about the effects of prolonged self-isolation on mental health.

Hand washing
Some social media users argued that the renewed focus on hand washing showed a lack of commitment to other public health measures such as extending the lockdown. Some also argued that it would not be possible to let children go back to school whilst following public health advice as they could not be expected to regularly wash their hands.

Using NHS 111
There were many reports of patients dying at home after NHS 111 refused to allow them ambulances or tests, despite some patients calling several times with severe coronavirus symptoms. NHS 111 was even called a ‘Gatekeeper to the Grave’. There were also some criticisms of NHS 111 only now including anosmia (loss of sense of smell) as a coronavirus symptom, much later than many other countries.