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Third of drivers say having access to a car is more important during the coronavirus pandemic

***** Please note this story was published before guidance to police forces was published on what could be deemed reasonable excuses for leaving the house, including using a car to drive somewhere and exercise. *****

A third of drivers say having access to a car is more important than ever following the coronavirus outbreak, while one-in-10 have actually stopped driving completely since the Government began an enforced lockdown,

according to new research from the RAC.*

The figures underline the increasing reliance many drivers have on their cars to help complete essential journeys, with three-quarters (75%) saying they use the car for permitted food shopping, 28% saying they use it to get to pharmacies, and a fifth (18%) needing the car to provide care or help to a vulnerable person. A fifth (20%) also say they use the car to get to work as they are in a role where they can't work from home.

But worryingly, the research also suggests that nearly one-in-10 drivers appear to be continuing to use their cars for trips that might not be classed as 'essential'. Five per cent say they drive a short distance so they can get some exercise, and 4% go for a drive to give their cars a run. Both of these types of journeys carry the avoidable risks of road traffic collisions at a time when the emergency services are under enormous pressure, and of unnecessary breakdowns.

While nine per cent of drivers say they still need their car most days, the majority say they are now using their cars once a week or less (60%) for essential trips – which is probably an indication more of us are now reverting to a weekly or fortnightly 'big' shop for groceries to minimise the time we're spending outside the home. The RAC is calling on all drivers to only use their vehicles for strictly essential journeys until Government advice changes.

The research also showed that the vast majority of drivers (97%) heeded the Government's 'stay at home' instruction over the warm Easter weekend. Two per cent of drivers reported they had used a car to drive to an open space for exercise, while 1% chose to see friends or family – a small but worrying proportion given the importance of everyone staying at home to reduce the transmission of the virus.

Breakdowns attended by RAC patrols were also down sharply over Easter compared to last year – across the UK there were 50% fewer breakdowns between Good Friday and Easter Monday. However, there was an unexpected spike in breakdowns on Tuesday – presumably as some drivers started their cars for the first time in weeks.

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RAC Breakdown spokesperson Rod Dennis said:

“These figures highlight the important role the private car still plays in enabling people to complete their essential journeys during lockdown. The reality for many people is that they still rely on the car for certain trips – be it for weekly food shopping, to get to and from work or when looking after a vulnerable person.

“The Government has indicated that food shopping should be done as infrequently as possible, and consequently many people are using their cars to carry heavy bags of groceries. But only using cars infrequently can lead to problems, particularly with batteries. Fortunately, the RAC is still on hand to sort out these issues enabling drivers to keep using their cars when they need to, alongside providing assistance to hundreds of emergency service vehicles and thousands of key workers who are RAC members.

“What is vital however, is that drivers heed the Government advice and strictly use their cars for essential trips only. It’s encouraging to see just how many drivers reported they stayed at home over Easter, but there appears to be a small proportion who continue to get in the car either to drive somewhere for exercise, or to keep their vehicle’s battery healthy. While the temptation might be there with the car sat outside and largely unused, we really do urge people to think twice before they get behind the wheel. Every

unnecessary journey potentially adds to the burden on our emergency services.”

The RAC has produced a [comprehensive set of answers](#) to questions related to driving during the coronavirus outbreak. A page detailing the [current service the RAC is providing](#) is also available.

Notes to Editors

* Research conducted among 1,550 drivers on the RAC Driver Opinion Panel between Tuesday 14 and Wednesday 15 April 2020.

About the RAC

The RAC provides complete peace of mind to 12m UK private and business drivers, whatever their motoring needs. Its services include:

- **[Breakdown assistance](#)**. Its highly-skilled, 1,600-strong branded patrol workforce attends more than two million breakdowns every year, fixing on average four out of five vehicles at the roadside. The RAC’s patrol fleet is one of the most advanced in the world, and was the first to roll out both an [All-Wheels-Up recovery system](#), allowing the vast majority of vehicles to be recovered from a single patrol van, and [EV Boost](#) mobile electric vehicle charging units
- **[Insurance](#)**. The RAC is a top-five [car insurance](#) broker having surpassed the 500,000 policies-in-force milestone in 2018. It also offers [‘black box’ telematics policies](#), as well as home and travel insurance
- **Other motoring services**. The RAC leads in the development of new solutions for business, fleets, electric vehicles and future car technology. Its additional products and services include a [personal loans offering](#), a [used car buying website](#), [vehicle inspections and checks](#), [legal services](#) or up-to-the-minute [traffic and travel information](#). It also has a network of [Approved Dealers](#) and [Approved Garages](#) which combine the trust of RAC brand with local service and convenience

The RAC also works to support the interests of its members and UK drivers on the most important motoring issues which it identifies via the annual [RAC Report on Motoring](#) and the [RAC Opinion Panel](#). The Report on Motoring is the longest running analysis of driver opinion in the UK having been published every year since 1989.

For more information about the RAC, visit the [RAC website](#).

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