

A soccer ball with colorful patterns (blue, green, red, and white) is positioned on a lush green grass field. In the background, the stadium seating and the roof structure are visible, though slightly out of focus. The overall scene is bright and clear, suggesting a sunny day.

Level
Playing
Field

Covid-19
fan survey summary

The intense anticipation as your team walks out onto the pitch; the glorious roar of the crowd as your team takes the lead and the agonising disappointment as they let that lead slip; that post-match debate with your mates; the feeling of belonging.

We took it all for granted.

Empty sports stadiums serve as ongoing reminders of the necessity for separation during this time. The impact of covid-19 has not just been on those it has impacted directly, but its wider impact on day-to-day life has been felt by everyone.

It's easy to be dismissive about sport at a time like this, but the reality is that it's an enormous part of many people's lives. It's not always immediately evident what effect the loss of sport has on people, particularly disabled supporters.

With uncertainty over the future and big decisions needing to be made, we believe it's important that disabled fan's voices are heard. This survey seeks to do just that.

“Football gives me something to look forward to, being able to see my football family is amazing. Covid-19 took that away from me.”
- *survey respondent*



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Survey overview

On the 13th of March the decision was made to suspend football at Premier League and English Football League levels indefinitely, due to the global pandemic. This was deemed a necessary action to safeguard the health and wellbeing of supporters, club staff and others involved in live football, and was an action taken by all other sports across the UK too.

Since then, Level Playing Field has turned its attention to supporting disabled fans and clubs during this period of uncertainty. Through speaking to disabled supporters it became clear to us that the loss of live sport was having a much greater impact on them than many non-disabled supporters. They told us about the anxiety and concerns they are feeling in relation to live sport recommencing, and not knowing when that will be. We decided to conduct a survey to gain a better understanding of what disabled supporters are currently experiencing. We also wanted to ask about the future of football and to have the voices of disabled supporters heard as big decisions are made by leagues and clubs nationwide.

Thanks to everyone who participated!

The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey and was sent out to disabled supporters through Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs), through club contacts and also via social media.

The survey was live for just over a month, running from Thursday 7th May through to Tuesday 9th June. Responses were anonymous unless respondents chose to give their name.

The results have been presented in this survey summary and are also being used to advise and support clubs, leagues and government

We had 570 responses to the survey from clubs throughout the football pyramid.



Key findings



The measures that supporters said they most needed to return to live sport were hand sanitising stations and appropriate hand washing facilities.

Of those surveyed, the percentage who are in the 'high risk' category for covid-19 is...



We asked supporters to rate the impact that suspending live sport has had on their mental health.



of respondents gave a rating which indicated a considerable impact on their mental health.

Impact

on fans

The two questions below were answered on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being 'no impact' and 5 being 'huge impact'.

The results are given as an average out of 5 (to one decimal place).

How much has the suspension of live sport because of COVID-19 impacted on your mental health?

2.9

43% of respondents rated the impact as either 4/5 or 5/5 showing that the suspension of live sport has had a significant impact on many disabled supporters' mental health.

If you were unable to return to watching live sport next season, how much impact would it have on your life and your wellbeing?

3.6

62% of respondents rated the impact as either 4/5 or 5/5. If returning to watching live sport next season isn't possible it would have a considerable impact on most disabled supporters' life and wellbeing.

Impact

on fans

The results from the previous page endorsed what Level Playing Field already knew: how important attending live sport is for so many disabled people.

Here are some of the fan comments...

“My movement has been significantly reduced, as has my socialisation. My mental health has also deteriorated, as having football gave me something positive to focus on.”

“I have greatly missed the excitement of matchday and the social interaction.”

“I'm ok - my son - it has had an impact on him.”

“It's has taken away the one distraction I have.”

“My son loves watching football and has missed watching them play he asks about them all the time, and because of his disability he doesn't understand.”

“Football was my outlet socially. So a massive impact...but I'd rather be alive!”

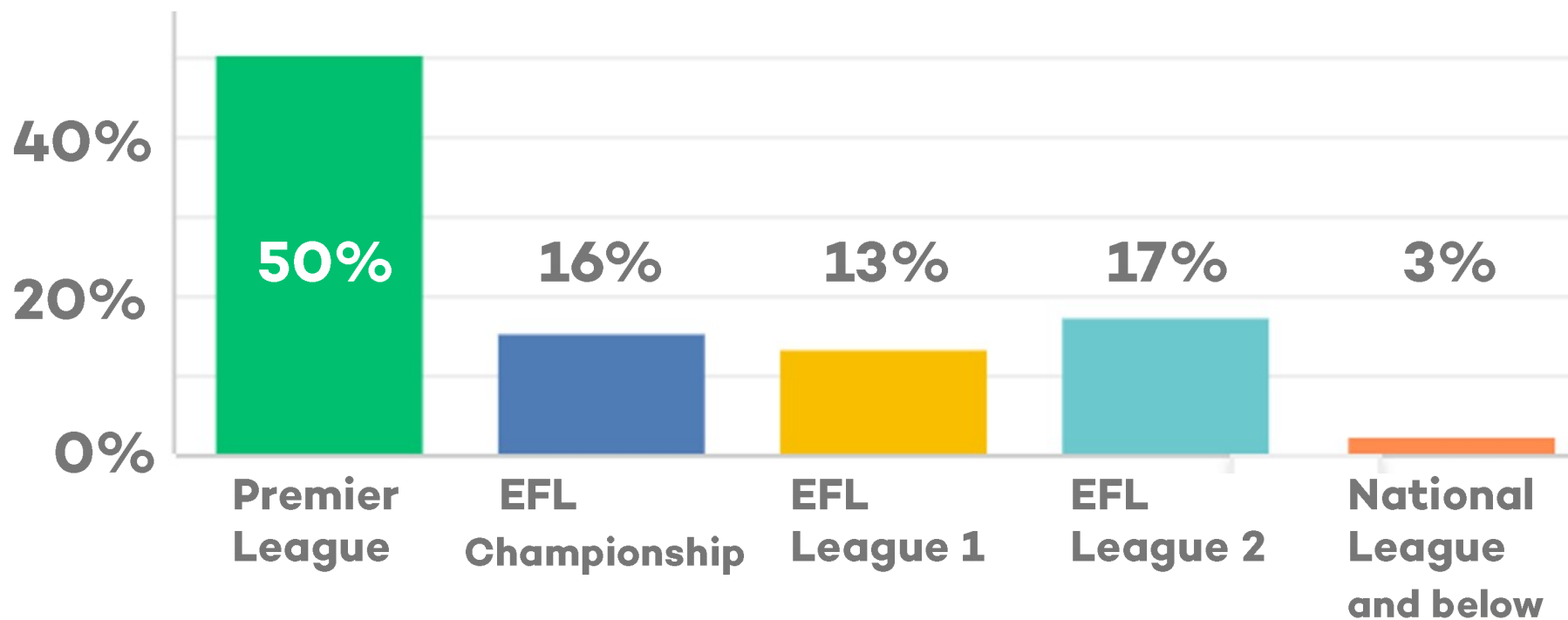
“Football gives me something to look forward to, being able to see my football family is amazing. Covid-19 took that away from me.”

League

Supporters of many different clubs completed the survey.

respondents

We asked supporters which league their club currently plays in.



Season

80%

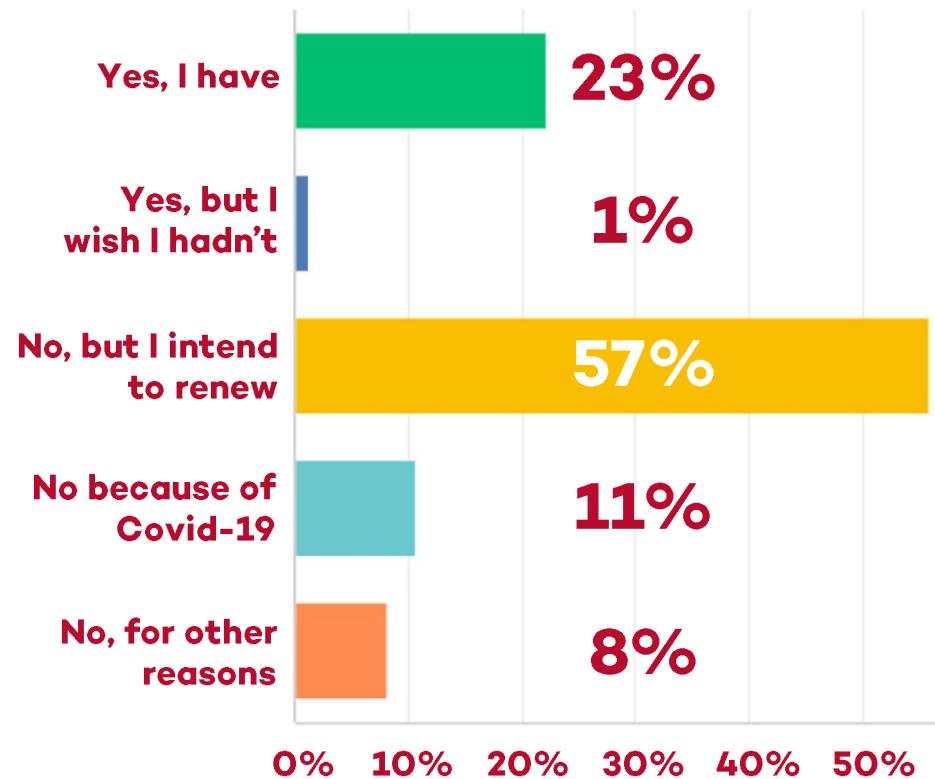
of respondents were season ticket holders.

tickets

Of those supporters who were season ticket holders

37% said that they had been contacted by their club about ticket sales for next season.

We asked the season ticket holders if they had renewed for next season. They said...

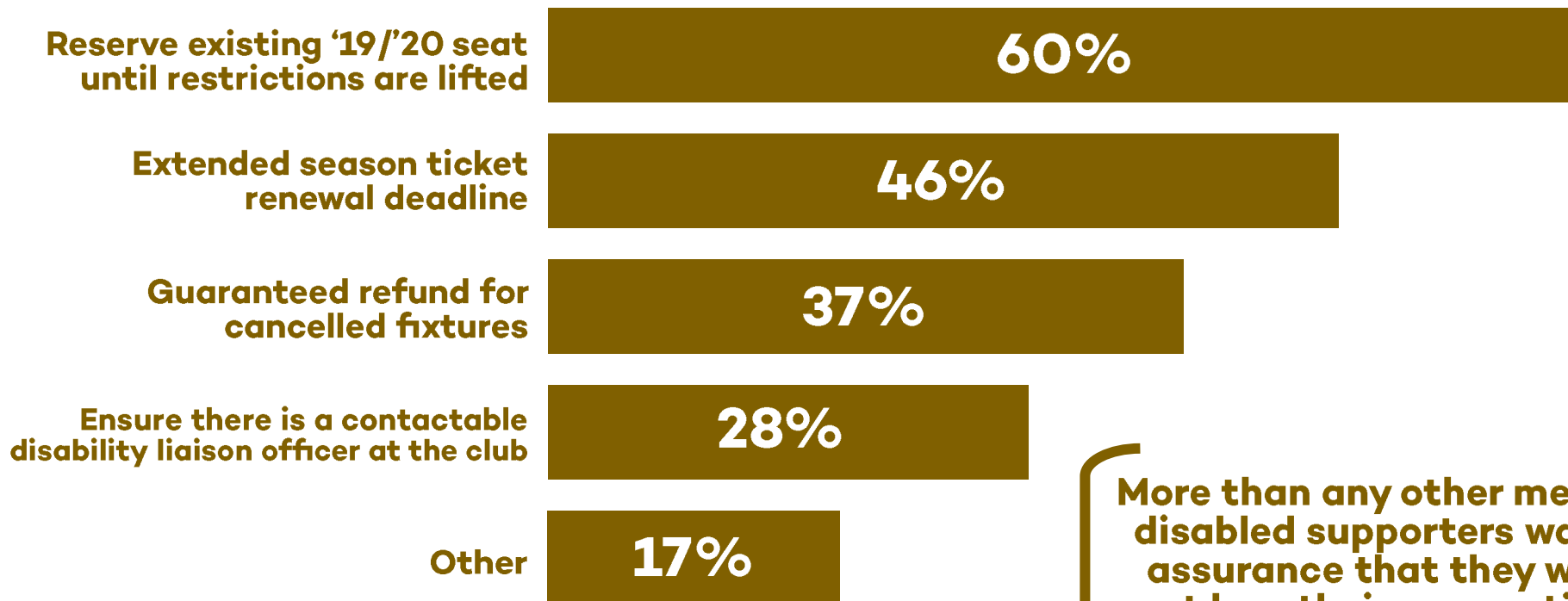


These results show that **81%** of supporters either intend to renew, or have already renewed, their season ticket for next year, despite the coronavirus pandemic.

Ticketing support

We asked supporters who had not renewed their season tickets what their club could do to support them in this.

Respondents could choose multiple options and the results are shown below.



More than any other measure, disabled supporters wanted assurance that they would not lose their season ticket.

Supporter

50%

of respondents said they had concerns about returning to live sport

concerns

“Where am I going to sit? When will I be allowed to attend? Will I be discriminated by others attending while I won't be allowed?” – *Championship supporter.*

“As a hearing-impaired supporter, my major concern is increased communication difficulty when staff will be wearing masks or be behind perspex screens.” – *Premier League fan*

“I would not risk going to a match if there wasn't a safe plan in place.” – *Debbie, League 1*

“I fear that some supporters will not observe basic rules regarding handwashing & will have a total disregard for the safety of others unless the rules are strictly enforced.”
– *Championship supporter*

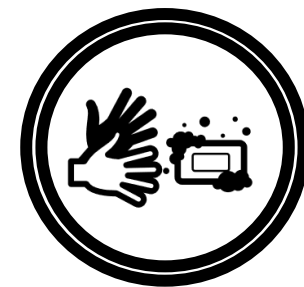
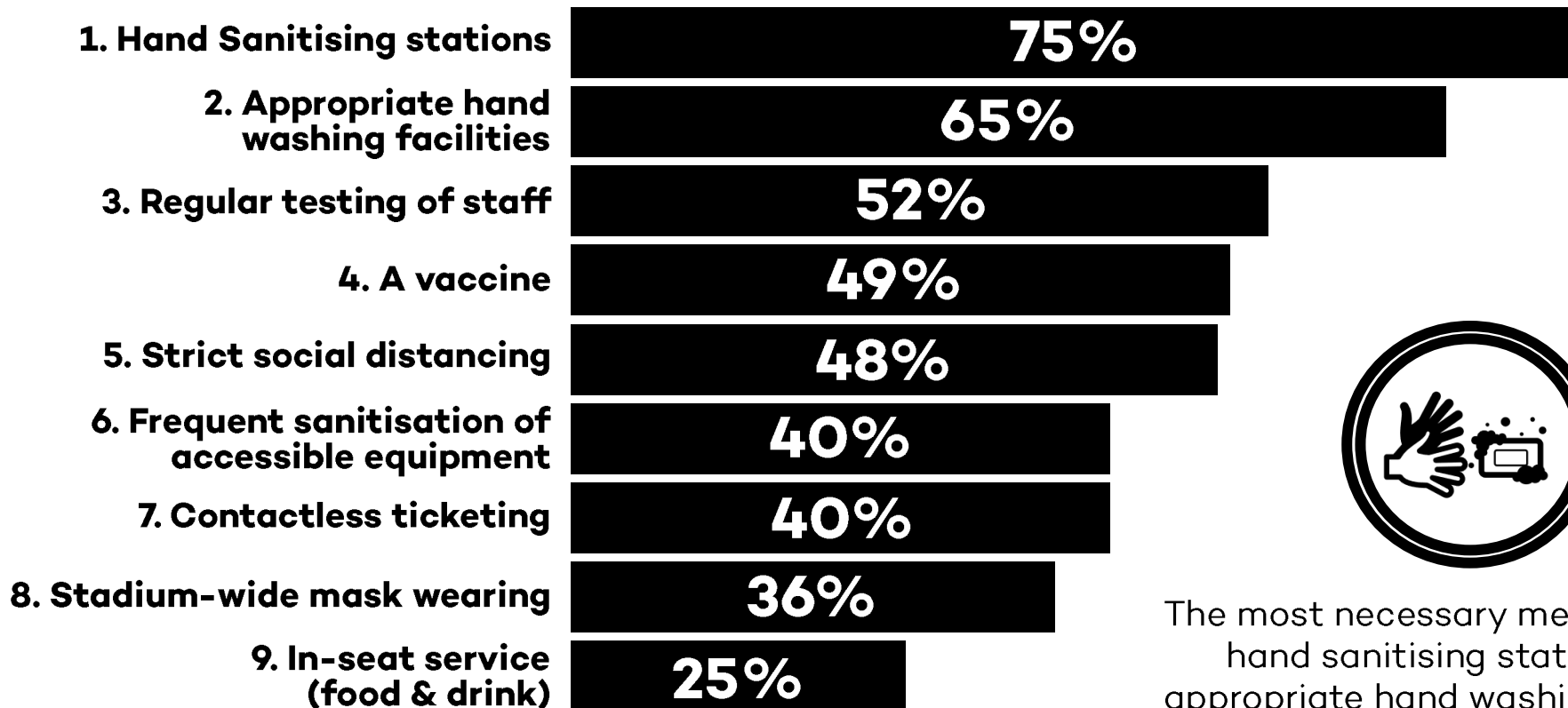
“Until safe, I don't want to attend, but will feel pressure to if having to pay for a season ticket to not lose my seat.” – *Premier League supporter*

“Will it ever be completely safe to be in a crowd again?” – *John, Championship supporter*

Returning to live sport

We asked supporters what measures would need to be in place for them to feel comfortable to return to live games.

Respondents could choose multiple options. The results are shown below.

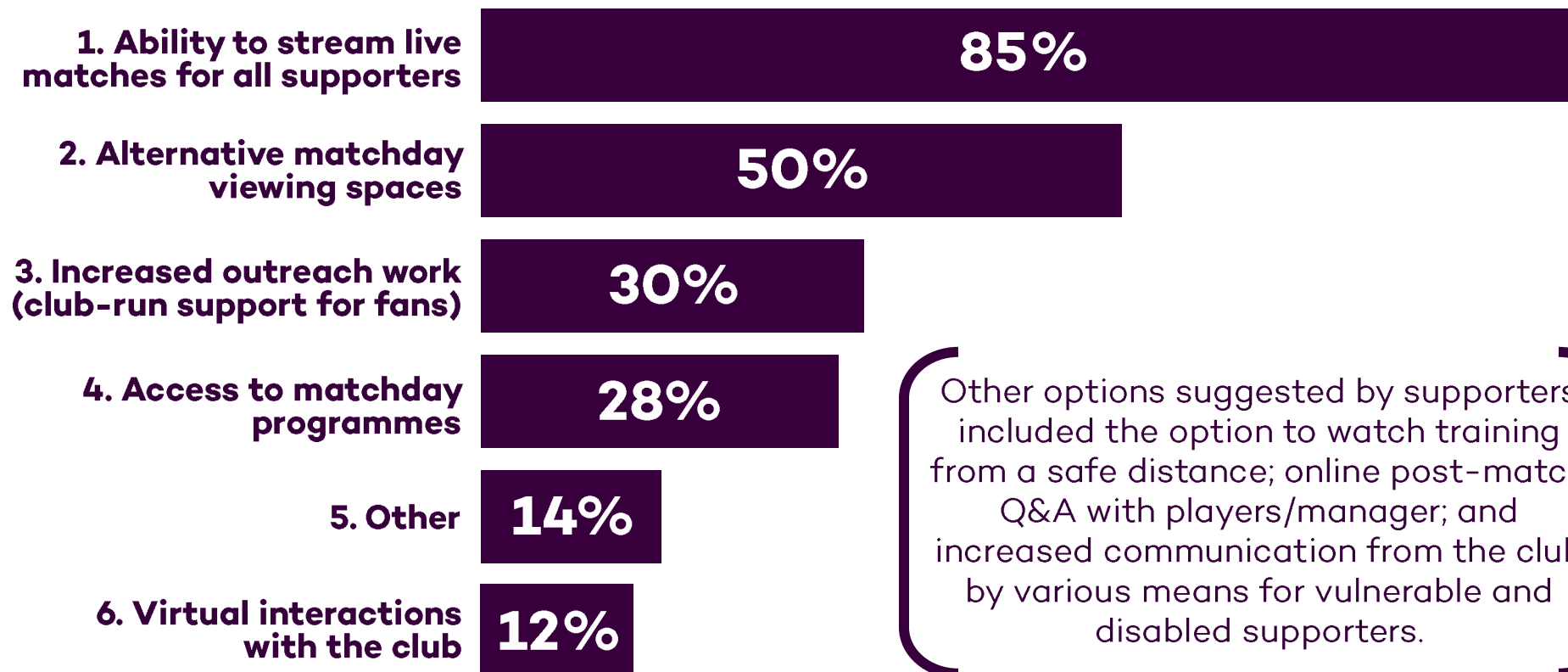


The most necessary measures were hand sanitising stations and appropriate hand washing facilities.

Alternatives to attending

We asked supporters what adjustments or alternatives they'd like to see from their club if they are unable to attend live sport next season.

Respondents could choose multiple options. The results are shown below.



Other options suggested by supporters included the option to watch training from a safe distance; online post-match Q&A with players/manager; and increased communication from the club by various means for vulnerable and disabled supporters.

Conclusion

With close to 600 responses, clearly this survey has resonated with many disabled supporters who were eager to share their thoughts and feelings with us.

There is significant concern from supporters about returning to live football. In fact 12% of respondents even said that they'd been put off attending a live sporting event ever again.

However, the large majority (81%) of season ticket holders intend to renew, or already have renewed, their season ticket for next year, so there is a strong desire from disabled supporters to return to watching live sport despite these concerns.

Clubs and governing bodies should be mindful of this strong desire from disabled supporters to return to attending live sport, despite 79% of those surveyed saying that they are in the high-risk category for Covid-19.

Clubs need to think seriously about what measures they should implement to ensure disabled supporters are as safe as they can be at matches.

Alternative provisions should also be offered to supporters who are not able to return to watching live sport, for however long that is deemed necessary.

Level Playing Field will continue to provide support and guidance to clubs and governing bodies where appropriate.





Level Playing Field Chair,
Tony Taylor, provided the
following summary:

“There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic has changed our way of life. As an organisation that represents disabled sports fans it is important that we can measure the impact; ensure that disabled fans’ views are not being overlooked and provide information to clubs, leagues and government as they plan their way through this unprecedented situation.

Our survey results, from nearly 600 fans, have endorsed what Level Playing Field already knew - how important attending live sport is for so many disabled people. But even we were shocked by the extent of the fear and anxiety expressed by some of the respondents.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey and Level Playing Field will ensure that this is shared widely with clubs and governing bodies. I am confident they will find that the data from this survey helps their decision-making and planning as sport begins to resume. Once again, many thanks and stay safe and well.”

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Covid-19 survey

for disabled sports fans



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