

# LOCAL NEWS PARTNERSHIPS



## Lockdown gambling

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## What's the story?

**Search interest in casinos online has hit an all-time high in the UK since lockdown began, according to Google.**

Firms have been [asked to contact people still betting after an hour](#) in one online session as watchdog the Gambling Commission said there had been a rise.

The closure of physical gambling venues and cancellation of sports events has led to a [drop in gambling overall](#).

But, while there was currently "no evidence" of an increase in problem gambling in lockdown, the commission said it would "continue to monitor and publish the data".

Anna Hemmings, chief executive of GamCare, a UK charity to help with problem gambling, said [there was "a concerning context for people at risk"](#) as "contributing factors [to gambling problems], such as financial distress, isolation and boredom were increasing with Covid-19 and government measures."

The Gambling Commission said across the industry there had been an increase in some customers playing online slots, poker, casino gaming and virtual sports.

Engaged gamblers are also spending more time or money during the coronavirus lockdown, [data shows](#).

The watchdog has given [new guidelines](#) to gambling companies to help their customers.

## Recent regulatory background

Using credit cards and e-wallets like PayPal, Skrill, and Neteller for gambling was banned in Great Britain from 14 April.

The credit card ban had been first announced in January and it included the requirement for all online gambling operators in Great Britain to be registered with Gamstop, by 31 March.

Gamstop is a free service that allows gamblers to self-exclude from online gambling sites with one registration. They choose a minimum exclusion period of either six months, one year, or five years.

National Lottery tickets and scratchcards purchased in-person at retailers are meanwhile excluded from the ban.

There has been a rise since lockdown began in people asking Gamstop for their self-exclusion to be reversed but once registered, the system does not allow them to cancel until the minimum period they originally chose, has expired.

In the past 30 days, searches for casinos not on Gamstop however have also increased, according to Google.

Gamstop said this was a sign "in one sense that the new regulatory system was working".

"However, it is obviously irresponsible for anyone to promote unlicensed websites that are not regulated by the Gambling Commission and consumers are strongly advised not to use them," it said.

Where it saw individuals or companies not licensed in Britain, illegally interacting with British consumers, the Gambling Commission meanwhile said it would act to close them down.

## Data:

For this pack we have sourced data from Google Trends on the relative popularity of the topic "Casinos" in searches which captures other related queries (there is more explanation of related queries on [Google Trends's public tool](#)).

One sheet of our dataset shows you the 25 city areas across the UK where casinos and related queries were most popular in searches over the past 90 days (our data covered the period 19 February to 19 May 2020).

The other sheet shows the all-time popularity of casinos and related topics across the UK, according to Google Trends data which begins in January 2004.

If you need more information on the data, the pdf [Google Trends: Understanding the data](#) will help.

You can search fresh city data [on Google Trends's public tool](#). On the top right you can choose between 'City' or 'Subregion'. You can also download the data and the embed code.

Here is the data on which we based our report:

[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jli-f-XOvKcXuh3yzzdeEv5vA0L7cpbr\\_qNx9EBgxLY/e/dit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1jli-f-XOvKcXuh3yzzdeEv5vA0L7cpbr_qNx9EBgxLY/e/dit?usp=sharing)

## Quotes:

GamCare operates the National Gambling Helpline, providing information, advice and support for anyone affected by gambling problems. Advisers are available 24 hours a day on Freephone 0808 8020 133 or via web chat at [www.gamcare.org.uk](http://www.gamcare.org.uk).

It also offers a range of free treatment across England, Scotland and Wales, as well as a moderated [Forum](#) and daily chatrooms so that people can speak to others experiencing similar issues and seek support.

**Anna Hemmings, GamCare CEO said:** “As an organisation it is too early to see if gambling problems are on the rise during lockdown.

“What we do know is that contributing factors, such as financial distress, isolation and boredom are increasing with COVID-19 and Government measures.

“Combined with the availability of online gambling, there is a concerning context for people at risk.

“People need to know that help is still there 24 hours a day and that they do not need to suffer alone.

“The National Gambling Helpline is free to call and we have expanded our online services with more online information and chatrooms, a new online treatment course as well as our confidential live chat service. These can all be used discretely on laptop, tablet or mobile.”

### **The Gambling Commission said:**

- These new safety measures apply to all online gambling businesses licensed to operate in Britain. In order to transact with a consumer in Britain gambling businesses must have a licence from us irrespective of where they are based.
- The new guidance (bulleted below) was the direct consequence of data that showed there was a risk to engaged gamblers and evidence that shows an increase in the use of certain gambling products such as online slots, poker, casino gaming and virtual sports.

All of the below changes will apply to those customers playing online slots, poker, casino gaming and virtual sports

- Prevent reverse withdrawal options for customers until further notice [3]
- Cease to offer bonuses or promotions to all customers who are displaying indicators of harm

- Interact with customers who have been playing for an hour in a single session of play
  - Review thresholds and triggers for new customers to reflect the operator's lack of knowledge of that individual's play and spend patterns
  - Conduct affordability assessments for individuals picked up by existing or new thresholds and triggers which indicate consumers experiencing harm - limiting or blocking further play until those checks have been concluded and supporting evidence obtained, and;
  - Implement processes that ensure the continual monitoring of their customer base – identifying patterns of play, spend or behaviours have changed in recent weeks.
- We have written to online operators to make very clear our expectations around consumer protection and responsible marketing during this time. We are watching very closely and if we see irresponsible behaviour from gambling companies we will step in immediately, and if anyone has evidence that operators are acting in that way we would want to see that urgently. The Advertising Standards Authority has strict and clear rules to prevent gambling adverts from encouraging gambling that is socially irresponsible or could lead to financial, social or emotional harm. If gambling firms break those rules, we can also take action which can include fining the offending firm. We are working closely with the ASA and others to continue to review closely the impact of lockdown on gambling activity.
  - Self-exclusion is an important tool to protect vulnerable consumers, which is why we made it compulsory for all online operators to be signed up to GAMSTOP by 31 March. We take breaches of our rules extremely seriously and that is why we suspended the operating licenses of two operators who initially failed to sign up to Gamstop.
  - We expect operators to step in when they see evidence of gambling related harm and to carry out source of funds checks, and we take failures to do this extremely seriously. In the last two months alone two operators [Caesars and Betway] faced significant enforcement action – which included making significant changes to their business and paying £24.6m in penalty packages – for failing to step in and carry out source of funds checks. We have been working hard to improve the way in which operators interact with consumers and in October we strengthened requirements on businesses to interact with customers at risk of or experiencing harm. As part of those changes we insisted that operators now take into account our guidance on customer interaction.

**Fiona Palmer, ceo of GAMSTOP, said:**

“Our data shows that GAMSTOP is continuing to provide important support to vulnerable consumers during lockdown and thousands of new users are choosing to exclude themselves from online gambling.

“We offer a free, simple and secure solution to anyone who needs breathing space to address issues with their gambling.

“Once a consumer has registered with us they cannot cancel their self-exclusion prematurely and this gives them time to find specialist help and treatment from charities, the NHS, or use other blocking services to protect themselves.”

**Gamblers Anonymous** said it did not remove the temptation by stopping using credit cards when gambling.

"It just makes it a bit more difficult," it said.

"If a compulsive gambler wishes to gamble online, they will find a way."