



# Lifting the Lid on Washrooms

There's something  
quintessentially British  
when it comes to talking  
about toilets



## Introduction

The loo, the restroom, the powder room, the washroom - call it what you may - we all spend a lot more time noticing them and talking about them than you think. Even though research finds the average desk at work harbours 400 times more bacteria than the average toilet seat, our sense of serenity comes from how we regard our restrooms. In restaurants, they impact our perceptions of hygiene while in the workplace grubby washrooms conjure up visions of employers with similarly low standards. In short, toilets say a lot about their owners.

All of this is against a backdrop of an emerging national debate about our basic facilities. Not only are their size, design and functionality all being looked at, there is now a serious debate about whether workplaces should allow members of the public, not just their employees, to use their loos. Around 40% of public conveniences have disappeared in the last decade and, in a speech to her fellow MPs in September 2017, Madeleine Moon MP called for business rate reductions as a reward for friendly employers who open their (toilet) doors to a wider clientele.

Pragmatically, there is an economic reason behind wanting to maximise the net internal area of a toilet. Dwarfing this though, is an emerging conversation about whether workplaces should dispense with traditional male-female loo labels altogether, and instead only offer gender-neutral toilets - to help transgender and non-binary people feel more comfortable. If even the White House has done it, many are asking why the change can't be made here too.

To understand opinions about these and other issues, and to uncover how the washroom needs to be optimised, we conducted our own research. We surveyed 2,000 UK adults between July and August 2017, and specifically asked them about their views and use of toilets - inside and outside of the home - from what they think about hygiene, to awkwardness about sharing loos at work; the privacy they offer, and whether the gender notice on the sign outside really matters.

This report reveals the results, detailing the most pressing concerns for people when it comes to this most personal of places.

We hope you find  
them revealing...



70%

*of adults admit they are either somewhat or very reluctant to use any other loos apart from those in their own home*

46%

*say they are either sometimes or often caught short and so need to put their prejudices aside*

## Big picture observations:

### The results are in - and they lift the lid on what people really think of washrooms.

Familiarity clearly wins the day with 70% of adults admitting they are either somewhat or very reluctant to use any other loos apart from those in their own home. A whopping 68% believe no other toilet but theirs is as hygienic. Other reasons to refuse public/workplace loos include lack of paper or soap (54%), lack of privacy, and - let's not dance around it - the smells they encounter, which also received 68% of the vote.

Even though Brits are squeamish about using public toilets, most can't avoid them, with 46% saying they are either sometimes or often caught short and so need to put their prejudices aside. However, what this survey reveals is that even though shopping centres want to attract tens of thousands of people each day, it is at these specific locations that facilities are regarded as most bereft (by 41%), followed by trains (36%) and bars (17%).

It's better news for the NHS. Where adults have to spend a penny outside, hospitals score the best for cleanliness (only 6% think they're dirty). Train stations and pubs/bars are both perceived to have the filthiest loos (by 41% and 39% respectively), while the latter creates the longest queues for them too. Even though just 9% of people think workplaces have the dirtiest toilets, employers don't get off that easily. At work, the potential for toilets to embarrass is rife. Two-thirds say they'd find it somewhat or very awkward knowing they're sharing the same loo as that used by their boss, clients or colleagues. In fact at work, unisex is a no-no. The vast majority (60%) of respondents who are employed said they wanted a gender-specific toilet. Just 6% said they'd prefer a unisex loo (the rest had no preference).

As well as uncovering inhibitions, the data also reveals how seeing what others do in loos affects their own behaviour. A significant 80% of people sometimes or frequently observe others not washing their hands after visiting a toilet. As such, a sizeable 66% would rather 'hold it in' than use a dirty-looking toilet, while the same proportion again would avoid touching the surfaces.

Such is the desire for cleanliness, 20% of people admit to using a disabled loo in the belief these are cleaner. It's perhaps little surprise that hands-free flushing is the technology most people (60%) want to see, followed by better ventilation (46%). Neutral and light décor is the design of choice because respondents believe it impacts cleanliness (75%).

*Where are the perceived dirtiest toilets?*



Trains

41%



Pubs/Bars

39%



Hospitals

6%



Airports

6%

# Do women look in the mirror more?

Maybe. Some **45%** say mirrors are the most important decorative consideration

For men it's **30%**

Overall though, men and women share similar tastes, toilets must be bright, and neutral in colour



## Gender differences

Our survey was gender balanced with a response rate of 51% women and 49% men. But, as the results of the poll reveal, people's attitudes were found to be split along very clear gender dividing lines.

It's women who overwhelmingly believe all toilets outside their home are unhygienic; 72% of women believe this compared to 64% of men. The trend continues when respondents were asked whether they would touch the surfaces of bathrooms outside their homes. A third of women (32%) said they were very likely to not want to touch anything, compared to 26% of men. More women also say their loos lack facilities - e.g. paper/soap (60% vs 47%); while – perhaps unsurprisingly – there is also a substantial variation between women and men when it comes to desire for hands-free flushing: 69% of women want it, compared to 53% from men. Men, it seems, are much less bothered about grime.

Gender differences can also be seen in terms of the function a restroom needs to perform in different users' eyes. Women (44% vs 31% men) regard a restroom's job as being 'to provide a space to go to go to the toilet and feel at ease'. So strong is this feeling that two-thirds (66%) of women claim to have 'cleaned up' (i.e. wiped the seat, flushed the pan, etc.) before using it – something only 53% of men have done. That said, 75% of women wouldn't even get that far, saying seeing dirt would actually put them off using a toilet in the first place.

It's clear women see loos as more of a sanctuary. Women spend significantly longer there (40% for 1-2 minutes, a further 22% spent 3-4 minutes), while 41% of men are in and out in under 30 seconds flat. Perhaps women have stronger feelings because of their usage of public toilets - more women than men admit to getting caught short while out.

However, some gender differences aren't always so obvious. More men (nearly double) actually say they're unhappy with the cleanliness of their work loos (11% vs 7% of women); the workplace is one of just two venues out of 13 where men register more disgust with dirt than women. More men than women (35% vs 29%) also registered a lack of hand washing.

What's clear though is that female desire for a place of safety is bad news for the gender-neutral debate. Some 67% of women in the workplace say they prefer a gender specific loo (vs 53% of men). A third of women say they'd feel very awkward sharing a unisex toilet with their colleagues/bosses, whereas only 20% of men would. So strong is the female view of unisex loos that nearly twice as many women (18% vs 10%) would actually try to use the toilet less if their workplace installed unisex bathrooms.

35% of men  
vs  
29% of women

*register a lack of hand washing*





30%

When it comes to being 'very reluctant' to use toilets outside the home we found it's the **18-24 year olds** who are the most reluctant

This decreases to **19%** by the time people reach **55+**

## Age/generational attitudes

If you thought wanting a clean environment and feeling clean was a universal age-less need, think again. When it comes to differences between the generations, being older really does change things.

Our research finds that while there is broadly similar reluctance to use public loos across the generations in their middle years (25-55 years), it's both the young (18-24) and the older (55+) who are fastidious about finding clean loos. The 18-24 year olds and 55+ groups show the highest instances of being very likely to avoid touching bathroom surfaces (31% and 28% respectively); they are both most worried about the gap between the floor and the cubicle; and both these age groups also feel there aren't enough toilets in shopping centres (39% and 49% respectively) and restaurants (14% and 19%).

Although there are some age-based surprises when it comes to being 'very reluctant' to use toilets outside the home, we found it's the 18-24 year olds who are the most reluctant (30%), decreasing to 19% by the time people reach 55+. Generally speaking, advancing age means advancing concern with cleanliness.

28 - 31%

18-24 year olds and 55+ groups show the highest instances of being very likely to avoid touching bathroom surfaces

From the age of 25 onwards, each successive (ten-year) age band shows a rise in the belief that non-home toilets are a breeding ground for germs. Some 48% of 25-34 year olds say this, rising to 50% amongst 35-44s; 51% for 45-55s and 58% of those 55+. With age also increases the desire for hands-free flushing, better ventilation and thicker toilet paper.

It may well be that some of this is self-fulfilling. More people in the 55+ age bracket report seeing people frequently not washing their hands (nearly 40% do), compared with those who are 25-34 (23%). Concern for cleanliness may also be linked to spending more time in toilets than others - when it comes to visiting for five minutes or more, the 55+ age group score the highest (nearly 5%). Moreover, some of lengthier visit times may be time spent cleaning up before they use the loo itself - 63% of over 55s have had to clean up first, higher than any other age group. Busting one stereotype is the fact older people are actually 'caught short' less (the 18-24s hold this record), so it seems that when they do have to use loos that aren't their own, they need them to be spotless.

One clear observation is that in the quest for cleanliness, older people are actually agnostic about unisex public toilets. Generation Xers are more likely to want gender specific loos than Baby Boomers, while older people show similar levels of neutrality to other age groups about being comfortable using unisex toilets overall.

However, the place where gender does seem to matter is at work. The over 45s and over 55s show the highest propensity to feel 'very awkward' sharing the same toilet at work (31% and 30%) and because of this they also try to use the loo less; just 1% of over 55s would prefer a unisex toilet at work. This is the lowest of any age group. The under 24s meanwhile are most likely to prefer it (12%).

For older users of loos, cleanliness also trumps things like graffiti (around half of people from 25 onwards say they don't like it, but it doesn't dramatically change with age), but older people do prefer brighter bathrooms. You can also count on strong-held attitudes towards sticking to the 'rules' shining through - greater percentages of those over the age of 45 and 55 (22% and 18% respectively vs 16% for under 24s) say it's never acceptable for a non-disabled person to use disabled toilets.



32%

*of people would rather there was better soundproofing in public loos than larger soap dispensers or better flushing systems*



## The consumer view of loos

There's no doubt most people view using any toilet other than their own as a risk they simply have to take - and that there's a hierarchy about which ones (in which places) are better than others.

Because of the sheer volumes of 'patrons' that use them each day, it's perhaps unsurprising that conveniences in trains, pubs/bars and nightclubs comprise the top three for being the dirtiest. Sports venues and motorway service facilities comprise the next tranche, followed by shopping centres and shops. It stands to reason that the places where people want more loos are shopping centres (41%) and in trains (36%). Perhaps the thinking is that the more of them there are, the more there are to share out amongst people, and the less dirty they get.

In better news, schools, hospitals and airports fare the best, perhaps because these are the most likely to observe stringent cleaning rotas. With hospitals fined for not having clean, germ-free loos and airports likely to suffer brand damage for filthy facilities, these destinations understand the benefit of keeping their users happy.

Workplaces actually come close to having the best toilets, which arguably makes sense. These spaces (amongst the largest employers at least) also tend to have cleaners or facilities teams in place to keep them clean.

However, there are some surprising findings relating to what people like and do not like. The top likes are largely predictable - hands-free flushing wins (with 61% of people), followed by better ventilation (46%) and thicker toilet paper (41%). But after this, attitudes are more surprising. For instance, people would rather there was better soundproofing in public loos (32%) than larger soap dispensers or better flushing systems. This suggests that deep-rooted fears about other people 'hearing' them are still rife. In fact it was specifically the 'sounds' of other people going to the loo (by more than a quarter of respondents), that was the fourth-most popular reason people dislike using public toilets in the first place - behind more obvious cleanliness and privacy reasons.

Even when people are in a cubicle, the data finds they still feel vulnerable, with nearly half of respondents saying they are conscious of large gaps between the doors and frame, and between the floor and base of the cubicle door. Around 22% of people say they dislike using loos outside their home specifically for this reason.

Aesthetically, Britons overwhelmingly want toilets outside the home to be neutral, light and airy. Being neutral was the top style of décor demanded (by nearly a third of respondents), while being light came next, (22% of respondents). After cleanliness and having hand soap, the decorative/interior considerations adults most wanted were good lighting (by 49% of people), followed by plenty of mirrors (38%) and windows (19%). Nearly three times the proportion of respondents would rather have hand cream dispensers than flowers (16% vs 6%).

Where respondents could freely suggest their own improvements, there was high demand for 'swipe activated taps' (similar to hands-free flushing) and 'soap you don't have to touch', which substantiates the major concern of this survey that people don't like touching any restroom surfaces that aren't their own.

*Aesthetically, Britons overwhelmingly want toilets outside the home to be neutral, light and airy*





## The UK's Best Toilet

*Respondents were asked to name their best toilet, and notable mentions include those at Harrods, while the loos at Debenhams also got the thumbs up from several different respondents.*

*Airport toilets got the most positive response, as did restaurants in general.*

*Out and about in Cambridge? If so, the American War Cemetery gets one person's praise. Meanwhile, Chatsworth House in Derbyshire also gets a nod, as do the loos put on at the Chelsea Flower Show - oh, and "any Wetherspoons pub".*

***"Superb facilities, free for account holders"***

Harrods

***"As they are constantly cleaned"***

and

***"Because they are very up to date"***

Airport loos

# 19%

of people say **sports venues** are where they queue the longest

**Shopping centres** are next, rated as the worst for queuing by **10%** of people



## Productivity and toilets

While the workplace might not always be considered a source of illness, dirty loos and surfaces (everything from toilet handles, taps, dispensers to toilet seats) really are - and this can massively impact an organisation's productivity.

Although respondents believe work toilets are much cleaner than those in trains, shopping centres and pubs and bars, medical research has proved pathogens commonly found on the skin (for instance *Staphylococcus aureus* - a cause of skin infections, food poisoning and respiratory infections) are readily transmitted between individuals by touching washroom surfaces. Hospitals are acutely aware of the dangers of spreading germs and infections, and with Britain suffering a well-noted illness and absence problem (averaging more than a working week per employee, per year), employers have a real business interest to ensure their loos stay clean too.

Respondents certainly believe toilets outside the home are a breeding ground for illness. Nearly 70% believe they are unhygienic; nearly two-thirds say they are somewhat or very likely to avoid touching surfaces in work/public restrooms; and women in particular simply don't want to share their loos with men (67% want a gender specific toilet). Women still strongly believe they are more hygienic than men and don't want males dirtying their ablutions space.

While there is little research into links between washroom germs and occupational ill health, the very fact workers perceive toilets to be dirty is enough of a concern. The data reveals that two-thirds of employees would sometimes or frequently avoid using a toilet entirely if they thought it was dirty. This is itself a risk. Research shows that people who actively 'hold it in' and do not go to the loo when they need to risk developing constipation. Those who store up urine for extended periods of time expose their body to potentially harmful bacteria, which can increase their chances of developing urinary tract infections and bladder infections. Bladder walls can also become weakened by people regularly not going to the toilet when they need to, which prevents people from fully emptying their bladders. So, the fact that nearly a third of respondents somewhat or strongly agree with the statement 'if my work installed unisex bathrooms I would use the bathroom less' is therefore all the more worrying.

Poorly cleaned toilets clearly have the potential to impact productivity by causing illness, but at least workers don't waste as much productive time at work queuing for one compared to other places. In fact the workplace is equal to schools in the provision of washroom facilities where the least time is lost - only 0.8% claim the queue is longest at work. Sports venues are the most inconvenient of public conveniences. Some 19% say these venues are where they queue for the longest. Shopping centres are next, rated as the worst for queuing by 10% of people. In short, it's the two places that attract the largest numbers in the most confined spaces that have the fewest number of public toilets.

*The workplace is equal to schools in the provision of washroom facilities where the least time is lost. Only 0.8% claim the queue is longest at work*





60%

*of people want gender-specific rooms in the workplace*

## The politics of loos

For years the public provision of toilets has been a political hot potato. Councils who have stripped back public restrooms have faced the ire of residents who believe it's their right to have access to free, public toilet facilities.

But now, loos have got political inside the workplace too. While gender is no longer black and white, male or female - loos are the permanent (many would say backward) manifestation of artificial constructs and distinctions.

When people's very gender is fluid, campaigners argue that workplaces need to accommodate the wishes of transgender people, who for example feel uneasy visiting a toilet that is, for men, if they are living as a women.

Studies suggest that as many as 1% of British people are either trans or have some form of gender incongruence - including describing themselves as gender neutral. Even if this were 0.2%, it would still be 130,000 people.

Our research however shows people's attitudes to gender neutrality has yet to catch up - primarily because it reawakens awkwardness about sharing, but also stereotypes about male/female attitudes to cleanliness.

For instance, the data shows that half of people have never used a unisex loo, and while only 15% claim they'd be very uncomfortable using unisex toilets (more than a third (35%) are somewhat or very comfortable using them), attitudes to workplace unisex toilets are far more hardened. Perhaps because people within workplaces tend to know one another (compared to public toilets where people won't generally be recognised), our sample group were clear: of those who are in employment, most (60%) want gender-specific rooms.

Awkwardness is cited as the main reason employees dislike sharing (68% claim unisex loos would be either somewhat or very awkward), while at a gender level, it's women who most want to keep their loos to themselves - 67% of females in work do, compared to just over half (53%) of men in employment. Women are also more likely to feel awkward using unisex toilets at work than men (75% say they'd feel somewhat or very awkward, compared to 60% of men).

Gender differences in attitudes towards cleanliness are also very likely to be behind these results. When asked why some people don't mind sharing at work, but did mind sharing in public toilets, nearly a third (28%) of women said they thought the other gender wasn't as clean as they were - nearly double the percentage of men who thought the same thing (15%).

With the political debate leaning more towards accepting unisex loos, employers have a tough mission ahead to convince their staff to think otherwise. Older employees, who are arguably much more set in their ways, are even less tolerant of unisex loos with 68% of those over 55 in work preferring a gender-specific toilet. With the removal of the default retirement age, meaning more older workers will be in the workforce, the job for employers to persuade these people to change their views will be even harder for some time yet.

*Women are also most likely to feel awkward at work with unisex toilets than men*

75%

*say they'd feel somewhat or very awkward, compared to men with*

60%





Did you know  
British Cycling owes  
part of its success to  
using hand gel?

## The importance of hygiene

All British cyclists were issued bottles of hand gel in the run-up to London 2012, as part of the team's programme of marginal gains. Reductions in cyclist infections meant fewer athletes were ill and took less time off training, meaning they trained harder and as the results show, they won.

Most Britons may not be top athletes, but this study reveals British adults are acutely aware (and acutely worried) about toilet hygiene in any washroom that isn't their own.

Overall, most (68%) think that any loo outside their home is unhygienic; so much so that the same proportion say they frequently or sometimes won't even use it because they think it is too dirty.

Some of this is clearly influenced by what they see - 80% of respondents say they sometimes or frequently observe people not washing their hands, and it's clear that when it comes to washrooms, this is the cardinal sin. Most people (67%) don't like touching bathroom surfaces at all, and although they find it unpleasant, 59% admit they've had to 'clean up' a non-home toilet before using it themselves.

Across the board, concern for hygiene is the dominant influence on people's choice of design (most want non-touch flushing systems), and even their likelihood to accept unisex toilets, with women believing men would leave a toilet less clean than them.

Attitudes to hygiene do, however, appear to differ across the country. Londoners are significantly more likely to regard toilets outside their home as unhygienic (73%) compared to people living in the West Midlands (61%) or Wales (64%).

Interesting too is the fact that where people are less bothered about cleanliness, they are also more likely to accept using a unisex loo. Although the majority (53%) would still prefer a gender-specific toilet, Welsh people demonstrate the highest acceptance level for unisex toilets in the country (20%). The proportion of Londoners who said they'd feel comfortable using unisex toilet is only the same as the national average.

Hygiene is so important to people that respondents said they would defy social convention and use a disabled toilet (even if they weren't themselves disabled) in their quest to find a toilet that they believed was cleaner. More than two-fifths (21%) said they felt it was acceptable to use a disabled toilet because they felt it was more hygienic. That is more than the proportion (19%) who said it was never acceptable for a person who is not disabled to use a disabled toilet.

The fact that schools, hospitals, airports and workplaces actually come out on top as places where people consider loos to be cleanest will be a comfort to those who have reluctance, but clearly need to use a non-home loo. For most families, their children being at school or themselves at work is where the most time outside the home is spent.

More of an issue is the perception of dirtiness that respondents have of toilets in pubs, bars and clubs, shopping centres and trains. All these venues are supposed to be cleaned according to strict rotas, but either this is not happening, or the through-flow of people is so vast that the cleaning isn't doing the job. People overwhelmingly believe shopping centres have the fewest loos to cater for the numbers of visitors they attract (41%), with trains next (36%) and bars third (17%). Interestingly perhaps, these are all places where floor space is at a premium, and where there is temptation to fit in a few more shops, a few more tables or a few more passengers respectively, rather than extra amenities.

*Londoners are significantly more likely to regard toilets outside their home as unhygienic*

73%

*compared to people living in the West Midlands*

61%

*or Wales*

64%



# 46%

Data from the survey reveals a substantial amount of adults wanted improved ventilation within workplace washrooms

## Specifications

People are different, but at least toilets are required to meet particular specifications - in order to suit each and every visitor. That's the theory anyway.

Although many regulations exist from the size cubicles must be to the numbers of loos needed per employee headcount, they are not always abided by. A poll recently found one fifth of small businesses are not meeting legal requirements for the number of toilets and wash basins in their offices.

Unfortunately, current rules can be considered to be a mix of both the clear and the ambiguous. Some elements are extremely clear: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) says an SME employing between one and five mixed-sex staff needs at least one toilet and one basin; for 6-25 staff it's two loos and two basins; for 26-50 staff it's three of each; for 51-75 staff businesses need four of each, while a 76-100 sized business needs five of each. Schools have their own washroom guidelines, with the recommendation that there is at least one toilet per ten pupils for those under the age of five, while for those aged 11+ there must be one washbasin per toilet. In special schools there should be one toilet for every 20 pupils, regardless of age. Cubicle sizes are also strict: All standard (non-disabled) cubicles must have a minimum of 450mm diameter maneuvering space within the cubicle, with the recommendation that the standard dimension is 850mm wide by 1500mm deep, specifiers can be assured that they are complying with the standards since Formica Group's two new washroom sizes are 2775 x 1835mm and 1825 x 1525mm.

However, there is also ambiguity, and this survey highlights this in action. The HSE merely says that in workplaces, rooms containing toilets 'must be adequately ventilated and lit'. But what is adequate to some is clearly not adequate to others. Data from the survey reveals a substantial 46% of adults wanted improved ventilation, while lighting was named as the third most important interior consideration behind provisions for cleanliness and hand soap.

Gaps between the floor and toilet cubicle doors are also the cause of much consternation. Survey respondents did not like the large gaps they find in public or workplace loos, even though they don't need to be as big as they are (regulations merely state a door should be able to be released from the outside). For 22% of people it's purely the size of this gap that causes them to dislike using toilets outside of their home.

When it comes to specific facilities a washroom must have, the regulations are again vague, and adults in this poll seem to signal that this vagueness (and its interpretation by employers) is not meeting their expectations.

Legally, workplace toilets simply have to have 'enough soap or other washing agents' and offer 'a means of drying hands - e.g. paper towels or a hot air dryer'. However, respondents feel this is not good enough. A majority (61%) wants hands-free flushing (not legally required); more than a third (34%) also want improved hand dryers; while 22% want bigger soap dispensers.

There's one key area too that the legislation overlooks entirely, but which adults seem to care about a great deal: noise. Going to the toilet (particularly at work) can feel embarrassing for people if they feel they can be heard either in the next cubicle or even in the corridor outside. That's why a significant 32% of people say they want better soundproofing. So fearful are people about the noise they create that nearly a fifth (18%) of adults have actually avoided using a toilet if they think it has a lack of soundproofing.

There is clearly scope for employers and other providers of toilet facilities to improve the quality of the fixtures, the lighting and the soundproofing they use.

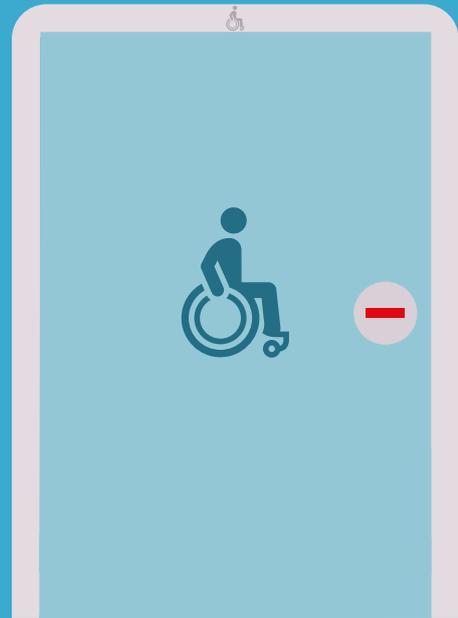
# 22%

of people say it's purely the size of the gap between the floor and toilet cubicle that causes them to dislike using toilets outside of their home



# 52%

*Data shows more than half of people think it's acceptable to bypass a long queue and use a disabled loo if it's not being used*



## Disabled toilet specifications

Disabled toilets are subject to a raft of regulation, to ensure all public cubicles can accommodate wheelchair maneuverability. They must be at least 2220mm x 1500mm wide, and have a door 900mm wide, able to open 950mm outwards. Basins need to be such that hands can be washed while still seated on the WC, while grab rails must also be present at specific heights.

In this survey, respondents were able to give their own free-text responses to the state of disabled toilets they have used, and contrary to the experiences of using standard public or workplace loos, disabled people give a big thumbs up to the experience of using these conveniences. "Disabled toilets I've used are great, and have plenty of room for my wheelchair," said one, while another wrote: "They are regularly checked and cleaned." When questioned about what is most important for them, 'comfort' was the word disabled people used the most. By and large this seems to be what they experience, perhaps because the regulations for these toilets are much more black and white.

This maybe explains why other (non-disabled) adults questioned for this survey hone in on disabled loos when the opportunity arises - such as when the queue is for standard toilets are too long or, and this is a popular reason, if they want to find a toilet that they believe is cleaner.

For example, the data shows more than half (52%) of people think it's acceptable to bypass a long queue and use a disabled loo if it's not being used. But it's the clear belief these toilets are used less frequently, and are therefore cleaner that is also telling. A fifth of people (20%) say it's acceptable to use disabled toilets when these are the cleanest option.

It's obvious disabled loos are larger, and non-disabled people appreciate the space afforded to them that the regulations insist on. Around 15% think they should be able to use a disabled toilet to make use of the additional space it provides, while the same proportion again think it's OK to access disabled toilets for the additional privacy they afford.

With privacy ranking as a major concern amongst adults using loos outside their home (41% claim work/public toilets do not give them enough privacy), the sanctuary a larger, disabled toilet gives them is obvious. This suggests architects and other space/workplace designers should arguably take note. There is a clear preference for more room to be given to people, and that they should allow for this when allocating space to their washroom designs.

"They are regularly checked and cleaned."

*- Free-text responses to the state of disabled toilets*





## Top ten tips

*The British public has spoken. At home they love nothing better than sitting on their own private thrones, but when it comes to using loos anywhere else, there's a lot that can be done to improve their experience.*

*Here are our top ten tips for washroom fabricators and designers:*

### **1. Don't let them fumble in the dark:**

Is going to the loo such an embarrassing exercise it requires a darkened room to do it in? Behind providing clean surfaces and hand soap, it's lumens people love. Why force people to sit in the shadows when going to the toilet can be a lighter, brighter experience?

### **2. No-touch please, we're British:**

Sometimes being touchy-feely isn't a great idea. Brits don't like the idea of touching anything in washrooms that they don't really have to. While you're not required to install hands-free flushing, you'd be loved if you did. A whopping 61% of people want to be able to flush with the swipe (not touch) of a finger.

### **3. Soundproofing please:**

A cacophony of splishes and splashes is not what people really want to hear. More than a quarter of people (26%) dislike toilets for the noise they're subjected to from other people. When a third of adults (32%) say they want workplace/public loos to be better soundproofed, that's your invitation to do something about it.

### **4. Neutral or nothing:**

It's out with the garish, the patterned, the dark and even the wooden. The public are unanimous - it's either neutral or nothing. Almost a third want this style of décor most. Patterns are so last century - just 3% think it's cool for toilets to be designed this way.



### **5. Give them air:**

Excretions smell. We get that. So why hide washrooms away in the darkest corners of buildings that are unventilated and nowhere near a window? Some 68% of respondents think loos smell unpleasant, and not surprisingly, 46% call for greater ventilation. So give them what they want and design your space where windows will take away any eye-watering stench.

### **6. Don't say it with flowers:**

Blooms might well appreciate the dark, damp conditions many public loos offer, but patrons definitely don't want their public conveniences decorated with daffodils or any such-like foliage. This is not the way to take away smells. A mere 6% say they'd appreciate them in their toilets.

### **7. Keep it clear:**

Hombres/Femmes, Hombres/Señoras - we've seen them all before; but while you may think your signage is clever, spare a thought for your patrons, especially if they're restaurant diners, who may have had a glass or two by the time they're faced with deciding which door to push. Nearly two-fifths of people (38%) say they've stumbled into the wrong sex toilet because they didn't think the signage was obvious enough.

### **8. Mirror, mirror, on the wall:**

If you can't easily put in lighting (the second top interior design want behind cleanliness), then mirrors are what people want next. Not just to throw some light on proceedings, but no doubt so men and women alike can perfect their hair and get ready to face the world again. Some 39% of people want to stare back at themselves, so mirrors are a cheap way to cheer someone up.

### **9. Mind the gap:**

Adults aren't children who need cubicles with large floor-to-door gaps so they can crawl out if need be. So don't treat them like kids. Nearly half (48%) of people say they're conscious of the large gaps in cubicles that make them feel their privacy is being compromised. Give them a door that reaches the floor and they'll surely thank you for it.

### **10. Unisex - think twice:**

While the zeitgeist might be for unisex toilets, it's still a hot potato – especially in the workplace. Two-thirds (68%) of staff say unisex loos would make them feel awkward, and older staff and women in particular still want their gender-specific toilet for reasons of sanctuary and cleanliness.



Toilets - they're hardly  
the topic of polite  
conversation at  
the dinner table...

## Conclusion

...but as this research proves, while the British public might well be coy about using toilets outside their home, and certainly feel awkward sharing them at work, when it comes to expressing their views about loos, they are certainly not shy about sharing them.

What Britons clearly want, more than anything else, is more facilities not less, and for them to be significantly cleaner. As things stand right now, most people simply don't want to use them outside their home - not unless they really have to.

This research shows Britons don't like what they see in shared facilities. They see filth and mess; they see people failing to wash their hands, and they definitely don't see the sorts of things that would calm their heightened senses like non-touch, hands-free flushing.

The vast majority feel all shared loos are so much more unhygienic than their own. Around two-thirds of people would even walk on by - risking their own health and creating considerable discomfort - rather than relieve themselves in what they see as germ-ridden, mucky, smelling, poorly-lit and poorly-ventilated public bathrooms.

This is a poor state of affairs. Architecture design that improves cleanliness; more soap dispensers; bigger, brighter rooms; rooms that are better ventilated, rooms with more mirrors - these are all the things adults want from those who design public and workplace loos. Is this such a large request?

The dangers of not doing these things could be public toilets that fall into disrepair through non-use - precisely because they don't encourage people to go into them in the first place. It's a vicious circle that if not broken could see even more public conveniences lost forever.

Better news is that in the workplace, toilets are regarded as being much cleaner than most other high-footfall areas. But this doesn't mean workplaces are free from their own issues to confront. There is still too much 'Britishness' about using loos at work - employees worry too much that their activities will be 'heard', causing them embarrassment; and while the queues for toilets at work are short, too many people would still not use their work facilities if they thought they looked dirty.

But perhaps more worrying than this is the surprising resistance from employees to embrace unisex toilets at work. Do staff feel embarrassed knowing a colleague of the opposite sex will judge them if they encounter a bad smell or mess after them - even if they themselves might not even have caused it? The answer is very much yes. But worse than this, non-sharing seems entrenched because there are long-ingrained attitudes that seemingly refuse to shift - this research finds women believe men leave loos dirtier than them and that female toilets should be a place of solitude that only other women can experience.

While these fears may well be valid, they are a worry because they leave the whole emerging issue around the acceptance of gender-neutral toilets in a difficult place. Right now, the British public do not seem satisfied with sharing. It's not necessarily based on prejudice, but they have much more basic feelings - fears about ill health and (lack of) cleanliness that loos accommodating both genders (and those between gender) could worsen.

If unisex loos are to become a reality, culturally there is a big issue to overcome. It's less around accepting that men and women can and should use the same space, but more about convincing each sex that if they do, the next person will find it as clean as they want it to be. Maybe that's why designers need to think even harder about what their loos will feature to suit the needs of all.