



Wessex Water – Wet wipe research

Full report – June 2025



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BLUE MARBLE



Photo by [Christine Sandu](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Background and methodology

Your sewer blockage prevention programme has been working hard to encourage behavioural change among customers, encouraging sewer friendly habits. **Flushing wet wipes down the toilet is a key contributor to sewer blockages and is a target behaviour to change.**

In order to improve your customer engagement programme so that it effectively discourages people to stop flushing wet wipes, you need to gain a better, **more in-depth understanding of wet wipe usage and disposal, including insight on key 'moments of change'**.

You also need to **evaluate the current engagement programme** to understand whether current approaches are influencing behaviour change and **whether any changes are sustained in the long term.**

Key objectives

1

To improve understanding of customer attitudes and behaviours towards wet wipes, including usage, disposal and alternative products.

2

To understand the above attitudes and behaviour across a range of key audience types, exploring their personal experiences and learned and adapted behaviours.

3

Evaluate your current blockage prevention programme, highlighting key areas of success where behaviour is changing in the long-term and where it is not working well.

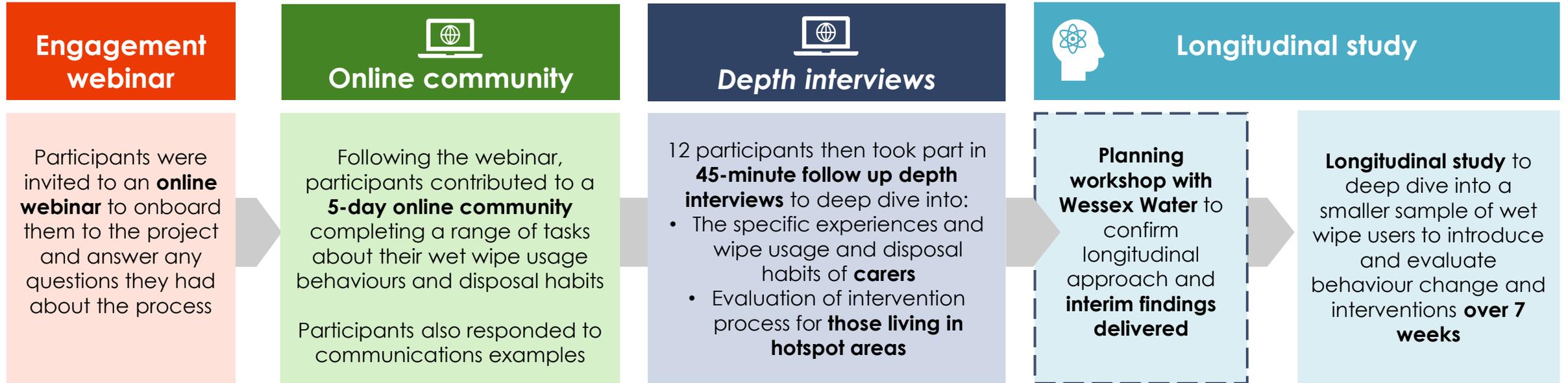
4

Identify ways to improve the impact of your blockage prevention programme to reduce the volume of wet wipes entering sewers.



Methodology and sample

Reader note: Icons used throughout report to indicate which phase of research the findings have come from.



Sample breakdown (n=28)

Wipe usage	All regular wipe users
Disposal habits	14 x flushing wipes 14 x binning wipes
Life stage	4 x younger people, parents of infants, parents of toddlers, middle-aged
Blockage hotspot	4 x waste pack recipients 4 x home visits
Carers*	2 x NHS 2 x private



8 x participants selected from the original sample based on their wipe usage and disposal habits

*Carers only took part in the online community and depth interviews.

We chose 8 respondents who flushed wipes from our original sample to speak to for a seven-week longitudinal study



We set respondents behaviour change activities to try, and speak about how they were getting on via WhatsApp and three short interviews

Longitudinal study: a study to track behaviours over time and test and evaluate behaviour change interventions in real time

Method overview:



Interview 1
30 mins

- Reflections from online community
- Explain longitudinal phase
- Explain and pick activities

Interim tasks
20 mins per week

- Set behaviour changes for household to trial
- Updates on how they're doing via WhatsApp

Interview 2
30 mins

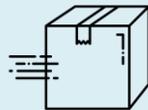
- Mid-point check in
- Briefing on new tasks

Interim tasks
20 mins per week

- Ongoing communications and updates continue

Interview 3
30 mins

- Summary and wrap up



Personalised pack of activity related items posted out



Who did we speak to?



- All still flushing wipes
 - Mixture of demographics
 - Varied family makeups, living situations and ages
 - Engaged respondents, with something to say about why they use and flush wipes
- Full sample details listed in the Appendix*



Each participant chose three-to-five tasks from the list we sent them (personalised to the barriers to behaviour change they were experiencing), to complete over a six-week period



7



Binning wipes



Post-its/visual reminders



Test reusable alternatives to wipes



Shake test



Build a social media campaign



Test alternatives to makeup wipes



Test toilet tissue spray



Peer research



Compare bathroom cleaning products



Executive summary



1

Wet wipes are valued for their ease of use, disposability and effectiveness. 2/5 participants use toilet wipes labelled as 'flushable', which are seen to give a better clean, and more refreshing feel than toilet roll. Many are unaware that many wipes contain plastic and should not be flushed.

2

Customers that flush wipes do so because: the packaging says 'flushable', out of habit (having never thought about why), for hygiene reasons (not wanting 'dirty' wipes sitting in the bin), and for ease of use with children. Flushing is most common when wipes are used near the toilet (i.e., bathroom cleaning and post-toilet use).

3

Learning about the consequences of flushing wipes motivates participants to change some of their usage and disposal habits. However, increasing awareness alone is not enough, with 'easy swaps' and reducing flushing preferred to stopping it completely, or swapping entirely to reusables.

4

Participants' worries over hygiene and smell were the most significant barriers to binning wipes, whilst cost and perceived additional effort put people off swapping wipes for reusable products (although many were already trying to cut down on waste, so this fitted in with their existing values).

5

Customers wanted to see social media campaigns highlighting the consequences of flushing, (particularly personal costs, like repair costs), and relatable stories of others trying to change behaviours. Some admit that binning wipes is too hard, and suggest encouraging customers like them to swap to reusables.

6

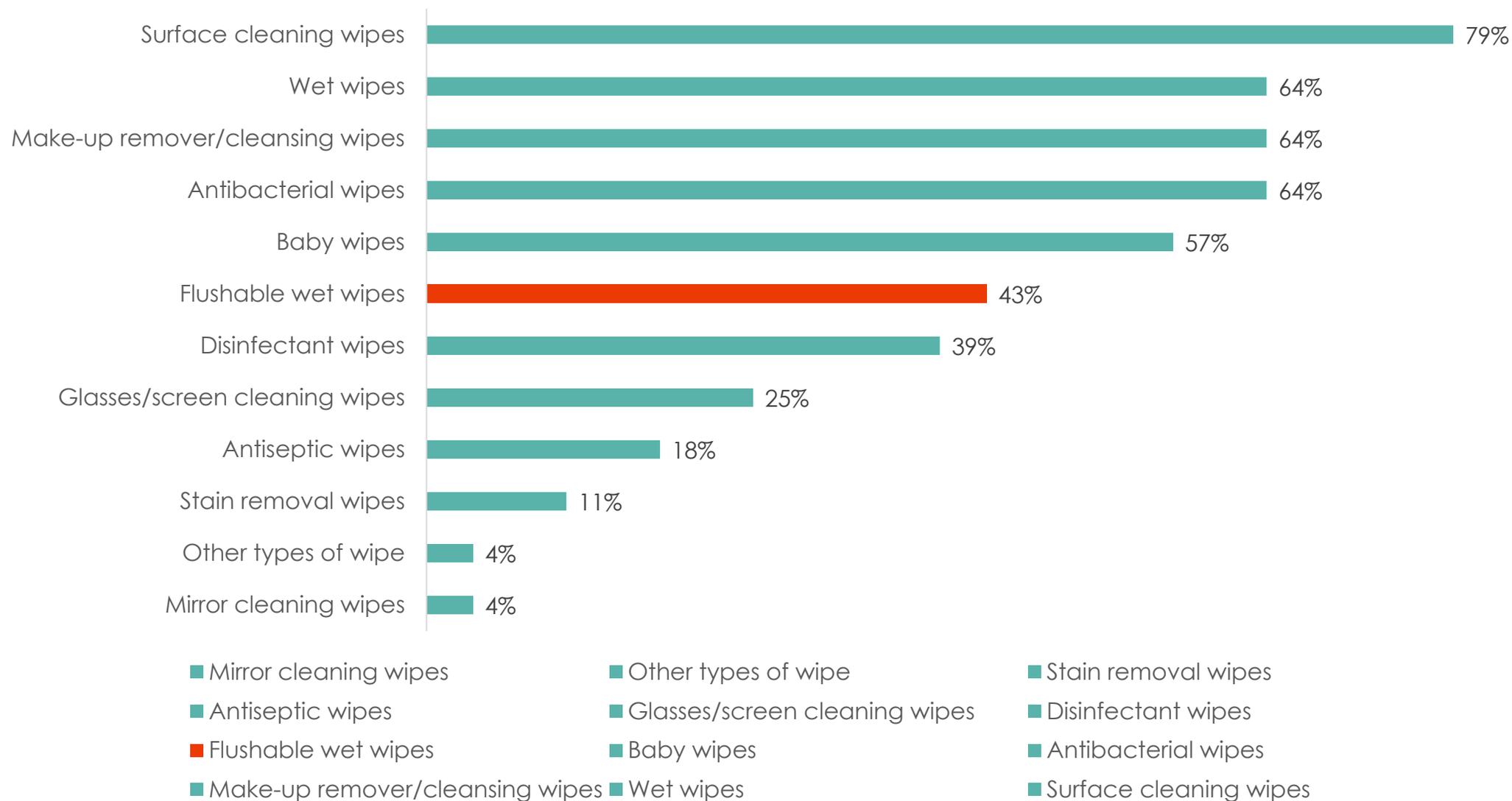
Other suggestions included: focusing on the additional benefits of swaps to reusables e.g., products that are better for your skin/naturally antibacterial, engaging with young people to establish good habits early on, and publicising and expanding waste pack provision (including offering reminder stickers, makeup removal cloths and scented nappy sacks/bin liners).



A photograph of a white toilet in a bathroom. The toilet lid is up, and the bowl is visible. A teal banner is overlaid across the middle of the image with white text. The background shows a white wall and a brown tiled floor.

Wet wipe usage and behaviours

Types of wipe used: 43% of our sample were using flushable wet wipes



Q: Which of the following types of wet wipes do you use in your household? Please tick all the options that apply (Base=28)

What are the benefits of using wet wipes?

Usage / behaviours

Key benefits



Cleaning

Especially used for 'top up cleaning' day to day, to keep the house clean between deep cleans that typically occur on the weekends (once per week or less).



- **Antibacterial properties – ensuring house is hygienic; Covid has pushed hygiene up the agenda**
- **Easy to use compared with a reusable cloth and spray**
- **Feels more convenient**
- **Wipes are often multi-purpose**



Kids

Used for wiping hands and faces throughout the day, but especially after eating. Wiping bottoms after toilet use or when changing nappies. Wiping surfaces, chairs, any other item if they get mucky or sticky.



- **Helps keep kids clean between washes**
- **Keeps kids looking presentable**
- **Easy, gentle, effective**
- **Can have them around the home and easy to transport**



Cleansing

Used for removing make up and cleaning face at the end of the day.
Used after using the toilet to clean self.



- **For make up removal: easy, good value, effective, doesn't irritate skin**
- **For post toilet use: feels more hygienic and refreshing, and is more effective at cleaning than toilet paper**



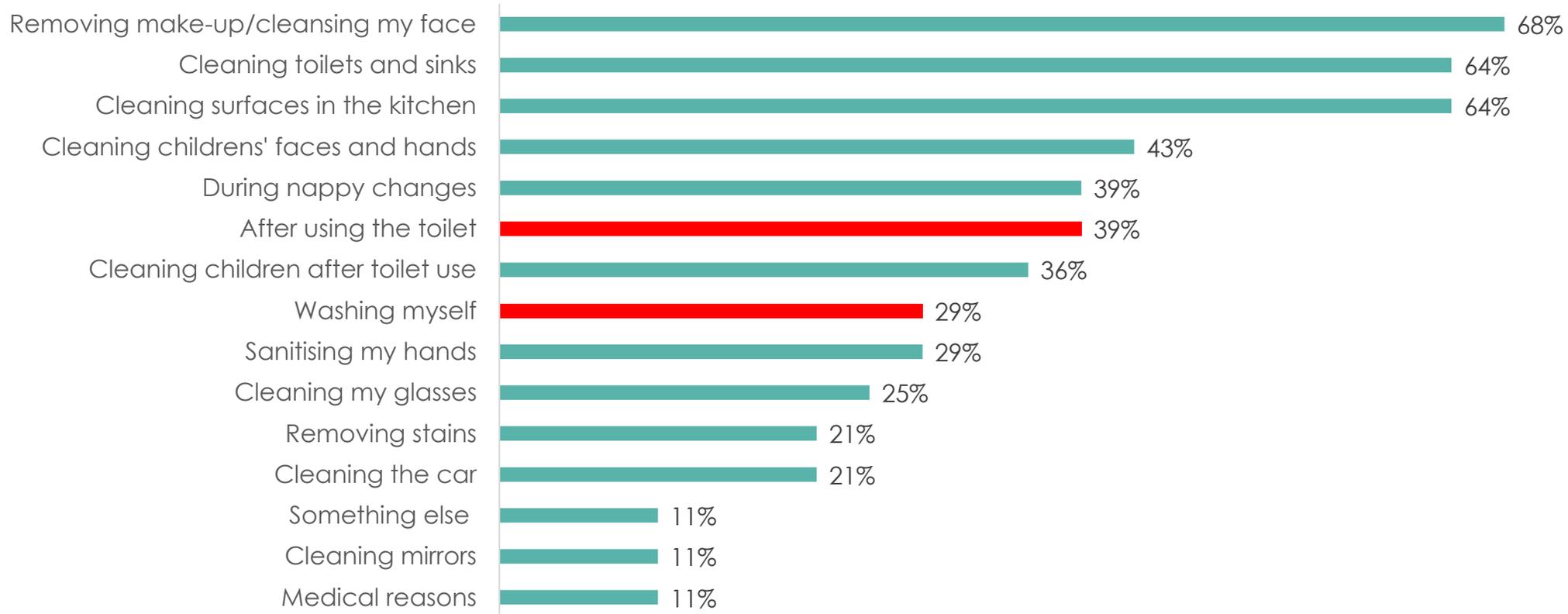
Specific usage

Antihistamine wipes, glasses cleaning wipes, floor wipes.



- **Driven to purchase as they are specifically designed for the job, so must be effective when using them for that purpose**





- Medical reasons
- Cleaning mirrors
- Something else
- Cleaning the car
- Removing stains
- Cleaning my glasses
- Sanitising my hands
- Washing myself
- Cleaning children after toilet use
- After using the toilet
- During nappy changes
- Cleaning childrens' faces and hands
- Cleaning surfaces in the kitchen
- Cleaning toilets and sinks
- Removing make-up/cleansing my face





For household items in general

“Thinking about buying everyday household items (like bin bags, razors, wet wipes or cleaning cloths), which of these statements best describes you?”



Answered: **I balance value with quality when making purchases**



Answered: **value for money is very important to me, and I purchase the cheapest products I can**



Answered: **I buy high quality products, regardless of the price point**

Role of brand

Majority are not looking at specific brands and will focus more on other factors, primarily what is on offer. However, a minority do use specific brands as they perceive them to be better quality.

“I use name brands like Andrex and Huggies for the quality of the wipes, I hate cheaper brands where the wipe breaks apart during use or worse when trying to pull from the packet.”

**Parents of toddlers,
Community**

For wet wipes

Some look out for:

Specific smells, antibacterial or kills 99% of bacteria, offers. Some will always opt for own brand for best value.

Environmental factors

Many do not notice or are unaware of plastic in wipes or biodegradability – not commonly thought of or considered. For those who do take note, they look out for low plastic content or ‘biodegradable’ on packaging and assume this means wipes break down more easily.

For kids/babies

Some will opt for specific brands that they deem more effective and better quality (e.g. strong, stay moist). Water wipes chosen for less chemicals, alongside unscented, chemical free, paraben free.

Flushable

One participant mentioned looking for ‘flushable’ wipes as they believe there is a higher chance of them breaking down (they bin either way). A few noted that some wipes say flushable but know that they are not, so do not flush them. The majority we spoke to did not take note.



Hygiene is a key consideration when thinking about alternatives to wet wipes

Hygiene	Whilst often mentioned, participants struggle to pinpoint exactly what makes wipes feel more hygienic. There is a hesitance to use products that then need to go into washing machine with other items or be washed by hand (ineffective).
Old fashioned	There is a sense that wipes were developed to be quick, convenient and more effective than traditional cleaning products.
Effort and convenience	Having to wash reusable cloths adds to the laundry pile and is considered less convenient. Some consider them to be hard to clean. You also need to have many to ensure you always have a clean one available. Reusable items are also perceived to take up more space.
Eco factor	Most view eco-friendly products as more expensive – always advertised as an ‘investment’. With busy lifestyles, wipes can feel like a shortcut.
Alternatives	Aside from using a cloth, participants were not sure what else could replace wipes and be as effective.

“I think they just seem cleaner than using cloth as cloths soak up dirt and it's hard to get rid of, so using the wipes helps to keep stuff clean for every use.”

Younger people, Community

“It's a case of I wish I had the extra energy to, and the will to use a reusable cloth or whatever it would be for wiping and stuff like that. Any things that I can take off my day to day... is a pretty big thing for me because my energy only goes so far.”

Hotspot, Community

“We do have a few of the reusable pad things [for makeup removal]. But, with a teen, unless I have an unlimited supply of them, they don't get washed, they don't appear in the washing.”

Hotspot, Community



Disposal habits



Wet wipe disposal – why do people bin?

Reasons to bin

Right thing:

Some simply understand this to be the correct way to dispose of wipes. For these people, often flushing would not have crossed their minds.

Consequences - home:

Awareness that flushing wet wipes could be bad for plumbing within their homes.

Do not want to cause blockages or flooding and incur the costs of calling out a plumber.

Consequences – general:

A few aware that flushing non-flushable items down the toilet could cause problems for the pipe network more generally.

Convenience:

Using a nappy bag/folding wipes into nappies is the most convenient behaviour for that task.
Helps with barriers around bin smells that can occur elsewhere.

Participant case study:

One participant who grew up in Portugal explained that this was engrained behaviour from their upbringing, and certainly the societal norm in Portugal.

For many people, it is hard to pinpoint exactly when they started binning wipes/where they learned to do this.

Some mentioned:

- Documentaries on fatbergs
- Experiences with blocked drains at home
- Upbringing or word of mouth

“The only time it would be tempting is if I get the kids to clean but I’ve always instilled in them that it’s not ok to do this. I have a bin in the bathroom to reduce the temptation.”

Carers, Community

“I don’t know people who flush wipes, I think it’s well known that flushing wipes can block your pipes so most people I know don’t want the expense of having to get their drains unblocked.”

Carers, Community



Wet wipe disposal – why do people flush?

Has flushing of wipes down the toilet ever happened in your household?



Yes



No



Not sure/don't know

"I have only ever flushed flushable toilet wipes. As mentioned, I only ever have been tempted to flush non-flushable wipes after cleaning around the bathroom if a bin isn't near."

Younger people, Community

"If I ever use a wipe to remove my make up, I ensure that I buy flushable ones. This is because I travel a lot and I can't always be promised that there will be a bin to hand, so having flushable wipes is very convenient."

Younger people, Community

Reasons to flush

Convenience:

General perception amongst those flushing that putting the wipe down the toilet is easier than bagging it up or putting in the bin.

In instances where there is no bin available, flushing is the obvious option.

Habit:

Some do this out of a force of habit, having not really considered why they do this before.

When prompted, respondents told us that they 'used wipes in the same way' as toilet roll, and so it seemed natural to flush them.

Common flushing 'moments':

- Using the wipes near the toilet.
- Using the wipes for something toilet related – personal hygiene, cleaning toilet.

Flushable packaging:

A minority think 'flushable' means it is okay to dispose of wipes down the toilet and use the labelling on the packaging as 'permission' to do so.

Hygiene:

Reluctance to throw used wipes in bin due to the hygiene risk, feeling it is dirty or will smell. This is especially true for toilet related wipe behaviours.

Ease for kids:

When potty training or teaching kids to use the toilet, it can be easier for them to just drop the wipe in the toilet rather than binning (an additional step to teach them).



Convenience:

General perception amongst those flushing that putting the wipe down the toilet is easier than bagging it up or putting in the bin.

Flushing as the easy option for kids: Timmy

Timmy* does not work due to a disability, which leaves him feeling fatigued. He finds wipes to be a convenient way to stay clean, especially if not able or wanting to shower daily.

He knows that wipes should not be flushed but will still do it sometimes without thinking. His daughter also uses toilet wipes, so she can go to the toilet independently. She will often flush them, as she wants to move onto the next activity, even though she's been told not to. She may also be copying her mum (who she lives with part-time), who flushes wipes, as she thinks it is cleaner.

"It's more of a case of absentmindedness, because you're just flushing normal toilet roll down the loo and sometimes you just throw a wipe down the loo too."

Flushable packaging:

A minority think 'flushable' means it is okay to dispose of wipes down the toilet and use the labelling on the packaging as 'permission' to do so.

Labels as a 'license to flush': Arabella

Arabella* only flushed toilet wipes labelled 'flushable', with other wipes going in the bin. She viewed flushable wipes as different, believing they are designed to disintegrate in the pipes.

It was not until a visit from Wessex Water (*further discussed on slide 35*) that she learnt that no wet wipes are flushable and the damage that they cause to the network.

This left her shocked that, as a consumer, you cannot always trust what you read on the packaging.

"Andrex toilet wipes are marked as flushable and up until the letter and visit from Wessex Water I would flush these. You wouldn't think otherwise given the packet tells you that you can, and you tend to trust what you read or at least I did."



Habit:

Some flush out of a force of habit, having not really considered why they do this before.

Flushing without thinking: Ben

Ben* lives in Bristol with his partner and six-month-old baby.

Before taking part in the research, he had assumed that most wipes were flushable and had never thought to look at packaging to check this.

He has experienced a few blockages before but never thought to connect them with flushing wipes.

After learning about the impact of flushing wipes, Ben significantly reduced his flushing (especially for wipes not labelled as flushable).

"I guess just it seemed like it's a dirty thing... maybe in my head I thought [wipes are] a bit more disposable than they are. I think that's probably part of the reason. I think I just never really assumed it was an issue. I don't even really think about it."

Hygiene:

Reluctance to throw used wipes in bin, feeling it is dirty or will smell, particularly regarding toilet related behaviours.

Doesn't want soiled wipes sitting in the bin: Kate

Keeping her environment as clean as hygienic as possible is very important to Kate*.

When her children were younger and still in nappies, Kate disposed of used wipes by sealing them in nappy sacks before throwing them away. However, as they transitioned out of nappies, she began flushing wipes more frequently.

Hygiene has always been the driving factor behind her decision to flush toilet wipes. She finds the idea of placing soiled wipes into a bathroom bin unappealing due to concerns about odour and cleanliness.

"Clean to me is a literal term. I'm very particular with washing, we all shower before bed, we don't sit on beds with outside clothes as since Covid germs scare me a lot more than they did before, hand gel, wet wipes, anti-bac, hand wash is all essential."



Audience specific findings

The image features a horizontal teal band across the middle containing the text 'Audience specific findings'. The background is a photograph of five people's silhouettes against a light blue sky. The silhouettes are arranged in a line from left to right, with the person on the far right being the largest and most prominent. The lighting is soft, creating a calm and professional atmosphere.

Usage

- Wet wipes are core to many of the responsibilities carried out by carers, including personal care and hygiene, as well as keeping patients and their spaces clean.
- They are the preferred product as they are considered effective and hygienic, as well as quick and convenient.
- This is key when some visits or shifts are time sensitive, or if you have multiple patients under your care.
- Using wipes also gives the carer peace of mind that their patient feels cleaner, as opposed to other cleaning methods.
- Wipes are often provided by the care home or hospital, however, for carers in domiciliary care they are provided by the patient or family.

"I think we've always just found it easier with wipes ... It gets [patients] feeling a bit more clean and definitely more refreshed as well... We end up giving them a nice clean maybe with the dry wipes, a bit of soap and just go over it with a wet wipe."

Carers, Community

Training

- Many carers knew not to flush wipes, but disposal is not always included in formal training.
- New joiners are often learning on the job and therefore learn behaviours from whoever happens to be showing them.
- Other challenges exist for those in domiciliary care and feel they must follow the protocol of the patient's home, sometimes being advised by the family.

"I think it's just common sense. Everyone at work, they just said like, oh, once you're done with [a wipe], then we put it in like the bag and obviously the bag goes into the bin."

Carers, Community

Disposal

- Most care homes or hospitals have specific bins or bags for any items used for personal care, e.g., wipes, pads etc.
- These are generally easy to find and in all necessary rooms, encouraging proper disposal.
- Domiciliary care is very dependent on the patient's household, often presenting challenges such as locations and number of bins.
- Overflowing bins in both settings can also present challenges.

"So, [I would only flush wipes] if the family have got them for wiping Betty's bum after she's used the toilet."

Carers, Community



Parents of infants and toddlers

- For many, dealing with household mess and keeping their little ones clean can be overwhelming and seen as a never-ending challenge
- This audience are generally time poor and will often choose the convenient option where available
- Because of these factors, wet wipes are seen as an effective and appealing option for both cleaning and household usage, as well as keeping children clean throughout the day – both in and outside of the home
- While many parents are the typical users, some parents also report wipes as more effective for children to use themselves, particularly during toilet training stages, as previously mentioned
- It is easier to drop wipes in the toilet after usage than use the bin, so some get taught to do this
 - For some, their flushing habits formed during infant stage of dropping dirty wipes down the toilet and continued
- Assumption that 'toilet' or 'hygiene' wipes can go down the toilet as that is what they're for

Younger people (18-25 years)

- This audience tend to be living in shared houses, where household responsibilities are split between tenants
- Whilst younger people tend to be slightly more aware or conscious of the environmental factors associated with single-use products like wet wipes, this is not necessarily impacting their usage or disposal of wipes
- This audience will trust what is advertised on wipe packaging, believing it is okay to flush wipes labelled 'flushable'
- Those who claim not to flush wipes can appreciate the appeal in the moment to flush, despite knowing the risks

"My family are very environmentally friendly, so I don't think wipes are ever flushed down the toilet, unless they say they're flushable."

Younger people, Community

Middle-aged (35-45)

- When purchasing wipes, it is all about balancing value with quality for this audience
- There is a conflict between the convenience of wipes and the environmental impact they cause, although most disregard this
- Most participants avoid flushing wipes, although some admit there are still situations where flushing is tempting, e.g., if the bin is overflowing or having used a wipe after the toilet

"The priority for us is quality and environmental factors, unless there is a good offer on an alternative brand. We are conscious not all wipes are biodegradable and feel the flushable ones have more chance of breaking down quickly."

Middle-aged, Community



Longitudinal phase: deep dive into barriers and motivators for binning wipes/swapping to reusables



Customers also need support to tackle their worries about hygiene and smell, and overcome cost related barriers to swapping to reusables

Increasing awareness of the consequences of wipe flushing can help motivate behaviour change, but it is not enough on its own

Participants' worries over hygiene and smell were the most significant barriers to binning wipes; Products that allay worries about hygiene and smell and remind participants to bin helped overcome this for most

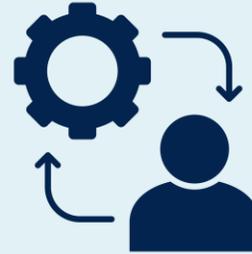
Participants were generally open to try swapping out wipes for reusables, but they do not want to shoulder the cost of buying them themselves



However, 'easy swaps' and reducing flushing were preferred to stopping completely

Increased awareness that:

- Flushing can cause blockages
- Customers are liable for a blockage on their property
- Flushing wipes can harm wildlife (motivational for some)



Led to participants...

- Trying to cut down on wipe usage, when there is a perceived easy alternative e.g., they already have cloth and spray
- Trying to stop flushing, or flush fewer wipes (especially when they're not marketed as flushable)
- Looking more closely at packaging out of interest, to see if wipes contain plastic, or are marketed as flushable or biodegradable
 - A few respondents bought or took greater interest in reusable alternatives to wipes when shopping
- One person stopped buying toilet wipes altogether, whilst another educated her children about 'only flushing the three Ps'



But most respondents did not stop using or flushing wipes altogether; lack of awareness about the consequences of these behaviours cannot be the only barrier to behaviour change

"I'm going to start looking at where I get my cleaning products. There's a place in town I've noticed where you just take refillable...obviously if it's cost effective and I can do it, then I will."

Hotspot, Longitudinal

"It's just trying to do our part to avoid the flushing. Not being so lazy and being more mindful, which to be honest, prior to this research, I wasn't at all."

Parents of toddlers, Longitudinal

"I didn't know that Wessex provided the items they did. I didn't know that flushing actually caused so much problems...and I didn't know that I would be liable for the cost if it happened either."

Middle-aged, Longitudinal



For those who we took forward into the longitudinal phase, worries over hygiene and smell were the most significant barriers to binning wipes



We set respondents interventions around binning wipes/swapping to reusables which were targeted towards the specific barriers to changing their behaviours they experienced (identified using the COM-B model for behaviour change)

Barriers to binning wipes

Capability

Physical and psychological capability

- Feels like it will be a lot of effort to change habits
- Feels like it will be difficult to remember to bin
- **Mental block about hygiene or smell when wipes are binned – esp. after toilet use or cleaning bathrooms**



Scented bin liners and nappy sacks

Watchout: some participants felt so strongly about this that they were not willing to try binning or only tried it a few times – even with the help of these items

Opportunity

Social and physical environment

- Overflowing bin
- Other friends/family members also flush so it feels acceptable
- **Lack bathroom bin – binning is an ‘extra step’**



Bin mailed out

“It’s not for me. I just think I’m quite a clean person. It’s not sustainable to be putting them in a bin and then taking the bin out every single time.”
Parents of toddlers, Longitudinal

Motivation

Habits, emotions, beliefs and plans

- **Flush without thinking**
- Still feel that flushable or biodegradable wipes are less likely to cause a blockage – even when community learnings contradict this
- **Can’t see impact of flushing**

Stickers/post-its

Shake test

“The ones that don’t say flushable, I definitely have not really flushed them.”
Parents of infants, Longitudinal

“I think if I could see the damage that it’s caused then that might make me think twice about flushing wipes.”
Parents of infants, Longitudinal



However, a minority were still too concerned about hygiene and smell to try them, and preferred messages encouraging cutting out wipes rather than binning them

Scented nappy sacks and bin liners

- ✓ Feels more hygienic, as the wipes are not touching the bin
- ✓ Improves bathroom fragrance
- ✓ Creates a new routine around disposal that discourages flushing
- ✗ Did not allay hygiene/smell concerns for a few people
- ✗ Feels like too much effort for heavy wipe users



Messages focused on reducing wipe usage more effective for this audience

"I feel like putting the wipes in the bin is okay now that we've got the scented bags."
Hotspot, Longitudinal

Stickers and post-it note reminders on wipe packets

- ✓ Effective reminders, that help prevent 'flushing without thinking'
- ✓ Sticker: positive response to simplicity of '3 Ps' message
- ✓ Simple, playful messages and personifying wipes (e.g., 'don't flush me') most effective
- ✗ Efficacy decreased over time

"I wasn't sure if the sticker would change anything, but I think the quiriness of the message acts as a reminder to do it."
Parents of infants, Longitudinal

"I love these [stickers], they did make me laugh. I will use these at school because I think children would find that quite amusing."
Hotspot, Longitudinal

Bathroom bin next to the toilet

- ✓ Removes 'extra step' to disposal, so it feels like an easier swap to make
- ✓ Visual reminder to bin
- ✓ Gets conversation about binning wipes started with household
- ✓ More effective in combination with scented liners
- ✗ Still some concerns over binning soiled wipes

"I think that knowing the bin is there is enough really. I'll be honest we haven't been binning the 🍌 ones as much."
Parents of infants, Longitudinal

But environmental messages only resonated with some people

Easy to deprioritise binning wipes when it's not seen as personally impactful

Shake test – visual/experiential learning

- Seeing wipes not breaking down in practice makes it easier to visualise consequences (blockages, fatbergs, harm to wildlife)
- Shocking results – assumption that wipe would break down at least slightly
- Seen as a fun activity to do with children

"Seeing in that bottle test really brings it home. You think, God, that wipe is really not going anywhere."

Hotspot, Longitudinal

Cost and environmental messages

- Reminders that they are liable for plumbing costs of blockages on their property were extremely motivational for most
- Environmental messages were also motivational for some people

"Obviously we don't want to have to pay for someone to come fix the pipes."

Young people, Longitudinal

"Seeing how it affects animals might make me think twice about flushing the wipes."

Young people, Longitudinal

Behaviour likely embedded for children if flushing wipes part of toilet training

Modelling good disposal behaviours for children

- Making disposal part of other bathroom routines e.g., handwashing, and closely monitoring children is key

"I had to almost put a sanction/incentive on the children for not flushing the wipes, as it's something we were doing for so long."

Middle-aged, Longitudinal



Respondents preferred to clean toilets with something disposable, and so they struggled to swap to reusables here

Cloth and spray

- ✓ More effective clean (for some)
- ✓ Improves bathroom/kitchen fragrance
- ✓ Economical in the long run – lasts longer than a packet of wipes
- ✓ Doesn't require too much extra effort (contrary to expectations)
- X Concern about washing after using to clean toilets, germ transfer
 - Prefer toilet/kitchen roll for this task
- X Time and effort burden of washing and drying (esp. for hygiene conscious)
 - Need to buy more to enable this
- X Wet wipes preferred:
 - When out and about, for convenience
 - For niche uses e.g., sofa cleaning

Cotton rounds/microfibre cloths

- ✓ Analysed in greater detail in 'waste pack' section of report, see *slide 38* – viewed by most respondents as a good substitute for makeup wipes

"If you're using a spray bottle and a cloth, you can just rinse and go and rinse... you don't have to worry about getting a packet and getting the thing out and binning it."

Parents of infants, Longitudinal

"It's more the convenience and the hygiene. You wouldn't want to wipe his hands and then use the same flannel to clean his face an hour later."

Hotspot, Longitudinal

Toilet tissue spray

- X Analysed in greater detail in 'waste pack' section of report, see *slide 39* – viewed by most respondents as an unsatisfactory substitute for toilet wipes

"I work from top to bottom, and it's done in half the time as well. Because it's giving it a more thorough clean."

Hotspot, Longitudinal





Most were optimistic, but didn't anticipate complete adherence to their new behaviours

What's next?

Wipe purchasing and usage changes

- **A few participants have stopped buying wipes entirely**, and feel 'converted', whilst others feel they will continue with wipes 'only when necessary'
- Most were pleasantly surprised by their experiences of using cloth and spray, and anticipated that they would continue with them (particularly in the kitchen) after the research concludes

Disposal habits

- Most were happy to continue binning wipes, now that they're aware of the consequences, and have established routines
- For a minority with strong hygiene concerns, working towards replacing wipes with using just toilet roll or toilet tissue spray was preferred

Reusables

- Continuing using waste pack items was relatively popular
- Once installed, strainers and hair catchers can be used with very little effort
- Makeup wipe alternatives were also popular, bar a few exceptions:
 - Views on the gunk pot were mixed – while seen as useful it can be easy to forget about it
 - Most participants told us that they would not continue with the toilet tissue spray



Toilet/bathroom cleaning, and when away from home are the most common areas where people anticipate going back to wipes





Most participants have continued with the wipe usage/disposal behaviours they predicted

Following the conclusion of longitudinal fieldwork, we recontacted participants four weeks later via WhatsApp to see what behaviours/swaps to reusable items have stuck

One month on...

Wipe purchasing and usage changes

- Many participants **accurately predicted their behaviours** following the conclusion of the research, whether that be to 'use wipes only when necessary', heavily reduce usage or give them up entirely
 - **Some niche uses remain hard to give up**, including sofa/fabric wipes
 - **Bathroom cleaning** has remained a key **area of exception** for some participants regarding swaps to reusables
- A key enabler for one active user (and flusher) to reduce their usage of toilet wipes was **learning about the consequences of flushing, which prompted her to question the need** for them

Disposal habits

- **Binning wipes is happening most of the time** across participants still using wipes
 - **Forming good habits** throughout the longitudinal phase has made this relatively easy for those who were flushing absentmindedly
- One participant has **continued to use visual reminders** to bin wipes, which helps combat forgetfulness
- One participant's family is still flushing occasionally when they're in a rush but have found **scented bin liners have largely combatted previous issues with binning**

"I haven't gone back to any previous behaviours, if anything, it's opened my eyes to look into other [behaviours] I'm doing."

Hotspot, Longitudinal

"We barely use [toilet wipes] now, mainly toilet paper. We have used the spray a couple of times while out. [Wipes] weren't flushable, and as a household we didn't NEED to use them."

Parent of toddlers, Longitudinal





Some are continuing to influence others around them to try or consider reusable items as well

One month on...

Reusables

- Many participants intend to continue to use/repurchase **the reusable items trialled during the research**, including microfibre cloths and spray, as well as scented bin liners to aid with binning wipes
 - One participant has signed up to a **subscription-based service** to assist with this, making the process easy and automated
 - One participant has **since purchased microfibre makeup wipes** (not trialled during the research) after discussion of these in the final interview and is now **using these in favour of makeup wipes**
 - **However, one participant returned to makeup wipes** due to not wanting to invest further into buying enough reusable cotton rounds to make the habit sustainable for her (wanting to wash after every use)
- **Others are still using waste pack items**, particularly the hair catcher and sink strainer as they can be used passively

Influencing others

- **Some participants have gone above and beyond** following the conclusion of the research by continuing to share their learnings with others within their households/family members, and purchasing items outside of those trialled (including the Wype toilet gel)
- One participant has since **bought reusable items**, including cleaning cloths and spray and microfibre makeup removing cloths **for her daughters**
- Another participant has **recommended cleaning with cloths and spray** to her sister, due to the pleasant smell

"I've bought more bathroom bin bags that smell as I liked those, I've also mentioned to my sister about the spray as I really like the smell over the normal bleach-like smells".

Parent of infants, Longitudinal

"[The research] made me look at things I'd taken for granted... I loved the microfibre [cleaning] cloths, I've actually now subscribed through Purdy & Figg, and they send me new cloths and spray [refills]. It's made life so much easier. I've introduced [my daughters] to it too."

Hotspot, Longitudinal



Evaluation of blockage prevention programme



The free waste devices help build an appetite for reusable swaps, but could be promoted more actively

The ability to order free waste devices is received positively, although there are some concerns over quality/current options available, and it needs to be better publicised

Positive feedback on microfibre makeup removal cloths, but toilet tissue spray seen as more of a hassle than it's worth

Suggestions to improve the effectiveness of engagement officer visits, include live demonstrations and leaving behind resources



While engagement officer visits are appreciated, there is room for improvement



- **Having an engagement officer in the area signifies the severity of the issue**
- **Many participants were in disbelief that companies can continue to advertise wipes as 'flushable'**
 - For one participant, the visit led to a significant change in behaviour, no longer buying 'flushable' wipes or three-ply toilet roll
- **Increased awareness about household responsibility for causing blockages was also effective at gaining interest in the programme**
- **Some participants found the visits helpful in reinforcing existing knowledge about proper disposal practices**
 - Some participants felt that the visits were too brief and were left still wanting to know more about the programme
- **Participants suggested that visits could be more effective if they included practical demonstrations or visual aids to show the impact of improper disposal**
 - E.g. the 'shake test' tested during the longitudinal phase, see *slide 29* for more

"You're thinking, am I gonna get fined? ... The thing that blew me away was [wipes] that say they're flushable and consumers are buying them and they're not. But, yeah, [since the visit] I seem to have just done a whole 180."
Hotspot, Community

"They did a knocking of all the doors... What I didn't know was that you're responsible for your own section, if there is a problem there, you're responsible for the cost... [The engagement officer] was lovely. I don't mind having a chat to someone at the door."
Hotspot, Community





Awareness of the waste packs prior to the research was generally low

- Common channels for finding out about the free waste devices were engagement officer visits and word of mouth, rather than directly through Wessex Water/social media
- Participants would have liked to have received more information or leaflets, other suggestions included being able to order a small bathroom bin
- One participant felt that the items included were poor in quality and didn't end up using or keeping any of them
- None of the participants who had ordered waste devices could recall or had tried the toilet tissue spray



When tested further in the longitudinal phase, customers found items useful overall

- The idea of sending out free devices was praised as reflecting highly on Wessex and their commitment to helping customers
- Participants enjoyed trialling the items, with some successfully implemented into household routines
- Some echoed comments from the earlier research about the low quality of the items, as well as mixed reviews about the bright colours of items
 - One participant was prompted to purchase her own items instead as she saw value in them but wanted durable items in neutral colours

"We didn't find [the waste pack] through Wessex Water. We found out that out through a friend who then told us about it."

Hotspot, Community

"[The waste pack] came very quickly. It's very brightly coloured and all the bits were quite large. I do use the [hair catcher] in the bathroom."

Hotspot, Community

"Overall, it's been really eye opening really, and we've been able to implement a few of the things as a household that will stay."

Parents of infants, Longitudinal

"[Trying the products] does actually change your way of thinking ... Now I've got the little plug things in the sink and shower [from Screwfix], it's surprising how much food that actually collects and how much hair it collects."

Hotspot, Longitudinal





Sink strainer

- ✓ Most used product by hotspot participants (prior to research)
- ✓ Key to keeping the drain clear
- ✓ Helps visualise how much would normally go into waterways
- ✗ Some comments about flimsiness, does not feel durable

"I get annoyed now ... if I forgot to pop [the sink strainer] back in after I've washed up. When you look at what it catches, you think, oh god, all that's been going down the plug and through the pipe work."

Hotspot, Community

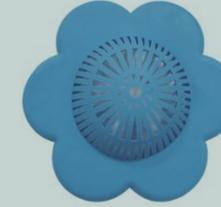


Gunk pot

- ✓ The bright colour stands out
- ✓ Easy fold-away design is effective and discrete
- ✓ Keeping it in close reach in the kitchen encourages use.
- ✗ Not all had a great need for it or were fine with prior solutions (e.g., using a plastic container or can.)

"[The gunk pot] was useful, it served a purpose, and you can store it away. It doesn't look like you've got an artefact."

Hotspot, Longitudinal



Hair catcher

- ✓ Some participants did find it effective at preventing blockage in the shower
- ✓ One participant found it easier to clean than metal alternatives
- ✗ Some concerns over the raised design, potential tripping hazard
- ✗ Participants did not like the bright colour – this product is more visible than the gunk pot which can store away
- ✗ Some unsure about the intended use without more information

"I was a little bit confused about the colourful one [hair catcher], because it didn't fit in any of my sinks. I wondered whether it should have gone upside down."

Middle-aged, Longitudinal



Active makeup removal wipe users in the longitudinal phase were sent microfibre makeup removing cloths for further trial and comparison



Reusable cotton rounds

- ✓ Inclusion of a washing bag
- ✓ Soft (initially) and feel gentle on the skin
- ✓ Useful for eye makeup removal due to size and shape
- ✗ Reported to not withstand the washing machine very well, causing thinning and staining
- ✗ One participant was not a fan of the reusable cotton rounds but has swapped makeup wipes for disposable cotton wool and micellar water (that we sent for trial)



This was a real issue for participants concerned with cleanliness/hygiene, as staining is associated with it being dirty

"When they're stained it looks dirty... You don't really want to use a stained thing on your face. So, that wasn't that appealing."

Hotspot, Longitudinal



Microfibre makeup removal cloths

- ✓ Feel gentler on the skin than the cotton rounds and wipes
- ✓ Less staining and maintain softness after washing (although one participant had issues with dry time)
- ✓ The larger surface area means they are quick and easy to use
- ✓ Some participants enjoyed the bright colour
- ✓ Works effectively with either water or face wash/cleanser
- ✓ Some participants incentivised to buy their own (approx. 6 was seen as a good amount for everyday use, we sent 3)
- ✓ One participant valued using both products together, for different parts of her skincare routine
- ✗ One participant felt that the cloths wasted product compared to the cotton rounds

"I do find that with makeup wipes, you have got to attack the skin a little bit to get off. Whereas with the what with the cloths, it is very much one wipe and the makeup's gone immediately."

Younger people, Longitudinal





Longitudinal participants found the toilet tissue spray more of a hassle than it is worth

As there were no earlier insights about the tissue spray, participants that chose to do so were tasked with trialling the spray throughout the longitudinal phase



Toilet tissue spray

- ✓ Novelty factor when initially receiving
 - ✓ Small size useful for travel/activity outside of the house, e.g., music festivals
 - ✓ Interest in a toilet wipe alternative to reduce waste and allow for safe flushing
 - While not trialled during this research, interest in other alternatives products, including gels, were probed on during discussions...
- ✗ Causes most toilet tissue to disintegrate, therefore unusable
 - ✗ Small quantity will run out quickly
 - ✗ Financial concerns if they were to keep repurchasing following the trial
 - ✗ Not aesthetically pleasing
 - ✗ Some hygiene concerns about touching the bottle in toilet
 - ✗ Parents reported that some children struggled to use the spray on their own
 - There is interest in a similar product, designed specifically for children (easy spray top, minimal/safe ingredients)

Toilet tissue gel

Wipe gel was of interest to some who were open to trying alternatives to toilet wipes, but unhappy with the result of the spray.

Perceived to be more effective than the spray form, will not wet toilet tissue as much.

For others, even the gel still requires 'too many steps', especially for participants who solely use toilet wipes, rather than using them in combination with toilet roll.

"I just find it a bit fatty, you know, I'm sort of there, like getting a bit of tissue, spraying it, you know. But then I do think maybe for things like festivals and things, that would probably be really good."

Parents of infants, Longitudinal

"It's not that actually using the little spritz and the toilet paper that is a problem in itself. It's mainly that it just destroys the toilet tissue, and it just becomes unusable really for the most part."

Hotspot, Longitudinal



A close-up photograph showing a person's hands wearing blue nitrile gloves. The person is using a white paper towel to wipe a white surface. In the background, a blue spray bottle is visible. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent teal banner containing the text "Detailed case studies".

Detailed case studies

Sally, 57, balances full-time work and being a mother/grandmother

Sally* lives with two of her young adult children and has young grandchildren who visit regularly. She uses wipes for a wide variety of things, including cleaning and disinfecting her home, which is crucial, as she is immunocompromised.



Sally spoke to her children about what she has learnt throughout the research, hoping to influence them to steer away from using and flushing wipes.

On finishing the research, Sally felt converted to using cloths and spray for cleaning, motivated by a better, smear-free clean. Having arthritis, she found the cloths easier to grip than cleaning wipes, making it a game-changer all round.



Sally also purchased her own sink and hair catchers to match the colours in her bathroom and kitchen and has found these to be very effective, even her son is using and emptying them.

While initially thinking the reusable swaps would be time consuming and messy (picturing cloths all over the house), Sally slowly transitioned away from using wipes, motivated by swaps being cost effective in the long run, and trying to reduce her waste.



It is important to Sally to maintain a tidy home, despite her busy schedule. She finds wipes appealing for their convenience factor.

Sally bins wipes and tries to tell her grandchildren to do the same, but her eldest daughter has different rules for her children, so she thinks that sometimes wipes are flushed when they visit.

"I always found the wipes easier, but not now. It's a quick spray, wipe and buff and it looks and smells cleaner. I'm back to having shiny taps again. Then I just pop the cloths in the wash, and it's done."

"My daughter is usually busy with her 2 [kids] under 3. We disagree on flushable wipes, as I like all wipes to go in the bin whereas she feels I'm defeating the purpose of them."

"My daughter said the wipes don't tend to go into the toilet unless her 3-year-old wants to be independent and wipe her own bottom ... I've shared the information and said, oh, you've got to have a go at [trying the reusable swaps], you know."

"You almost get a guilt trip if you're doing something that could be seen as being bad for the environment, like 'oh gosh, I bought plastic'. So, I do feel a bit pressured [to try reduce my waste]."



* Name changed.



Alice, 24, a barista living in a shared house

For Alice*, having a clean home is very important to her mental wellbeing, but this can be difficult due to her housemates' varying schedules, and their partners visiting. They use biodegradable wipes (perceived as more environmentally friendly) for cleaning surfaces in the kitchen and bathroom, and sometimes toilet wipes, which she will flush as they are labelled 'flushable'.

Time →



Alice considers herself to be environmentally conscious, however, her commitment to this can sometimes slip due to her busy and active lifestyle.

Prior to taking part, she suspected that wipes were not great for the environment, but it was not a priority issue for her at all.

"I think I knew before [the research] that wipes are just bad for the environment. Whether you flush them or not, like, they're still not good. [I used them] out of convenience and laziness ... You think, one wipe isn't going to affect much."

Throughout the research, Alice has involved her housemates and friends, finding visual reminders in the bathroom to bin wipes excellent conversation starters. She found short and snappy mottos worked best.



"I have had a lot of people ask, what is that [post it]? When I explain, they're like, 'oh, actually that's a really good idea'. I think that just seeing those words every single day, whether you're in the bath or shower or, you know, sat on the toilet, I think that's probably just a really good way of getting it into people's heads to not flush wipes."



She also trialled removing the cleaning wipes from the bathroom, making it more difficult for people to choose the 'easy' option, which she found to be effective.

Alice does not see herself using wipes for cleaning or makeup removal in future. She thinks that Wessex Water's best chance to get through to young people is linking the issue back to the individual consequence (e.g., fines/liability.)

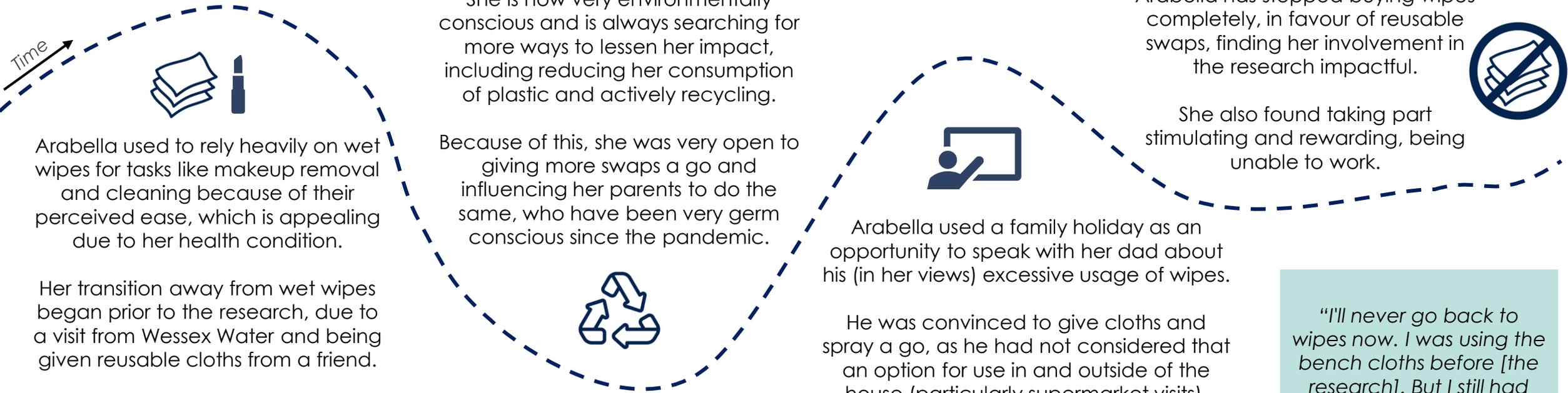
"[Wessex should be] honest about what flushing wipes does to affect you and everybody else ... like, 'you'll have to pay for this plumbing issue'. Younger people like us maybe don't think about the personal consequences."



* Name changed.

Arabella, 36, lives with her son and is unable to work due to disability

Arabella* enjoys spending time with friends and family. Maintaining a clean home is very important to her, although her daily routine varies depending on her health, Arabella involves her son around the house, setting him up for the future, but also so he can help when she is in pain.



"I wish I'd swapped [to reusable cloths] a lot sooner because I just find it easier and less time consuming. If I'm cleaning up a big mess, the cloth gets rinsed off and then in the wash, then I'm getting a clean one straight back out."

"Dad is over the top clean, but he slowly came around to the idea. I heard him say the other day, 'put [cleaning spray] on the shopping list' ... I dread to think in his years how many [wipes] he's used. But yeah, even he's thinking of getting the reusable bottles and stuff. So, it's catching on."

"I'll never go back to wipes now. I was using the bench cloths before [the research]. But I still had the odd wipe around, maybe for the floor and stuff like that."



* Name changed.

Kate, 41, a busy working single mum

Kate's* schedule is busy, juggling work, school runs and ferrying her three kids to their hobbies, whilst also maintaining the household (food shops, cleaning etc.) Having a clean home is very important to her, and wipes are a key part of this.



"I think my fear was the smell and I think everybody's just so used to... without going too graphic, you sit on a toilet, you wipe, you flush."

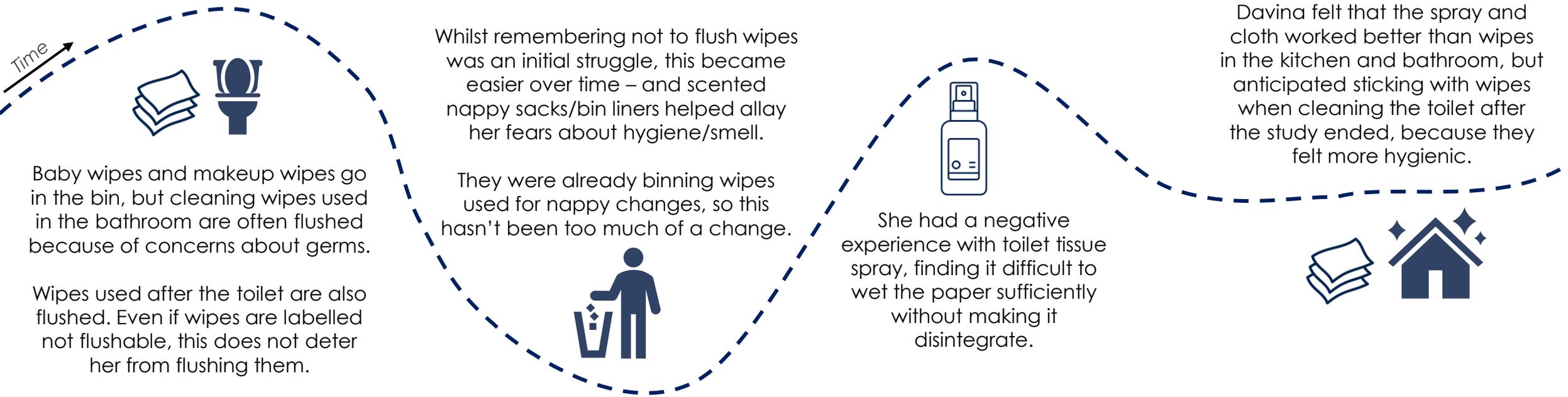
"I had to almost put a sanction/incentive on the children for not flushing wipes, as it's something we have done for so long."

"Replacing the flannels for the wet wipes when out and about is definitely a no-no; it's just not practical. Surface wipes being replaced with microfibre and spray—perfect! I don't think I'll ever go back."

* Name changed.



Davina* is busy juggling her job with new responsibilities as a parent. She uses wipes for a range of tasks around the house, including nappy changes, makeup removal, as well as cleaning surfaces in the kitchen and bathroom.



“So the antibacterial wipes says not to flush them but if I'm using them to clean the bathroom I just prefer to flush them due to the type of germs they carry.”

“It just feels normal to put [wipes] in the bin now.”

“It doesn't make the tissue as moist as a wet wipe because I quite like them quite wet. I use water wipes so they're actually quite moist. Whereas to get a tissue that moist with that spray, you have to do quite a lot of spraying.”

* Name changed.

Daisy, 33, lives with her husband and three daughters

Daisy's* house has 3 bathrooms, so keeping on top of the cleaning can be a challenge. She feels strongly about reducing her environmental impact. She uses wipes around the house on surfaces and mostly for the children.



"I'm just trying to be a bit more environmentally minded and stop flushing the wet wipes down the toilet."

"I just think I'm quite a clean person. It's not sustainable to be putting them in a bin and then taking that out to the bin every single time."

"It doesn't make the tissue as moist as a wet wipe because I quite like them quite wet. I use water wipes so they're actually quite moist. Whereas to get a tissue that moist with that spray, you have to do quite a lot of spraying."

* Name changed.

Ben, 39, lives with his partner and their 6 month old baby

Ben* uses wipes for a wide range of things, from baby to cleaning counters, to stain removal to walls and blinds, to birdcage cleaning. Him and his partner use toilet wipes as they feel they're more effective than toilet paper.



"The ones that say flushable, I'm still a bit conscious but. I feel a bit more comfortable [flushing] them."

"I think at first I thought it'd be really hard... to not throw wipes down the toilet, but actually it's been surprisingly easier than I thought."

"I still prefer the convenience of the wipes, for sure. Something easier than having to get like a spray bottle out and then like get some tissue out, you know, whatever, and spray it and then it just feels like. Wipes have sort of disinfectant cleanliness."



* Name changed.



Timmy, 42, unable to work due to disability, spends weekends with his daughter

Timmy* lives alone and likes to play video games to relax. He regularly balances his desire to be environmentally conscious with convenience, due to his limited energy. As he is unable to work, cost also plays a factor to his purchasing habits.



Timmy has toilet wipes at home for his young daughter to use, as this allows her to be independent in the bathroom and gives him peace of mind that she's being clean.

He uses them occasionally but doesn't rely on them on daily basis. He is environmentally minded and had begun reducing his usage prior to the research.

"My daughter can look after herself now, but [toilet wipes] give peace of mind that she's that extra bit hygienic ... But it's not something that I feel the need to use all the time for myself."

Timmy trialled the toilet tissue spray, however, found it disintegrated the toilet tissue, making it unusable. His daughter also could not use the spray on her own, removing her independence, which was an issue.

He also investigated the cost going forward, and didn't see the swap to be financially liable, even if successful.



"For someone in my position where I'm disabled ... and have to make do with what I've got, affordability is a big factor ... So, I tend to compare [reusable swaps] to something that's less environmentally friendly and doing a balancing act."



Timmy tested post it note reminders to bin wipes as his main reason to flush wipes was absentmindedness (see slide 19). He found this to be effective as they visually stood out, which was helpful to combat his busy mind.

"My brain's all over the place, so moments of forgetting [to bin] often happens. Having something that is there on the wipe packet, standing out is a really good reminder and such to keep me in check."

Timmy found taking part in the research had a positive impact on his habits, by bringing the issue of improper disposal to the forefront of his mind.



He plans to continue using the visual reminders to combat accidental flushing.

"Taking part in this research, makes you become more mentally conscious about these things. The more I think, can I just avoid [using wipes]? If it's at the forefront of my brain, then I'm more likely to act on it."



* Name changed.

Recommendations

Customers want the reusable products on offer to be expanded and better publicised, with product discounts/vouchers made available to encourage repurchase

Communications should highlight the consequences of flushing wipes, focus on the benefits of changing habits, focus on allaying hygiene worries about binning them

Active and passive wipe users need to be engaged with differently; encouraging 'easy swaps' to reusables is preferable for the former, while the latter respond better to reminders to bin wipes



Going forward...

Publicise reusable products, and add to the selection on offer

- Customers love a free sample, so advertise widely to make sure they know what they're eligible for
- Consider including other options for customers to choose from, including:
 - Reminder stickers
 - Microfibre makeup cloths
 - Nappy bags/scented bin liners
 - Toilet tissue gel

Social media campaigns* to highlight the consequences of flushing wipes

- While most participants have limited recall of campaigns related to wipe disposal, it is seen by many as an important channel for sharing information
- The audience through social channels, especially TikTok, is likely to be younger so there is an opportunity to make content more targeted – generic messages for wider audiences and are more likely to fall flat
 - Sponsored content is more likely to resonate for this audience when integrated into regular content (e.g., partnerships with content creators), rather than being labelled as an advertisement/coming from a brand account
- Do not shy away from the seriousness of the issue, the middle-aged audience want to see the visuals to drive home the reason why it is bad to flush wipes.
- Leverage the environmental factor, as well as the reality of blocked pipes and blockages (particularly the cost for customers)

"Everybody loves a freebie! It's a great way to promote an important message."

Hotspot, Longitudinal

"If you're trying to really trying to get information out there, you need to do it so it's hard hitting, serious and so people actually see this is a consequence of what happens."

Hotspot, Longitudinal

"A more targeted campaign would be beneficial ... I always found news around 'fat bergs' was a stark reminder of how incorrectly flushed waste was affecting drainage systems."

Middle-aged, Community





Focusing on the benefits of using reusables, and making them more accessible and affordable, could encourage more people to use them instead of wipes

Promoting alternatives that still have a disposable element will address the hygiene concerns preventing others from moving away from wipes

Swapping to reusables can seem like a higher effort product 'downgrade'



Focus on benefits of changing habits

- Make the environmental benefits of reducing wipe usage tangible e.g., number of trees saved
- Focus on the additional benefits of using reusable products e.g., better for skin, more effective, cost savings
- Give relatable examples of other people trying to make the swap – include slip ups as well as successes

"My skin looks so much better. Having the cloths has probably made a difference."
Younger people, Longitudinal

Reusables can be expensive, hard to find and more labour intensive to use



Accessible, budget friendly alternatives

- Products sent straight to your door:
 - Either enough to prevent the need for frequent washing
 - Or vouchers to encourage reordering
- Stress that reusables are cheaper to use in the long run

"If you haven't got wipes in your house, you're not going to flush them. If you've got [the reusable items], they are, in the long term, better for your purse, better for the environment, they look better, they smell fresher. So just making people more aware [of the alternative products] and steering them away from the wipes."
Hotspot, Longitudinal

Some don't want to touch cloths after using them for 'dirty' activities



Allay hygiene worries

- Spread the word about alternatives to cloths e.g., toilet roll, for those too concerned about hygiene to use them
- One respondent suggested providing products that are naturally antibacterial e.g., coconut scrubbers

"I've met people who are germ-phobic, and part of the appeal of wipes is that they want to use something that's just disposable."
Hotspot, Longitudinal





Engaging young people is also key to building good disposal habits early on

Active and passive wipe flushers also need to be engaged differently

Target young customers

Likely to be less knowledgeable about plumbing/lack accountability for disposal habits

- Messaging around being liable for the cost of repairs may not resonate with this audience
- Knowledge building about blockages and how they occur is key
- Environmental messages, and the cost saving element of reusables are highly motivating for this age group

"I don't think a lot of people... would read this whole massive paragraph about wipes ... on TikTok short videos catch people's attention."
Carers, Community

Engage active/passive flushers differently

Active flushers

- Highly concerned about the hygiene/smell aspect of binning wipes
- Reluctant to change their behaviour even when they learn about the consequences of flushing
- Comms encouraging swaps to reusables/cutting out wipes likely to be more successful

Passive flushers

- Flush without thinking, likely to try binning wipes if adequately supported and made aware of the consequences of flushing

Engage with schools

Helps tackle disposal habits embedded during toilet training, and set up good habits for the future

- Shake test seen as an effective way to visualise consequences of wipe flushing with children
- Building wipe disposal into existing teaching around handwashing etc. could establish good habits for future generations
- One participant also suggesting running community events in schools focused on wipe disposal/swapping to reusables

"I think if it [was] addressed within the schools the children [would] educate their parents."
Hotspot, Longitudinal



Appendix



Addressing Ofwat's research principles

Standards for high-quality research:	How these were addressed in this project:
Useful and contextualised	This research is part of Wessex Water's evaluation of their Blockage Prevention Programme. An online webinar was held prior to the research to explain what is expected of participants, and how the findings of the research will be used. A rapid review of existing research (including documents sent over from Wessex) was conducted by the Blue Marble team to ensure materials design (and the project as a whole) built on information that is already known.
Fit for purpose	The sample was designed to capture Wessex customers who had already engaged with the Blockage Prevention Programme (through receiving/ordering free reusable devices and/or home visits from engagement officers), as well as free-find participants in the Wessex catchment. All participants were active users of wet wipes, with half the sample disposing by flushing, prior to the research. Additional depth interviews were conducted with carers and hotspot participants during the initial fieldwork period with specific discussion guides to ensure questions were relevant to them. By allowing participants to respond using various methods during the online community and longitudinal phas), including text, audio or video options, participants were able to participate in a way that was convenient to them.
Neutrally designed	Our team's extensive experience in designing research stimulus and discussion guides ensures our lines of questioning are neutral and not leading. Information was provided to participants about Wessex Water, the purpose of the research, and the regulation of the industry as part of the webinar.
Inclusive	Our sample reflected a broad range of demographics within the target audience (active wet wipe users). Eight participants were recruited using customer lists as they were known to have engaged with Wessex's Blockage Prevention Programme. The remaining twenty were recruited from audiences of interest to Wessex (i.e., suspected high users of wet wipes). Digitally disadvantaged customers are not reflected in the sample, due to the online methodology.
Continual	Wessex Water to advise.
Shared in full with others	The research findings are included in this full report for Wessex Water to share as required.
Ethical	Blue Marble is a company partner of the MRS. All of its employees abide by the MRS code of conduct and as such all of our research is in line with their ethical standards. The privacy of respondents was protected throughout, due to the sensitive subject matter (as flushing wipes is discouraged by companies), including not sharing recordings outside of the Blue Marble team. Pseudonyms were also used throughout to protect identities of longitudinal participants.
Independently assured	This research has been conducted by Blue Marble Research, an agency independent from Wessex Water, that holds expertise in conducting research across the water industry.



Participant	Gender	Community audience	Disposal habits	Rationale for involvement in longitudinal
Sally	Female	Hotspot (waste pack recipient)	Bins wipes	Chosen to engage in peer research with her family members. Considered a mega-user of wipes, using them for multiple purposes around the house.
Kelly	Female	Middle-aged	Bins and flushes wipes	Also considered a mega-user. Prior to involvement, didn't think anything would sway her from flushing toilet wipes. Aim to reduce wipes used.
Alice	Female	Younger people	Bins and flushes wipes	Worthwhile to understand more about young peoples' attitudes towards campaigns, and motivators for change.
Diana	Female	Parents of infants	Bins and flushes wipes	Flushes wipes due to concerns about germs. Is not deterred by wipes marked 'do not flush', will flush either way.
Bradley	Male	Parents of infants	Flushes wipes	Potential to unpack why he prefers toilet wipes over toilet roll, and subsequently why he flushes wipes. Trial behaviour swaps.
Denise	Female	Parents of toddlers	Flushes wipes	Trial use of bathroom bin, aware wipes aren't good for the environment but use anyway for convenience.
Arabella	Female	Hotspot (home visit)	Bins wipes	Brings perspective as a reformed wipe flusher, uncover her moments of change, also trial makeup wipe swaps.
Timmy	Male	Hotspot (home visit)	Flushes wipes	Is already trying to make 'easy' swaps, hope to continue own efforts and uncover personal motivators. Trial toilet tissue swaps also.



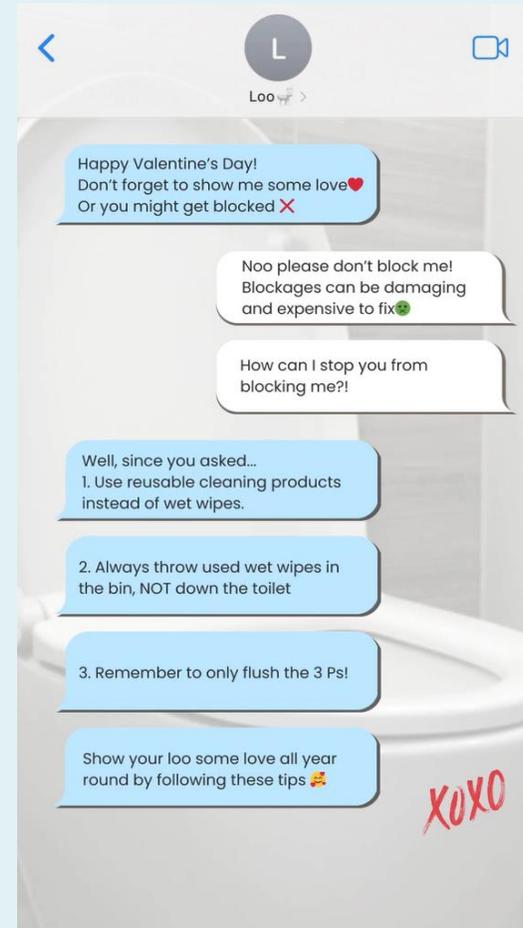
'How to avoid blockages in your home' YouTube Video



Social Media Posts



Valentines Reel



Halloween TikTok



Overall, the responses to the communications were very mixed and varied by audience type

More effective (overall)

YouTube Video

- ✓ Informative and insightful
- ✓ Highlights the seriousness of the issue by showing the impact visually
- ✓ Clear message (flush 3 P's only)
- × 'Old school' format to some

"Quite an eye opener. I have always assumed flushable wipes were in fact 'flushable' and quite surprised to find out how much of a problem they cause ... Made me feel like I have been quite naive."

Parent of toddler

More effective (younger people)

Halloween TikTok

- ✓ Highlights the seriousness of the issue
- ✓ Shows the impact visually
- ✓ Clear message (flush 3 P's only)
- × Some from other audiences found the tone inappropriate/childish

"This video cleverly incorporates a trending sound, instantly making it more appealing and engaging ... Using humour to highlight a serious issue is an effective way to capture attention and encourage people to reflect on their habits."

Younger people

Less effective (overall)

Social Media Posts

- ✓ Clear messages (promoting waste packs and blockage visuals)
- × Not engaging, too much text
- × Sceptical about reach on platforms like Facebook and Instagram

"Advertising other alternatives to use rather than wipes is a very good message, however, the way that it was captured in the post did not interest me and I found it slightly dull to look at."

Young people

Valentines Day Reel

- × Only applies one day a year, not good for encouraging long-term change
- × Text-based format not engaging
- × Some found the tone corporate

"At a glance you may think it's ad for toilet roll. It's a bit wordy, and not everybody finds text messages exciting ... Why would you relate wipes to romance?"

Hotspot





Cost and consequences

- Some participants highlighted the need for stricter measures to encourage behaviour change in the form of fines or warnings
- However, there were mixed views on fines, as it was thought to be difficult to find out who's to blame or if it was caused deliberately
- The introduction of fines would drive home the severity of the issue, making flushing look like an anti-social behaviour
 - Therefore, only seen as only appropriate for households constantly causing blockages
- Money could be reinvested into addressing environmental impacts caused by improper disposal practices
- Many emphasised the importance of combining penalties with education and awareness campaigns to ensure long-term behaviour change

"[Fines] would stop people doing it, obviously, because they're not going to want to pay a fine or anything. But then good luck to Wessex Water tracking where it's coming from."

Hotspot, Community

"I think fines do make people avoid doing certain things, like when you're driving, you wouldn't go in a bus lane."

Parents of infants, Longitudinal





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