

Census 2021 myth buster: 11 things you think you know about the census but you're wrong

1. *Census 2021 is over – I've missed Census Day so I don't have to do it*

Wrong! Every household is required by law to complete the census and even though the official census day has come and gone, it is not too late to complete a questionnaire.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has had a great response to Census 2021 so far, but everyone needs to respond as soon as possible to avoid a fine.

2. *You only count yourself at the house you were in on Census Day*

Everyone needs to complete a return at their usual address, even if they weren't there on census day, as well as at the place they were staying on census day.

If the pandemic has changed where you are currently living (e.g. you moved out of a city to a rural or holiday home prior to lockdown restrictions, or you haven't visited your city commuter flat because of lockdown) you still need to complete a census form at both addresses. Visit www.census.gov.uk to request an access code for your second address.

3. *You don't need to complete a return for an empty house*

A census return has to be completed for every property, even if nobody lives there full time – e.g. holiday homes and caravans, unlet rental property or a house waiting to be sold.

Local councils need to know about all properties in their area so that, for example, they can plan services and work out how many new houses need to be built. Visit www.census.gov.uk to request an access code if you are responsible for an empty house, flat, caravan or park home, or a holiday home.

4. *I'm not a British citizen, so I don't have to be counted*

Everyone staying in England and Wales on Census Day, March 21st, has to be counted.

Go to www.census.gov.uk to request an access code or call 0800 587 2021 for support in languages other than English.

5. *Students don't count in the census*

Students are vitally important and do count! All students need to be included in the census.

They should complete a form for their usual term-time address (even if they weren't there on census day) AND be included at their home address. All universities and colleges have details of how to get a census form or go to www.census.gov.uk and request an access code.

6. *My information will be shared*

This is not correct. Personal census data is kept under lock and key for 100 years. No individual or their responses can be identified in the statistics published by the ONS.

Your personal information can't be accessed or used by anyone who makes decisions about you or to investigate you. It cannot be used by the government to influence benefit claims, a residency application, immigration status or taxes, or by security services, or by landlords or any private organisation.

7. The census is pointless. It doesn't help me.

The census benefits us all by underpinning all the services every single person relies on.

The data it provides will help shape policy and investment decisions at a local and national level for years to come. Census information is used to plan a vast range of services: from school and care home places to the planning of bike lanes; it is even used when deciding where to build new supermarkets, what food to put on the shelves and how many parent and toddler spaces to put in the car park.

8. If you can't get online, you can't do the census

For the first time, everyone is able to complete the census online and the response has been terrific. But if you or someone you know doesn't have the equipment, skills or confidence to do it online, help is at hand.

There are local census support centres offering telephone and face-to-face support. Go to www.census.gov.uk to find the nearest centre, or call 0800 141 2021 for help or to order a paper questionnaire. Questionnaires and guidance are available in a range of accessible formats.

9. Census officers will ask for personal information

Census officers will never ask to see personal documents like passports or birth certificates; they will never ask for payment and they will not enter your home.

If a householder requests a paper questionnaire, a field officer will only ask for the householder's name. If a new online access code is needed, the householder will also be asked for a phone number.

10. Census officers will fine you on the doorstep

Do not be scammed. Census field officers will never ask for a payment on the doorstep. You will also not get any email, text message or telephone call asking you for census information or to pay a fine.

The role of field officers is to give help and encouragement to those who have not yet filled in their census questionnaire and to explain the support services that are available. They will be using PPE and operating in the same way as a postal or food delivery visit. They also carry ID to show they are genuinely working on the census. If in doubt, close the door and call 0800 141 2021 for help with your census.

The ONS will continue to support people to respond to the census but if a household refuses to fill out a questionnaire they will ultimately proceed to an interview under caution, which may be followed by a court summons, a fine of up to £1,000 and a criminal record.

11. I've got to pay a fine online for making a mistake on my census

Do not be scammed. If you think you've made a mistake on your census, call 0800 141 2021 for help.

For a fine to be imposed your case must go to court. You will never be issued with a fine by text message, on social media or by email. The ONS's Cyber Intelligence team is constantly scouring the web for phishing sites and taking them down. If you find a site that looks suspicious or receive text messages with a link to a site asking for money related to the census, ignore it. Report the details to the Census 2021 Contact Centre on 0800 141 2021.

There's still time to do your census - it only takes a few minutes - make sure you are included!