



COVID-19 Survey Summary: October 23, 2020

The following is a summary of social, behavioral and economic survey research on COVID-19 released in the past week, as compiled for the Societal Experts Action Network ([SEAN](#)). Most surveys cited in this report are available in the [SEAN COVID-19 Survey Archive](#).

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Public pessimism about the pandemic’s trajectory in the United States has increased amid rapidly rising COVID-19 cases in many states, with more Americans saying the worst is yet to come. This follows a drop in some social distancing behaviors to pandemic lows last month.

Other newly released studies find continued concern about political pressure influencing the vaccine process, investigate impacts on workers, describe population patterns in coronavirus-related deaths and assess how Americans get their information about the pandemic.

Coronavirus Concerns

After dividing evenly last month, more Americans again think the worst of the outbreak is yet to come than think it is behind us, 42-33 percent, vs. 38-38 percent in September. (An additional one in five say the coronavirus isn’t a major problem, essentially unchanged.) ([KFF 10/7-10/12](#))

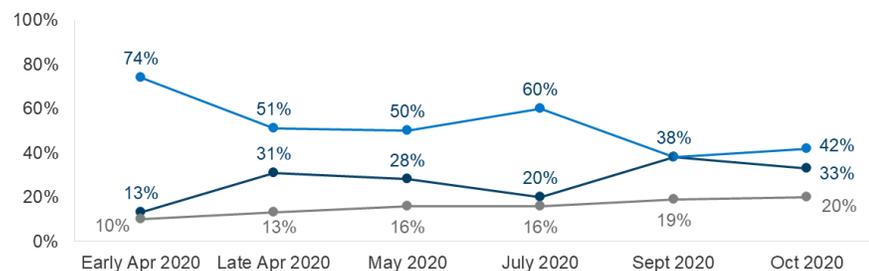
Similarly, in a binary approach, more likely voters say the worst of the pandemic is still to come than say it is over, 51-37 percent, compared with 49-43 percent in September ([NYT/Siena 10/15-10/18](#)).

Six in 10 likely voters say the spread of the coronavirus is out of control in the United States ([Quinnipiac 10/16-10/19](#)). Similarly, 61 percent of Americans think the United States has not controlled the outbreak as much as it could have, unchanged since last month. More think the pandemic has been made a bigger deal than it really is, rather than a

About Four In Ten Say The Worst Of The Coronavirus Outbreak Is Yet To Come

Percent who say each of the following best describes their feelings about the coronavirus outbreak in the U.S.:

● The worst is behind us ● The worst is yet to come ● The coronavirus is not/will not be a major problem



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Polls. See topline for full question wording.



smaller one, 36-30 percent, but that gap has narrowed from 39-26 percent last month. A third continue to say it's been characterized about right ([Pew 10/6-10/12](#)).

Eighty-two percent are at least somewhat concerned about the outbreak and 73 percent are that concerned about the possibility of getting sick, both essentially unchanged since late August. Eight in 10 apiece are concerned about cases rising in their area this fall and winter or another wave of lockdowns and business closures in their area ([Axios/Ipsos 10/16-10/19](#)).

Vaccines and Public Health Agencies

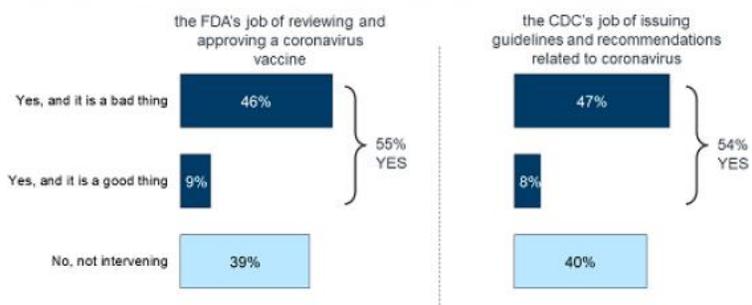
Six in 10 likely voters say that if a vaccine to prevent COVID-19 were approved by the FDA, they would definitely (27 percent) or probably (34 percent) get it. By a 2-1 margin, likely voters oppose a national vaccine mandate, 63-32 percent ([NYT/Siena 10/15-10/18](#)).

Sixty-two percent of adults remain at least somewhat worried the FDA will rush to approve a vaccine without making sure it is safe and effective because of political pressure from President Trump and the White House, unchanged since last month. Fifty-three percent of Democrats are very worried about this, as are a third of independents, vs. one in 10 Republicans.

Fifty-five percent think Trump is intervening in the FDA's job of reviewing and approving a vaccine and 54 percent say he's intervening in the CDC's job of issuing recommendations related to the coronavirus. Most of those who think these are happening say it's a bad thing.

Majorities Think President Trump Is Intervening With The FDA And CDC's Coronavirus Related Work

Do you think President Trump is intervening with...? IF YES: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?



SOURCE: KFF Health Tracking Poll (conducted October 7-12, 2020). See top line for full question wording.



Despite those concerns, seven in 10 have at least a fair amount of trust in the FDA to ensure that a vaccine is safe and effective before it is approved (71 percent) and trust the CDC to provide guidelines and recommendations related to the coronavirus based on scientific evidence (72 percent).

Most Democrats and Republicans alike trust both agencies, with a wider partisan divide in trust in the CDC, 84 vs. 60 percent, than in the FDA, 77 vs. 72 percent ([KFF 10/7-10/12](#)).

Masks and Distancing

In a poll conducted in September, the number of Americans who said they engaged in several social distancing practices dropped to new lows:

- Fifty-three percent said they had avoided public places such as stores and restaurants, the fewest since mid-March, and down from 84 percent in April.

- Forty-five percent were avoiding small gatherings, again a low since mid-March and far off its peak of 84 percent in the early days of the pandemic.
- Seven in 10 had avoided large crowds in the previous week, more modestly off its high of 78 percent in late July/early August to a low in data since early July.

Mask use remained widespread – nine in 10 said they’d worn a face mask when outside their home in the previous week, essentially unchanged since mid-July ([Gallup 9/14-9/27](#)). In a different measure, nearly seven in 10 continue to say they *always* wear a mask when leaving home, essentially steady since early August ([Axios/Ipsos 10/16-10/19](#)).

That said, support among likely voters for a mandate for every American to wear a mask when they expect to come within six feet of another person has dropped from 67 percent in September to 59 percent now. It’s down 15 percentage points among independents (to 54 percent) and 11 points among Republicans (to 29 percent), while essentially steady – and far higher – among Democrats (90 percent) ([NYT/Siena 10/15-10/18](#)).

Impact on Work

In a newly released poll from mid-September, 54 percent of employed adults said the amount of stress they experience had worsened in the pandemic. (A third said it was unchanged and 13 percent said it’s improved.) Forty-three percent called the pandemic a major stressor, including 62 percent of employed Blacks, vs. 44 percent of Hispanic workers and 39 percent of whites. It also was higher among employed women than men, 50 vs. 36 percent.

More workers overall said the pandemic made the balance between their work and personal life worse rather than better, 36-19 percent. It was closer on whether the pandemic made the amount of work they get done worse or better, 24-18 percent.

Four in 10 working parents with children in school or daycare said balancing work with other responsibilities was a major source of stress; it was half that among those without kids. A third of parents said family life overall was a major source of stress, vs. 15 percent of others.

More than half of employed parents of color said their child’s school or daycare was closed, compared with roughly a quarter of white workers. Working parents dealing with those closures were particularly apt to report challenges, including their stress levels, their work/personal life balance and the amount they get done at work.

Twenty-eight percent of working parents said they’d had to take a leave from their job, vs. 16 percent of employed non-parents. Fifty-six percent of employed adults overall said it’s extremely or very important for their employer to provide extended family leave options during the pandemic – although just a quarter said their employer was providing such options.

Nonetheless, 57 percent said their employer was doing about the right amount to respond to the pandemic and a quarter said it was going above and beyond; just 18 percent said it was falling short. Those working remotely were more apt to say their employer was going above and

beyond, 35 vs. 19 percent. Those leaving home for work were more apt to think it was falling short, albeit at fairly low levels in either case, 21 vs. 11 percent.

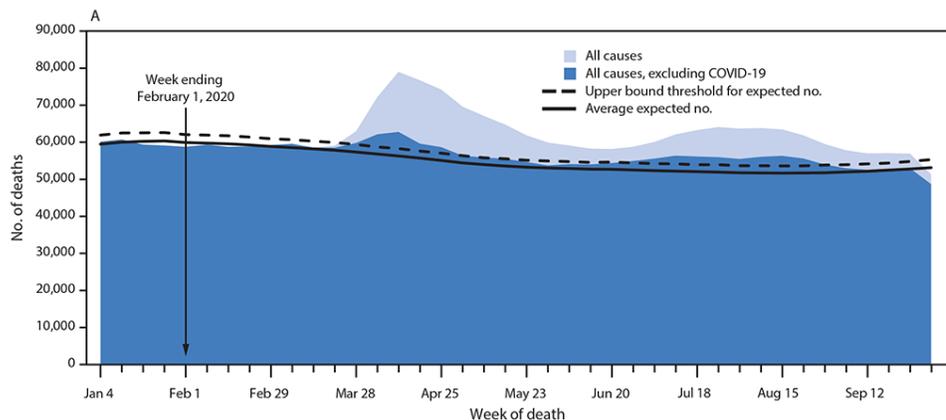
More than six in 10 overall said their employer was doing a good job ensuring that the work environment met public health guidelines (66 percent), providing protective equipment for employees (62 percent) and communicating updates on company practices during the pandemic (62 percent). Positive ratings were lower on protecting employees' physical health (54 percent), financial well-being (47 percent) and mental health (45 percent). Good-job scores were lowest on expanding healthcare benefits (22 percent) and providing hazard pay for at-risk workers (22 percent).

A quarter of workers considered quitting their job as a result of the pandemic, peaking among those who were experiencing stress, getting less work done and less apt to think their employer was doing a good job protecting employees ([AP-NORC/SAP 9/11-9/16](#)).

Coronavirus-Related Deaths

Aligning with analyses reported in [last week's summary](#), a CDC report estimates 299,028 more deaths in the United States from Jan. 26 to Oct. 3 than expected based on prior years. Of these, 198,081 were attributed to COVID-19, suggesting the official tally may be an undercount.

Excess deaths peaked during the weeks ending April 11 (40 percent more than expected) and Aug. 8 (24 percent more). Deaths were 54 percent above expected levels among Hispanic people, as well as 37 percent higher among Asians, 33 percent higher among Black people and 29 percent higher among American Indian/Alaska Natives, compared with 12 percent higher among whites. By age, excess deaths peaked among 25- to 44-year-olds, 27 percent higher than expected ([CDC 1/26-10/3](#)).



A separate CDC analysis of 114,411 COVID-19-associated deaths from May to August found that 78 percent were among seniors and 53 percent among men. Fifty-one percent were among whites, 24 percent Hispanics and 19 percent Black people. Hispanics accounted for 16 percent of deaths in May but 26 percent in August. The share of deaths in the South rose from 23 percent in May to 63 percent in August, averaging 46 percent across all four months. Twenty-one percent occurred in the Northeast (declining sharply from 44 to 4 percent), 18 percent in the West (rising from 11 to 21 percent) and 15 percent in the Midwest (from 22 to 12 percent) ([CDC 5/1-8/31](#)).

Information and Trust

In another mid-September poll, Americans divided on whether it was easy or difficult to know if information about COVID-19 was true or not, 35-36 percent. (The rest said it was neither easy nor difficult). More found it easy to understand the difference between fact and opinion about COVID-19, 48 vs. 26 percent.

Fifty-seven percent were paying extremely or very close attention to information about COVID-19. Forty-three percent said it was easy to find factual information about the virus, while 30 percent found it difficult. (Again, the rest said it was neither easy nor difficult).

In terms of specific information, seven in 10 said it was easy to find information to make a decision about wearing a face mask, 57 percent said it was easy to find information to make decisions about getting tested and 55 percent said the same of deciding about the safety of group gatherings of 10 or more people. Fewer said it was easy to get information to make decisions about the safety of reopening schools (39 percent) or treatments for the virus (35 percent).

Forty-six percent reported getting information about the coronavirus from the media at least once a day, but just 18 percent highly trusted it. The most trusted sources of information – health care providers and federal health officials – were consulted far less frequently ([USAFacts/AP-NORC 9/15-9/25](#)).

Separately, newly released results from a longitudinal study conducted from early April to mid-June found a drop in the number of Americans' expressing a great deal or complete confidence in hospitals and healthcare professionals (from 70 to 50 percent) and an 11-point decline in confidence in the scientific community (from 58 to 47 percent) ([Poverty Lab/Rustandy Center](#)).

Misinformation and Behavior

In a series of six true or false statements, large majorities of Americans correctly identified coronavirus misinformation. Specifically:

- More than nine in 10 say it is false that there will be a COVID-19 vaccine available before Election Day (94 percent) and say it is true that people can spread COVID-19 even if they don't have symptoms (93 percent).
- Eighty-six percent say it's true that masks have been shown to limit the spread of COVID-19 from person to person, 81 percent say it's false that the United States could reach herd immunity with few additional deaths and 80 percent say it's true that some COVID-19 vaccine trials have been recently paused due to possible patient safety issues.
- Seventy-two percent say it is false that hydroxychloroquine has been proven effective in treating COVID-19.

Roughly three-quarters of Americans responded correctly to at least five of the six items. Those who got fewer than that correct are less likely to be concerned about the outbreak, to wear a

mask when leaving home or to see attending a political campaign rally as a large or moderate risk to their health and well-being ([Axios/Ipsos 10/16-10/19](#)).

Government Response

Seventy-two percent of likely voters support a “new \$2 trillion stimulus package to extend increased unemployment insurance, send stimulus checks to most Americans, and provide financial support to state and local governments,” unchanged since last month. Support ranges from nine in 10 Democrats to two-thirds of independents and 56 percent of Republicans ([NYT/Siena 10/15-10/18](#)).

Fifty-seven percent of likely voters disapprove of President Trump’s handling of the coronavirus response, essentially unchanged since last month ([Quinnipiac 10/16-10/19](#)). Thirty-seven percent of Americans say Trump’s coronavirus diagnosis makes them less likely to trust him to provide accurate information about the virus, up 14 points in two weeks. Forty-six percent say it hasn’t changed their level of trust, down from 60 percent, and 16 percent say it’s made them more apt to trust him, unchanged ([Axios/Ipsos 10/16-10/19](#)).

The Presidential Election

By double digit margins, more likely voters trust Joe Biden over Trump to do a better job handling the pandemic –55-38 percent in one poll ([Quinnipiac 10/16-10/19](#)) and 52-40 percent in another ([NYT/Siena 10/15-10/18](#)). Just a quarter of those likely to vote for Trump say the outbreak is very important to their vote, down from 39 percent in August. More than eight in 10 Biden supporters call it highly important to their vote, unchanged ([Pew 10/6-10/12](#)).

Forty-five percent of Americans are at least somewhat concerned about contracting COVID-19 by voting in person, including six in 10 Black people and Asians, half of Hispanics and four in 10 whites ([Axios/Ipsos 10/8-10/15](#)). A similar share (44 percent) see voting in person as a large or moderate risk to their health or well-being. Far more (75 percent) view attending a campaign rally as a risk ([Axios/Ipsos 10/16-10/19](#)).

State Results

In Ohio, likely voters divide 48-42 percent, Biden-Trump, on who would do a better job on the coronavirus; that’s contracted from 52-38 percent last month. Just 36 percent plan to vote in person on Election Day ([Fox News 10/17-10/20](#)).

In Wisconsin, Biden has a 13-point advantage among likely voters in trust to do a better job on the coronavirus, 50-37 percent, similar to late August/early September. Forty-five percent plan to vote in person on Election Day ([Fox News 10/17-10/20](#)).

In Florida, Biden leads Trump by 53-43 percent on better handling the coronavirus response ([CNN 10/15-10/20](#)).

In Texas, 51 percent of likely voters disapprove of Trump's handling of the coronavirus. Notably few – 18 percent – intend to vote in person on Election Day ([Quinnipiac 10/16-10/19](#)).

In Pennsylvania, 56 percent of likely voters disapprove of Trump's handling of the response to the pandemic ([Quinnipiac 10/16-10/19](#)). By double-digit margins, more think Biden would handle it better ([CNN 10/15-10/20](#); [Fox News 10/17-10/20](#)). In one poll, six in 10 plan to vote on Election Day ([Quinnipiac 10/16-10/19](#)); in another, half say so ([Fox News 10/17-10/20](#)).

In Iowa, 45 percent of registered voters say the pandemic worries them a lot. Again, more trust Biden over Trump to handle it, 46-36 percent. Four in 10 plan to vote in person on Election Day ([Monmouth 10/15-10/19](#)).

In Virginia, Biden holds an 18-point advantage among registered voters as better able to handle the outbreak, 54-36 percent. Twenty-two percent of likely voters say they've already cast their ballot ([Post/Schar School 10/13-10/19](#)).

In California, 57 percent definitely (26 percent) or probably (31 percent) would get a coronavirus vaccine if it were available today. About two-thirds are more concerned about the approval process moving too fast, without fully ensuring safety and effectiveness, than about it moving too slowly, delaying access to a vaccine. Six in 10 approve of Gov. Gavin Newsom's handling of COVID-19, nearly double approval of Trump's performance (32 percent) ([PPIC 10/9-10/18](#)).

In North Carolina, six in 10 likely voters are at least somewhat worried that they or an immediate family member may catch the coronavirus. Fifty-one percent disapprove of Trump's handling of the pandemic, and there's a 51-45 percent divide, Biden-Trump, in trust to handle it. Just 28 percent plan to vote on Election Day. Those most concerned about the virus are more apt to back Biden over Trump to handle it and to say they'll vote early ([ABC/Post 10/12-10/17](#)).

In South Carolina, likely voters divide on whether or not they trust the Trump administration to provide accurate information on the president's health, 47-49 percent, and 54 percent do not think he took adequate precautions against getting COVID-19. Fifty-eight percent of those who have not already voted plan to vote in person on Election Day ([NYT/Siena 10/9-10/14](#)).

In New Jersey, 55 percent say they definitely or probably would get a vaccine, down from 63 percent in June. That partly reflects a drop in confidence that it will have been tested adequately and is safe to use – 35 percent are not at all confident in this, up 7 points. Seventy-seven percent continue to favor mandatory mask wearing in public places and two-thirds say restrictions should stay in place until a vaccine or treatment becomes available. Both are unchanged since June.

Nearly seven in 10 say their local schools have done a good job managing their response to the pandemic. Seventy-two percent say Gov. Phil Murphy has done a good job managing the state's response, up from 67 percent in June. By contrast, 56 percent say the federal government, under the leadership of President Trump, has done a bad job managing the nation's response, essentially unchanged. Seven in 10 have at least some trust in Murphy (69 percent) and the CDC (70 percent) to provide them with accurate information about the coronavirus, double the number who trust the information from Trump (34 percent) ([FDU 9/30-10/5](#)).

International Results

In Brazil, six in 10 continue to say that the pandemic has harmed their source of income, unchanged in recent months albeit down from 69 percent in May. Fifty-seven percent say they did not pay any bills last month because of the crisis, down from 68 percent in September. A third say they've received at least a portion of the emergency aid payments designed to reduce the economic burden of the pandemic; 13 percent are waiting, 14 percent were refused registration and 36 percent say they're ineligible. Forty-six percent say they or someone close to them has caught the virus, essentially unchanged in recent months ([PoderData 10/12-10/14](#)).

In Mexico, six in 10 think the pandemic will last at least another five months, up 12 points since late June. Just 6 percent think it will be over in the next two months, down from 21 percent. However, the share who think the number of infections in the country is decreasing has grown from 34 to 41 percent since September. Thirty-eight percent think the number of infections is still growing and 19 percent feel the country is at its peak. Sixty-three percent personally know someone who has contracted COVID-19; 36 percent know someone who has died ([El Financiero 10/9-10/11](#)).

Additional U.S. and international poll results are available at the [COVID-19 Survey Archive](#).

Summary for SEAN by [Langer Research Associates](#).