

COVID-19 Survey Summary: November 20, 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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The numbers of Americans who personally know someone who has tested positive or died from COVID-19 reached record highs this week as the death toll passed a quarter of a million in the United States, with cases surging nationwide. One in three is “extremely” concerned about the pandemic, and its impact on mental health has been substantial – more than four in 10, including close to six in 10 young adults, report symptoms indicative of an anxiety or depressive disorder.

Other results in newly released surveys this week find a rise in social distancing sensitivity and behavior, though not to the extent as in the spring, when the case count was far lower. And public hesitancy to get vaccinated has eased somewhat – although substantial resistance remains.

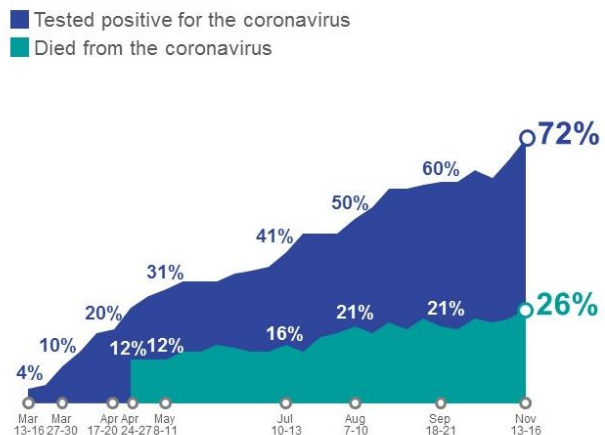
Contact and Concern

Seventy-two percent now personally know someone who has tested positive for the coronavirus, up 6 percentage points since late October to a new high. Twenty-six percent know someone who has died from the virus, also a high. Three in 10 personally have been tested, including 13 percent who’ve gotten a COVID-19 test in the past week.

The share who know someone who has tested positive increased most in the Midwest (up 14 points to 84 percent) and Northeast (up 12 points to 74 percent), while essentially steady in the South (71 percent) and West (64 percent). It’s up 10 points in suburban areas to 75 percent, while little changed in urban (68 percent) or rural (72 percent) areas.

Three in 10 in the Northeast and Midwest know someone who has died from the virus, as do a quarter in the South and two in 10 in the West. Nearly four in 10 Black adults and 32 percent of Hispanics know someone who

Do you personally know anyone in the U.S. who has...



has died, compared with a quarter of whites.

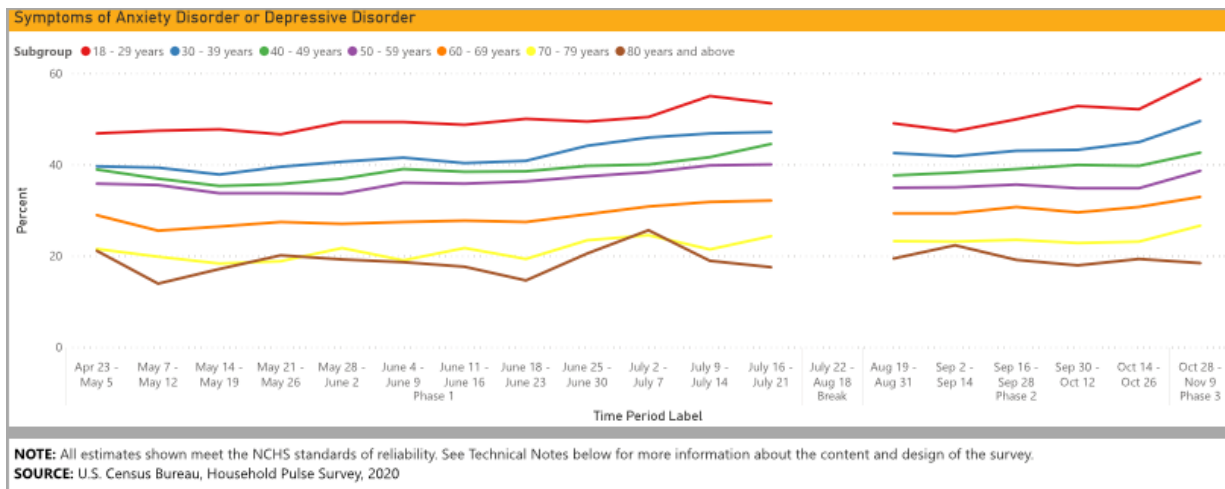
Eighty-two percent overall are at least somewhat concerned about the COVID-19 outbreak, essentially unchanged in recent weeks – but the share who say they’re extremely concerned (33 percent) matches the high hit in early April ([Axios/Ipsos 11/13-11/16](#)). Similarly, three-quarters are at least somewhat concerned about someone in their family becoming seriously ill from the virus. While that’s about the same in early September, the share who are very concerned about this, 50 percent, matches the April high ([Monmouth 11/12-11/16](#)).

The Pandemic’s Toll

The [National Center for Health Statistics](#) finds that 41 percent of Americans show symptoms of an anxiety or depressive disorder, up 5 points since August to a numerical high in data since April. Before the pandemic, in the first half of 2019, just 11 percent showed such symptoms, based on identical screening questions.

Fifty-nine percent of adults younger than 30 now show signs of anxiety or depression, up 10 points since August to a new high. Still, heightened distress is broadly based; the share of adults showing these symptoms also hit pandemic highs in other age groups – 30-39 (50 percent), 60-69 (33 percent) and 70-79 (27 percent).

In addition, 46 percent of women, 48 percent of Hispanic or Latino adults, 45 percent of Blacks and 39 percent of whites report symptoms of anxiety or depression. Again, each is a high in data since April.



Additional [NCHS results](#) show that 21 percent of Americans, including a third of those with symptoms of depression or anxiety, report having taken a prescription medication for mental health in the past four weeks. In 2019, by contrast, just 16 percent reported having taken a prescription medication for their mental health in the previous year.

One in 10 has received counseling or therapy from a mental health professional in the past four weeks; that essentially matches the number who reported in 2019 having seen a mental health professional in the previous year. Combining across the two measures, a quarter of Americans either have taken medication or received treatment for their mental health in the past four weeks, including 39 percent of those who report symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Eleven percent report needing counseling or therapy but not getting it in the past four weeks, including 23 percent of those with symptoms of anxiety or depression. Needing but not getting counseling or therapy peaked among young adults (22 percent), who – as noted – are the most apt to report symptoms of anxiety or depression.

The [Household Pulse Survey](#) adds evidence of the economic toll. Thirty-four percent of adults say it has been somewhat or very difficult for their household to pay usual expenses. Twelve percent say there was sometimes or often not enough food to eat in the past week and 9 percent are not current on rent or mortgage payments or have little or no confidence that they can make next month's payment. All are their highest since late August ([U.S. Census Bureau 10/28-11/9](#)).

Vaccines

Following promising vaccine development news from two pharmaceutical companies, 45 percent of Americans now say they'd be likely to get a first generation COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it's available, up from 38 percent in early October.

As [noted last week](#), results depend on how the question is asked. More, 68 percent, say they'd be at least somewhat likely to get a vaccine that "has been proven safe and effective by public health officials" and six in 10 apiece would get a vaccine "that has been on the market for a few months" or one that is "more than 90 percent effective, according to pharmaceutical companies." (For more on vaccine question wording, see New Jersey results in the State Results section).

The public splits roughly into thirds on whether an FDA-approved vaccine will be available in the next three months, in four to six months, or later than that ([Axios/Ipsos 11/13-11/16](#)).

A late October poll, conducted before the recent vaccine announcements, also found a rise in willingness to get vaccinated. Fifty-eight percent said they would agree to get an FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine if it was available "right now" at no cost, up 8 points since September.

This reflects a rebound among Democrats – while 78 percent in late August said they'd agree to be vaccinated, that dropped to 53 percent in September amid concerns about politicization of the vaccine development process leading up to the election. It's rebounded now to 69 percent. About half of independents and Republicans said they'd get vaccinated, essentially unchanged since September.

Among those disinclined to get vaccinated, 37 percent say the main reason is concern about a rushed timeline, 26 percent want to wait to confirm it's safe, 12 percent don't trust vaccines generally and 10 percent want to wait to see how effective it is ([Gallup 10/19-11/1](#)).

Daily Life

Amid the sharply rising case count, there's evidence that the public is restricting at least some social activity, albeit not to the same extent as during the initial spring surge:

- Six in 10 say they have not visited with any friends or family in the last week, up 9 points since late October to the most since mid-May. That's still well below its level in early and mid-April, when eight in 10 said they hadn't seen friends or family in the previous week.
- Seven in 10 see attending in-person gatherings as a large or moderate risk to their health or well-being, up from 63 percent; eight in 10 said so in April. Among Republicans, the view that these gatherings are risky is up 12 points since late October.
- Three-quarters say they're social distancing, up 7 points since late October while well below the high of 92 percent in April.
- Three-quarters see spending more time inside public places as the weather turns colder as at least a moderate health risk, including 42 percent who view it as a large risk, up from 35 percent in October.
- Seven in 10 say returning to their pre-coronavirus life would be at least a moderate risk, including 41 percent who view it as a large risk, up from 34 percent in October to a numerical high since April.

At the same time, four in 10 have gone out to eat in the past week, about the same as have said so since mid-September. This is so even though perceptions of risk have increased – 68 percent view dining in at a restaurant as a risk, up from 61 percent in late October. In late April and early May, just one in 10 said they'd gone out to eat in the past week ([Axios/Ipsos 11/13-11/16](#)).

Holiday Season

Three-quarters of Americans plan to spend Thanksgiving in their own home this year, far more than the 44 percent who say they usually stay home for the holiday. Thirteen percent plan to travel to another place for Thanksgiving, just for the day. One in 10 will spend the night.

Fifty-three percent say their in-person Thanksgiving gathering will be smaller than usual. Forty-five percent say it will include either their immediate household (37 percent) or just themselves (8 percent); an identical share say there will be a small number of additional people around the table, and 8 percent plan on a bigger in-person gathering. A quarter plan to have friends and family join them virtually via Zoom or video ([Monmouth 11/12-11/16](#)).

More broadly, in another poll, that 45 percent of Americans plan to celebrate the upcoming holiday season only within their household. Most of the rest, three in 10, have yet to make plans. Seventeen percent plan to celebrate with people outside their household as they normally would and 8 percent plan to form a “holiday bubble.”

Three-quarters view traveling for the holidays as at least a moderate risk, including 44 percent who view it as a large risk, up from 32 percent in late October ([Axios/Ipsos 11/13-11/16](#)).

Post-Election Trust

Fifty-six percent of Americans now say they trust Joe Biden a great deal or fair amount to provide accurate information about COVID-19, up 9 points since the election. Half as many, 28 percent, trust Donald Trump, essentially unchanged since August. Thirty-nine percent now trust the federal government to provide accurate information, up 6 points. Far more continue to trust the CDC (68 percent), national public health officials (67 percent) and state governments (55 percent), each largely unchanged in recent weeks ([Axios/Ipsos 11/13-11/16](#)).

State Results

In New York, 64 percent say their Thanksgiving plans will be at least somewhat different this year because of the pandemic. Fifty-two percent say they will not be gathering in person with family or friends and more than eight in 10 say they will not be traveling to visit family or friends. Four in 10 say they will connect with others via Zoom or another video calling service. About a quarter (23 percent) plan to go shopping at a physical store on Black Friday or Small Business Saturday.

More generally, about eight in 10 New Yorkers say they will not be attending any holiday parties nor hosting holiday gatherings this year. Sixty-four percent say they'd be comfortable attending a holiday gathering with 10 or fewer people. Fewer, 47 percent, express comfort attending an outdoor holiday event, and far fewer are comfortable attending a holiday gathering at a restaurant or banquet where everyone remains seated (26 percent), a work holiday party with more than 25 people (16 percent) or a party at a friend's home where over the course of the evening 50 people drop in (10 percent).

Sixty-three percent of New Yorkers think the government's priority should be to contain the spread of the coronavirus, rather than restarting the economy, 28 percent. Fifty-four percent think the worst of the pandemic is still to come. Most, 68 percent, feel the holiday spirit cannot be ruined by the coronavirus, but 27 percent say that no matter how hard people try, the pandemic will take the joy out of the holidays ([Siena 11/4-11/10](#)).

In New Jersey, 36 to 47 percent in a mid-October poll said they were not likely to get vaccinated against COVID-19, depending on how the question was asked. Resistance was highest for a "first generation vaccine" – 47 percent said they would definitely or probably not get vaccinated. That fell to four in 10 for a "vaccine" and 36 percent for a "safe and effective" vaccine. Among those reluctant to be vaccinated, eight in 10 cited concerns about side effects (80 percent) or a need for more information about how well the vaccine works (82 percent) as major reasons. Fewer mentioned not feeling they need it (25 percent) or the potential cost (15 percent).

Most said it will take six months to a year (42 percent) or longer than that (30 percent) before New Jersey is back to normal. Sixty-six percent said they know someone who has tested positive

for the coronavirus and 71 percent were at least somewhat worried that they or someone in their household will get sick. Half in the state give President Trump a failing grade for his handling of the pandemic, compared with 15 percent for Gov. Phil Murphy and 9 percent for local elected officials ([Rutgers-Eagleton 10/18-10/24](#)).

International Results

In India, where new cases have been trending down after a mid-September spike, concerns have waned. A daily tracking poll asks people if they agree or disagree that they're afraid they or someone in their family may catch the coronavirus. Disagreement is close to its highest since late April, 56 percent. Nearly half strongly disagree, the most since the pandemic began. Fifty-two percent agree that the threat of the virus is exaggerated, essentially unchanged since late September. (Note, agree/disagree questions are subject to acquiescence bias and satisficing.) Three-quarters agree that the Indian government is handling the coronavirus well, also largely unchanged since September ([CVoter 11/17](#)).

Despite the recent vaccine announcements, 56 percent in Mexico think it will still take time for a vaccine to be ready, unchanged since August. Fifty-one percent say that a vaccine that is 90 percent effective is acceptable, but 43 percent do not. Regardless, 85 percent think that a vaccine will help bring a return to normal activities in the country, including 52 percent who think it will help a lot. Forty-six percent think infections are rising in Mexico, down from 60 percent three weeks ago. Sixty-one percent support maintaining the current restrictions and isolation measures, while 36 percent prefer reopening and a return to normal activities. Six in 10 personally know someone who has had the coronavirus, essentially unchanged since August. Two in 10 say they personally have been tested ([El Financiero 11/14](#)).

In Brazil, 57 percent say they or someone close to them has gotten sick with the coronavirus, up 6 points in two weeks to a new high. Sixty-four percent say their income or jobs were hurt by the pandemic and 56 percent report having to stop paying bills, both essentially unchanged ([PoderData 11/9-11/11](#)).

In Great Britain, three-quarters support current lockdown measures where they live, 68 percent say they're easy to follow and 63 percent say they're easy to understand. Fifteen percent say they left their home to meet up with people in a public place in the past week, down from 21 percent last week. Young people in particular report less indoor socializing – excluding household members or those in their support bubble, 23 percent of those younger than 30 say they've had physical contact with at least one other person when socializing indoors in the last 24 hours, down from 32 percent last week ([Office for National Statistics 11/5-11/8](#)).

In the Philippines, additional results from a September poll show that two-thirds of Filipinos said they would definitely or probably get a COVID-19 vaccine if it were available now. Men and younger adults expressed greater willingness than women and older Filipinos. Eight in 10 overall expected a vaccine would be available in the next year. As many expected medication for effective treatment of the virus to be available within the year ([SWS 9/17-9/20](#)).

In Australia, recently released results from an August poll found that six in 10 said they would definitely get a coronavirus vaccine and an additional 29 percent likely would; 7 percent said they probably would not and 6 percent definitely would not. Women, those with lower incomes, those living in disadvantaged areas and those who felt coronavirus risks were being overblown expressed greater hesitancy about getting a vaccine than others. Those who expressed greater trust in government and lower levels of religiosity were more apt to say they'd get vaccinated ([Australian National University 8/10-8/24](#)).

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

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