



COVID-19 Survey Summary: January 8, 2021

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 share of Americans showing symptoms of depression or anxiety, struggling with household expenses, having trouble keeping food on the table and living in insecure housing all reached highs since at least mid-August in newly released surveys related to the coronavirus pandemic.

Small businesses also are struggling, with a third saying they'll need financial assistance in the next six months, nearly four in 10 reporting a drop in revenue and a quarter reporting a decline in the number of hours worked by employees.

Additional results released in the past week reveal hesitancy to get vaccinated among rural Americans, describe trends in COVID-19 incidence by age, examine state differences in the economic toll of the pandemic and explore attitudes and behavior in hard-hit Los Angeles.

Mental Health Impacts

The pandemic continues to take a toll on the public's mental health, with three in 10 Americans reporting symptoms of a depressive disorder, numerically the most in data since late April and more than four times the pre-pandemic level (7 percent).

More, 37 percent, show symptoms of an anxiety disorder, matching the high in November and more than four and a half times the 2019 level (8 percent). Forty-two percent have symptoms of depression, anxiety or both, nearly matching the November high (43 percent).

Impacts are worst among young adults; 48 percent of 18- to 29-year-olds report symptoms of an anxiety disorder and 44 percent show symptoms of depression. Anxiety symptoms also are widespread, 44 percent, among those in their 30s, and 35 percent in this group have symptoms of depression. By contrast, among those age 60 and up, fewer than three in 10 show symptoms of an anxiety disorder and roughly two in 10 have symptoms of depression ([NCHS 12/9-12/21](#)).

Economic Impacts

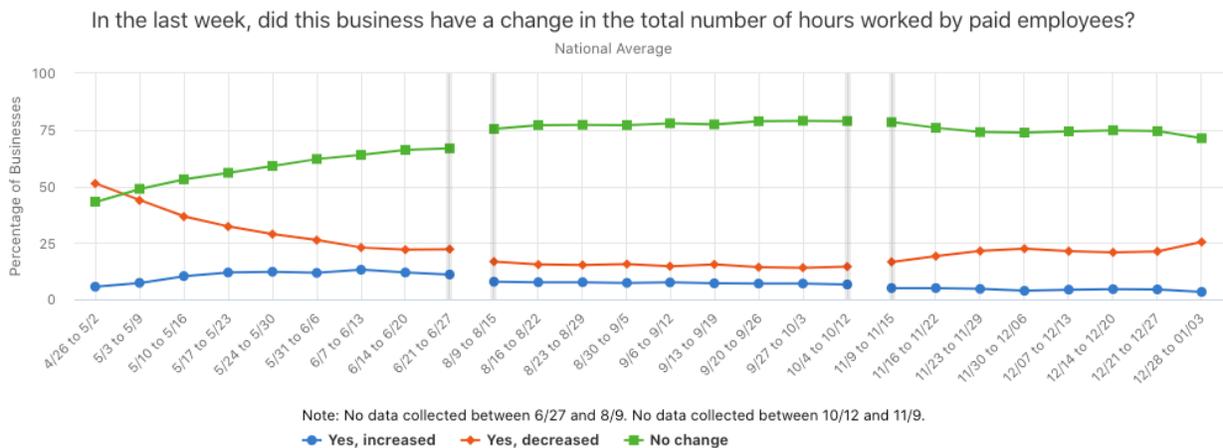
Echoing the [latest employment numbers](#) from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of Americans in economic distress also climbed higher, with several indicators topping highs since

mid-August that were set [just a few weeks ago](#):

- Thirty-eight percent say it's been very or somewhat difficult to pay for usual household expenses during the pandemic, up slowly but steadily from 32 percent in September to a new high.
- Fourteen percent report that there was often or sometimes not enough to eat in their household in the past week, also a new high.
- One in 10 is not current on rent or mortgage payments or has little or no confidence they can pay next month's payment on time, a numerical high.
- Among those behind on rent or mortgage, 36 percent think eviction or foreclosure in the next two months is at least somewhat likely, again a high.
- Thirty-one percent expect that someone in their household will lose employment income in the next four weeks, matching the high in late November/early December ([U.S. Census Bureau 12/9-12/21](#)).

Impacts on Small Businesses

Small businesses are struggling as well. A third say that in the next six months they'll need financial assistance or additional capital, numerically the most in available data since August. Forty-two percent say their operating revenues decreased in the past week, also a high since August. A quarter report a decrease in hours worked by paid employees, the most since late May/early June.



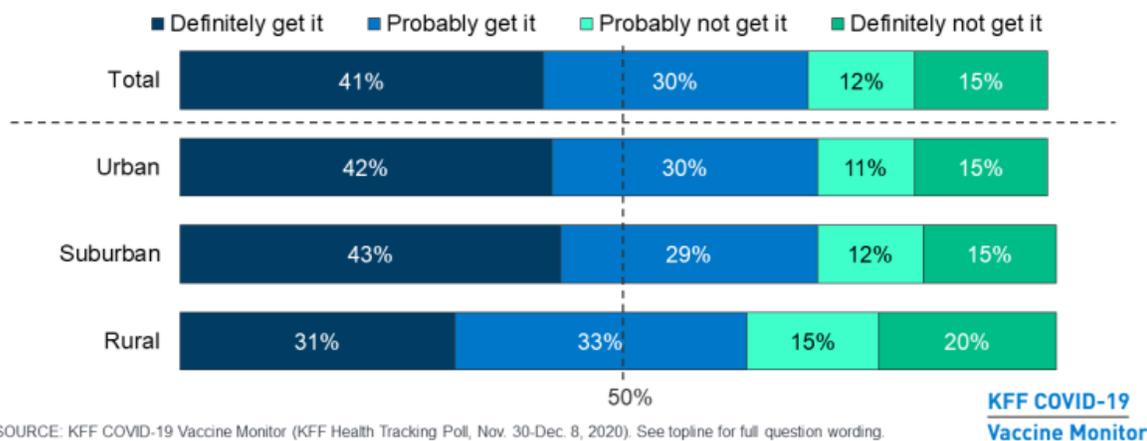
Three in 10 say the pandemic has had a large negative effect on their business and 44 percent report a moderate negative effect, essentially steady since fall. (Of the rest, 19 percent report little or no effect and 7 percent indicate a moderate or large positive effect.) Forty-six percent think it'll be more than six months before their business returns to its normal level of operations, largely unchanged since August ([U.S. Census Bureau 12/28-1/3](#)).

Vaccination in Rural Communities

A new analysis of a late November/early December poll (covered [here](#)) finds rural Americans particularly reluctant to get vaccinated against the virus. Just three in 10 of those living in rural areas said they definitely will get the vaccine, compared with about four in 10 in urban and suburban areas. (An additional third said they'll probably get it, similar to the urban and suburban results.) Rural Americans also were less apt to want to get vaccinated as soon as possible – 29 percent, vs. 34 percent of suburban dwellers and 36 percent in urban areas.

Smaller Shares of Rural Residents Say They Will Definitely Get A COVID-19 Vaccine

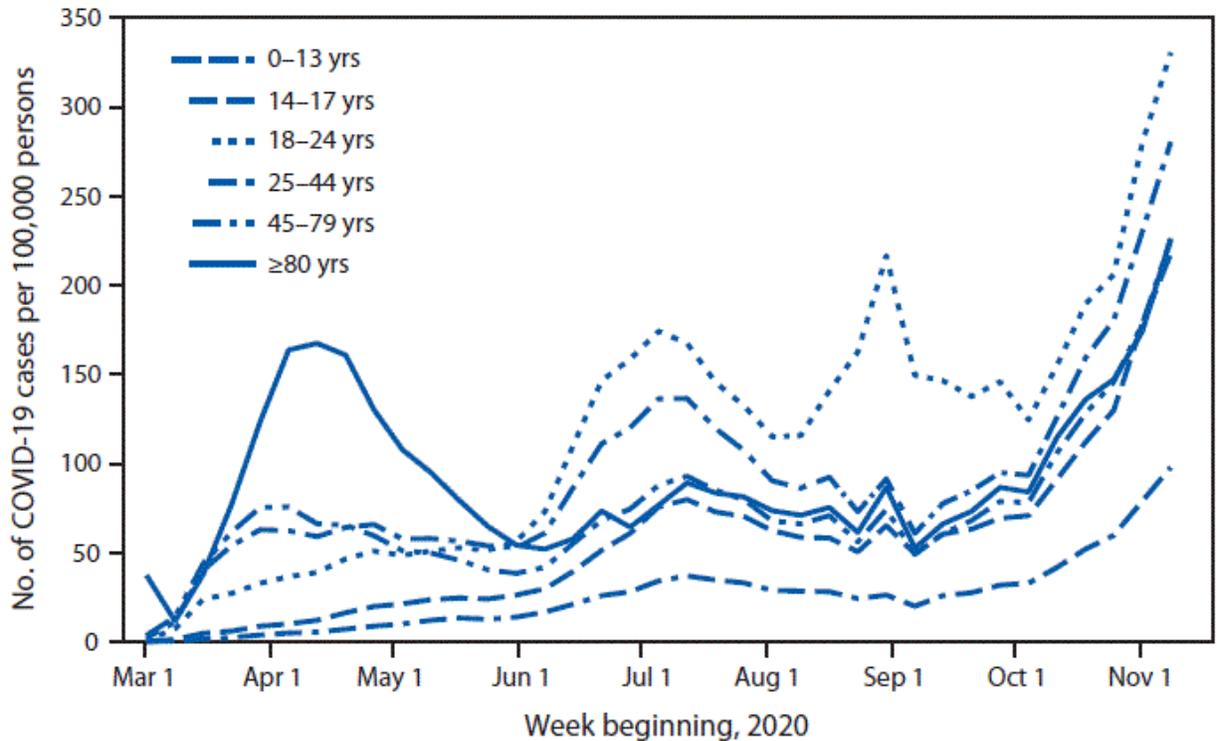
If a COVID-19 vaccine was determined to be safe by scientists and was available for free to everyone who wanted it, would you...?



These differences persisted when controlling for factors shown to be related to hesitancy, including age, education and partisanship. Rural Americans were less worried that someone in their family will get sick from the coronavirus, more likely to think the threat of the virus is exaggerated and more likely to see getting vaccinated as mostly a personal choice rather than a responsibility to protect others, views that strongly predicted their intentions ([KFF 11/30-12/8](#)).

COVID-19 Incidence by Age

A new CDC report tracks COVID-19 incidence by age, showing how prevalence has spiked among young adults. Early in the pandemic it was highest among those age 80 and older, peaking the week of April 12. But incidence increased especially steeply among those younger than 45 starting in June, particularly among 18- to 24-year-olds, soaring highest in this age group and staying there since (in data to mid-November). The incidence of COVID-19 among children age 0-13 remained lowest, but has steadily climbed since September ([CDC 3/1-11/14](#)).

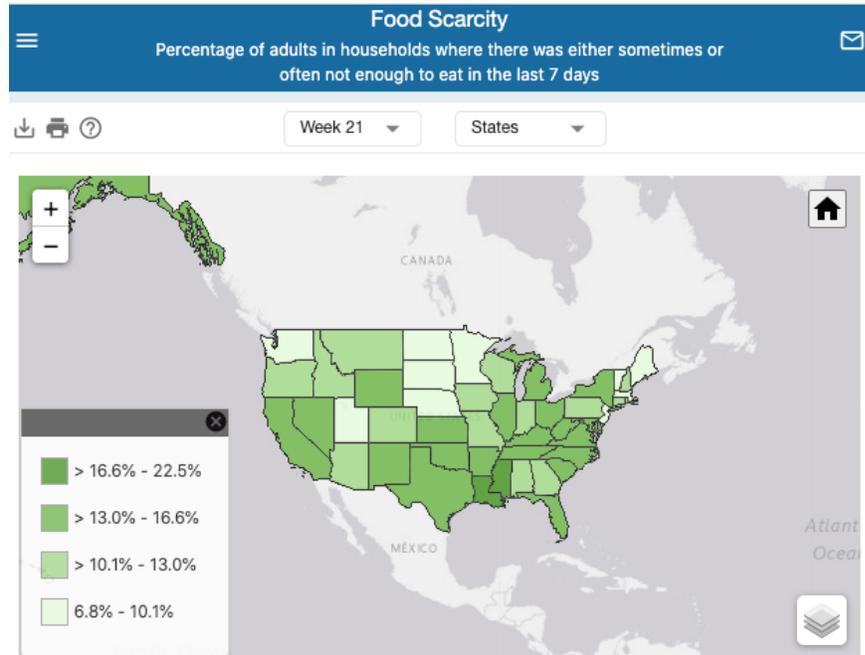


State and Regional Results

While, as noted, several indicators of economic distress climbed to new highs nationwide, there's a great deal of variability by state. For example:

- Louisiana and Mississippi households are hardest hit. Louisiana has more food and housing insecurity than any other state; 23 percent say there often or sometimes was not enough food in their household in the past week and 18 percent are not current on their housing payment or lack confidence they can pay next month's rent. Neighboring Mississippi is in second, with 19 percent food insecure and 13 percent housing insecure, and it has the highest share (46 percent) reporting difficulty paying for usual household expenses.
- California has the highest share of households expecting a loss of employment income in the next four weeks (42 percent), and it's near the top in both difficulty paying for usual household expenses (42 percent) and housing insecurity (12 percent). Nevada is second across all states for expected income loss (39 percent) and difficulty paying for household expenses (45 percent).

- Utah stands out in the opposite direction – just 4 percent are in insecure housing, 8 percent are food insecure, 18 percent expect a loss of income in the next four weeks and 27 percent have had difficulty paying for household expenses. Beyond Utah, housing insecurity is also notably low in North Dakota, Washington, New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine and Wisconsin (all 5 percent), while food insecurity dips lowest in Vermont (7 percent), Maine and Washington (8 percent apiece) ([U.S. Census Bureau 12/7-12/21](#)).



In exit poll results from Tuesday’s runoff elections in Georgia, nearly seven in 10 voters were at least somewhat worried that they or someone in their family would be infected with the virus and 54 percent said the pandemic has caused them financial hardship, including 15 percent who said it’s been severe. A slim majority, 52 percent, said it’s more important to contain the coronavirus now, even if it hurts the economy, while 42 percent called it more important to rebuild the economy, even if it hurts efforts to contain the spread of the virus ([ABC](#)).

In Los Angeles County, facing a severe surge in cases and hospitalizations, 61 percent report that in the past seven days they stayed home except for essential activities or exercise, the most since late summer. Forty-eight percent say they’ve had close contact with non-coresidents, the fewest since late May. At the same time, 32 percent report having visited a friend, neighbor or relative in the past week and 29 percent have had visitors at their residence, about the same as in most of December (excluding brief holiday bumps).

Just 7 percent say they’ve attended a gathering with more than 10 people, also largely unchanged in recent weeks. In a hopeful sign, more than seven in 10 say they’re at least somewhat likely to get vaccinated when available, higher than the national average ([USC UAS 1/5](#)).

International Results

In Brazil, 54 percent agree with the Supreme Federal Court’s decision to authorize mandatory vaccination against COVID-19 in the country, while 41 percent are opposed. Forty-two percent say the government of President Jair Bolsonaro has acted correctly to offer vaccines to all Brazilians, 40 percent do not and 18 percent are unsure. As [noted last week](#), vaccine hesitancy

has increased recently in the country – 28 percent say they will not get vaccinated, up 9 percentage points in a month ([PoderData 12/21-12/23](#)).

In Mexico, 38 percent say they and/or someone in their family has lost employment or their source of income in the past three months, down from the pandemic peak of 52 percent in April but still nearly double the level a year ago (21 percent). Thirty-six percent say their personal economic situation is bad, down from an April high of 53 percent. Six in 10 say the economic situation in the country is bad, similar to last month but down from a high of 72 percent in May ([El Financiero 12/4-12/19](#)).

In the Philippines, a November poll found that nine in 10 were at least somewhat worried that someone in their immediate family might catch COVID-19, a new high. Sixteen percent of families had experienced hunger due to a lack of food in the past three months, down from a record high of 31 percent in September but still nearly double the level prior to the pandemic. More than six in 10 said their quality of life had gotten worse in the past year. A quarter said it's stayed the same and 14 percent said it's improved ([SWS 11/21-11/25](#)).

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

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