



COVID-19 Survey Summary: October 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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A shrinking share of Americans say they won't get vaccinated against the coronavirus, with concerns about side effects the largest expressed deterrent for those still hesitant, accompanied by distrust in the vaccines and in government more broadly.

New pandemic-related polls released this week also find broad support for a return to in-person work, more positive than negative responses to vaccine mandates for admission to restaurants or public events and backing by nearly eight in 10 adults for increased federal spending to prepare for future major epidemics. On the economic front, job growth in September fell to its lowest of the year and consumer confidence is down.

Several analyses this week examine the vast toll of the pandemic as the death toll surpasses 700,000. One estimates that 140,000 children in the United States lost a caregiver to COVID-19. Another finds that symptoms of anxiety and depression remain elevated compared with pre-pandemic levels, albeit down since December. A third finds an association between housing insecurity and health and a fourth looks at the recent toll on nursing home residents.

Vaccines

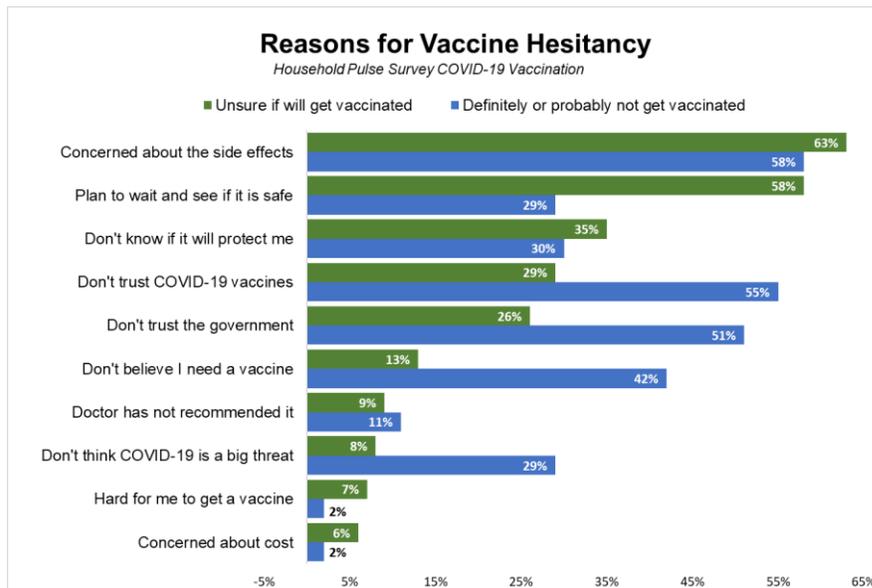
The [CDC estimates](#) that 78 percent of adults have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, up 1 percentage point the past week. It says 4 percent of fully vaccinated adults have gotten a booster shot, including 10 percent of those 65 and older.

Survey-based uptake estimates are 82 percent in one poll this week, 77 percent in another and 74 percent (including both those vaccinated and intending to do so) in a third ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/15-9/27](#), [CDC 9/19-9/25](#), [Quinnipiac 10/1-10/4](#)).

Reinforcing increased uptake intention in surveys [last week](#), 13 percent indicate they probably or definitely won't get a shot, down from 19 percent in mid-June to a low in data since April ([CDC 9/19-9/25](#)). It's similar, 11 percent, in another survey, steady in recent months but down from 22 percent in January. An additional 3 percent are unsure, down from 6 percent in early June. ([U.S.](#)

[Census Bureau 9/15-9/27](#)). A third poll finds more, 20 percent, not planning to get vaccinated, unchanged from mid-September but down from 27 percent in April ([Quinnipiac 10/1-10/4](#)).

Given a list of possible reasons for not getting vaccinated, about six in 10 cite concerns about side effects, including similar numbers among those who are unsure about getting a vaccine (63 percent) and those who say they definitely or probably won't get one (58 percent).



Gaps appear between these groups on other items. Among those who are unsure about getting vaccinated, 58 percent say they plan to wait and see if it's safe, compared with 29 percent of those who say they won't get a shot. Conversely, Americans who say they're unlikely to get a shot are 21 to 29 points more apt than those who are unsure to say it's because they distrust the vaccines (55 vs. 29 percent), distrust the government (51 vs. 26 percent), believe they don't need a vaccine (42 vs. 13 percent) or don't see COVID-19 as a big threat (29 vs. 8 percent) ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/15-9/27](#)).

Concerns & Outlooks

Even as new cases have subsided since mid-September, the public's outlook is mixed: Thirty-seven percent think cases will increase over the next few months, with the rest divided between expecting a decrease (28 percent) or steady caseload (30 percent). Half of Democrats expect an increase, vs. a third of independents and a quarter of Republicans.

In an area of majority partisan agreement, 77 percent think it's a good thing that many businesses and employers have returned to in-person work, including most Democrats (67 percent), independents (78 percent) and Republicans (89 percent) alike ([Quinnipiac 10/1-10/4](#)).

Fifty-eight percent overall have a household member who worked onsite at a workplace in the past week. This is highest in North Dakota (76 percent), Utah (70 percent), New Hampshire (69 percent) and Wyoming (68 percent), while lowest in Florida (50 percent), D.C. (52 percent), Louisiana (52 percent) and New York (54 percent) ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/15-9/27](#)) (Note, this interacts with state-level labor force participation rates.)

Economic Impacts

The economy added just 194,000 jobs last month, down from 366,000 in August to the fewest since last December. While unemployment fell from 5.2 to 4.8 percent, that partially reflected workers leaving the labor force ([Bureau of Labor Statistics 10/8](#)). A weekly measure of consumer sentiment has sustained one of its biggest multi-week declines in the last 16 months, led by a drop in ratings of the national economy. It lost ground disproportionately among Republicans, women, older adults, homeowners and those not employed for pay ([CCI 9/7-10/3](#)).

Vaccine Mandates

Americans are more likely rather than less likely to say they'd go to a restaurant that has a vaccine mandate in place, 35-17 percent, with the rest saying it makes no difference. Results are virtually identical for the likelihood of attending large sports or entertainment events.

The public by 52-44 percent opposes schools requiring K-12 students to receive a coronavirus vaccine once eligible. Opposition rises to 68 percent of parents with children younger than 18 ([Quinnipiac 10/1-10/4](#)). Previous [polls](#) have found Americans are essentially split on whether schools should require vaccinations among eligible children.

Flu Vaccination

A new survey suggests the pandemic may alter some flu prevention behaviors. Twenty-eight percent of Americans say the pandemic makes them more likely to get vaccinated against the flu and 45 percent they're more apt to stay home from work or school if they get sick. Fifty-four percent say they'll wear a mask at least some of the time during flu season, including 43 percent who will do so around crowds and large groups of people and 37 percent indoors ([National Foundation for Infectious Diseases 8/12-8/16](#)).

Government Response

The one national poll this week to test views of Biden's pandemic response finds a 48-50 percent split, approve-disapprove, essentially unchanged from mid-September but down from 65-30 percent in late May ([Quinnipiac 10/1-10/4](#)). His approval rating on the pandemic was higher, 56 or 57 percent, in other polls [last week](#).

Seventy-two percent call the pandemic extremely important (43 percent) or very important (29 percent) for the federal government to address, topping a list of issues ([Monmouth 9/9-9/13](#)).

In another poll, 77 percent see increasing federal spending to prepare for future major epidemics as extremely or very important, tied with two others for fourth place among 20 items tested. This includes 36 percent calling it extremely important, ranking second ([Politico-Harvard 9/14-9/19](#)).

Sixty-two percent in a July survey said the United States should play a leading role in international efforts to send COVID-19 vaccines to other countries in need; an additional 29 percent say it should play a minor role ([Chicago Council on Global Affairs 7/7-7/26](#)).

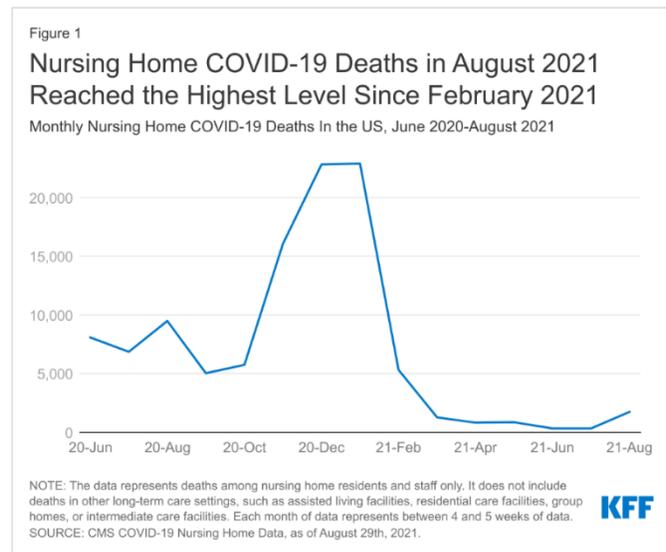
Loss of Parents & Caregivers

A new study estimates that 140,000 American children – one in 500 - experienced the loss of a parent or caregiver to COVID-19 from April 2020 to June 2021, including 120,000 who lost a primary caregiver in charge of providing basic needs. Children in racial/ethnic minority groups were disproportionately affected, accounting for more than 65 percent of the losses, with the largest burdens on Hispanic children in border states, Black children in Southeastern states and American Indian/Alaska Native children in states with tribal areas. The authors note that caregiver loss puts children at higher risk of housing instability, low self-esteem and poor education outcomes ([CDC 10/7](#)).

Cases & Deaths Among Older Adults

Coronavirus deaths among nursing home residents more than quadrupled from 317 in July to 1,658 in August, though still were vastly below their peak of more than 22,000 in December. The rate of growth in cases and deaths alike was faster among nursing home residents than others ([KFF 10/1](#)).

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services estimates that 85 percent of nursing home residents and 67 percent of staff were fully vaccinated as of Sept. 26 ([CMS 9/19](#)). Another report estimates that vaccination of Medicare fee-for-service beneficiaries resulted in about 107,000 fewer infections, 43,000 fewer hospitalizations and 16,000 fewer deaths within the first five months of distribution. Extrapolating to all 62.7 million Medicare beneficiaries, this corresponds to a reduction of 265,000 deaths, 107,000 hospitalizations and 39,000 deaths ([ASPE 10/5](#)).

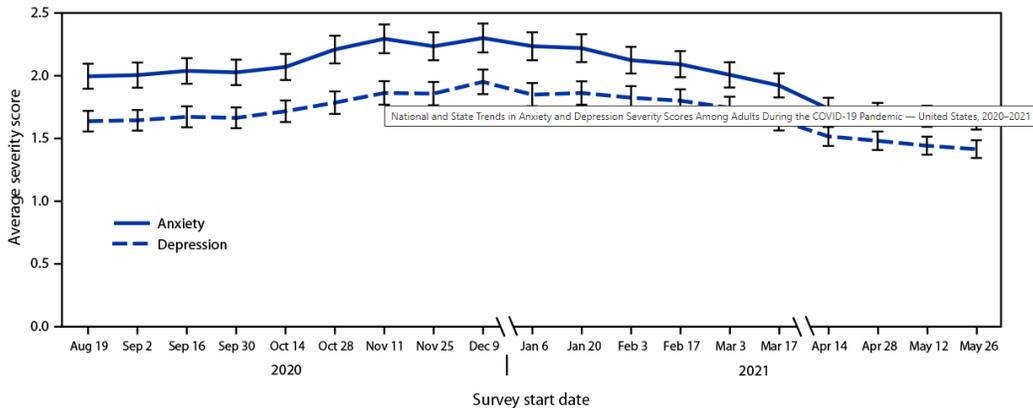


Mental Health in the Pandemic

Twenty-eight percent of Americans report symptoms of an anxiety disorder in the past week, up 3 points since early July but below its peak of 37 percent last November and December. Twenty-two percent report symptoms of depression, steady since April; it was 30 percent in December ([U.S. Census Bureau 9/15-9/27](#)).

The frequency of such symptoms is down since December but still elevated from pre-pandemic levels. From a baseline of 0.63 in 2019, average “anxiety severity” scores were 2.0 in August 2020 and 2.3 in December, then declined to 1.7 in June. Average depression scores, 0.51 in 2019, were 1.6 in August 2020, 2.0 in December and 1.4 in June. The scores measure frequency of symptoms in the past two weeks on a 0-6 scale.

FIGURE. Trends in average anxiety and depression severity scores* among adults, by survey start date — Household Pulse Survey, United States, August 19, 2020–June 7, 2021¹



* 95% confidence intervals indicated by error bars.

The authors find that symptoms of anxiety and depression are positively correlated with the average number of daily coronavirus cases ([CDC 8/19/20-6/7/21](#)). (A separate study, reported [previously](#), found a decrease in such symptoms in the near term after vaccination.)

Housing Insecurity and Health

Analysis of a November 2020 survey finds that housing-insecure adults were twice as likely as others to report being in fair to poor health, 30 vs. 16 percent, and more apt to report severe to moderate psychological distress, 57 vs. 45 percent. The study defines housing insecurity as being behind on housing payments or having little or no confidence in the ability to make the next housing payment ([Linton et al., 2021](#)).

Vaccine Efficacy Over Time

A study attributes reduction in the Pfizer vaccine’s effectiveness over time largely to waning immunity rather than the Delta variant escaping vaccine protection. Analyzing records of vaccine-eligible members of Kaiser Permanente Southern California from Dec. 14-Aug. 8, the authors find that one month after full vaccination, effectiveness against infection was 93 percent for the Delta variant and 97 percent against other variants. Four months after full vaccination, effectiveness fell to 53 percent against the Delta variant and 67 percent against others. The difference in the decline in effectiveness is not statistically significant ([Tartof et al., 2021](#)).

State Results

In Virginia, 71 percent of registered voters favor schools requiring teachers and students to wear masks and two-thirds favor schools requiring teachers to be vaccinated. A majority of voters, 60 percent, also are in support of the federal government requiring companies with more than 100 employees to institute a vaccine/testing requirement. Twenty percent in an open-ended question say the pandemic is the most important issue in their vote for governor next month, surpassed only by jobs and the economy ([Fox News 9/26-9/21](#)).

International Results

In Chile, one of the most-vaccinated countries, 95 percent of adults say they've received at least one vaccine dose and 26 percent have gotten a booster shot. Worry about becoming infected fell 10 points in a week to 40 percent, the fewest since March 2020. Forty-four percent fear the Delta variant specifically, similarly down 11 points in a week to a low in surveys since mid-August. Sixty-nine percent approve of the government's handling of the pandemic, a high in weekly data since April 2020 ([Cadem 9/29-10/1](#)).

In Canada, 15 percent in an open-ended question say the coronavirus is the most important issue facing the nation, a low since March 2020. Others are concerned for the environment, 17 percent; health care, 12 percent; and jobs and the economy, 11 percent ([Nanos 9/3-10/1](#)).

Similarly, in Mexico, 15 percent call the pandemic the main problem facing the country, down 12 points since August to one of its lowest levels of the pandemic. More, 39 percent, think public security is the most important issue, followed by the economy and unemployment, cited by 22 percent ([El Financiero 9/10-9/11](#)).

Seven in 10 Filipinos are concerned about staying healthy and avoiding illnesses, down 4 points from a year ago while up from about six in 10 in December 2019. Twenty-nine percent think controlling the coronavirus is one of the most urgent concerns facing the country, down from 38 percent a year ago. About four in 10 say controlling inflation and increasing worker pay are urgent issues; three in 10 say the same for reducing poverty. Nineteen percent say providing assistance to people who lost their job because of the pandemic is an urgent issue, down 11 points since September 2020.

In terms of the national administration's performance, 64 percent approve of its job aiding people who lost their livelihoods during the pandemic and 59 percent approve of its performance controlling the spread of the virus. While still positive, approval on both measures is down from 84 percent apiece in September 2020 ([Pulse Asia 9/6-9/11](#)).

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

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