



COVID-19 Survey Summary: October 16, 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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Americans' concerns about catching the coronavirus hit a new high this week, with few seeing the outbreak in the United States as under control. Still, amid rising cases in much of the country, vaccine hesitancy remains widespread, especially among Black people, many of whom doubt the safety of a potential vaccine and distrust the healthcare system overall.

Other newly released results document the disparate toll of the pandemic on Black Americans' financial and psychological well-being, show its impact on those providing care for elderly loved ones, find a rising poverty rate in the United States and suggest that the actual death toll may be greater than official statistics reflect.

Coronavirus Concerns

Just two in 10 registered voters think the coronavirus outbreak in the United States is completely (5 percent) or mostly (17 percent) under control. That's an improvement from August, when just 14 percent felt the outbreak was controlled, but about the same as it was in May, June and July. (Forty-three percent think it's "somewhat" under control, 35 percent, not under control at all.)

Further, nearly three-quarters now are worried that they or an immediate family member might catch the coronavirus or say this already has happened, a new high ([ABC/Post 10/6-10/9](#)). Seven in 10 view it as "a real threat," about the same as in August ([NPR/PBS/Marist 10/8-10/13](#)).

At the same time, registered voters divide evenly on whether they worry more that their state has moved too quickly in loosening restrictions (38 percent) or is taking too long in relaxing restrictions (38 percent). It was 44-38 percent in June ([NBC/WSJ 10/9-10/12](#)).

Vaccines

Responses on getting vaccinated continue to differ depending how the question is framed. In one study, just two in 10 registered voters say they will get the vaccine as soon as they can once one it's available. Half instead say they will wait until it has been available for a while to see if there are major problems or side effects; 10 percent say they'll get it eventually, but only if they're required to; and 17 percent say they will not take it at all ([NBC/WSJ 10/9-10/12](#)).

In another approach, 50 percent in one survey, and 44 percent in another, say that if an FDA-approved vaccine to prevent COVID-19 were available right now at no cost, they would agree to be vaccinated. ([Gallup 9/14-9/27](#); [Survey Center on American Life/Center for American Progress 9/11-9/21](#)).

Both of those surveys no longer find a partisan gap in intended vaccine uptake, with movement in opposite directions. It's down sharply among Democrats, from 78 percent in late August to 53 percent in mid- to late September, and has gone from 59 to 49 percent among independents. Among Republicans, 47 percent would get vaccinated, up from 37 percent ([Gallup 9/14-9/27](#)).

Nearly two-thirds of those who say they would not get a vaccine primarily cite safety concerns, while 13 percent question efficacy and an additional 13 percent don't think it's necessary. Three-quarters of reluctant Democrats raise safety concerns compared with 57 percent of Republicans, who are more apt to call vaccination unnecessary (25 vs. 4 percent).

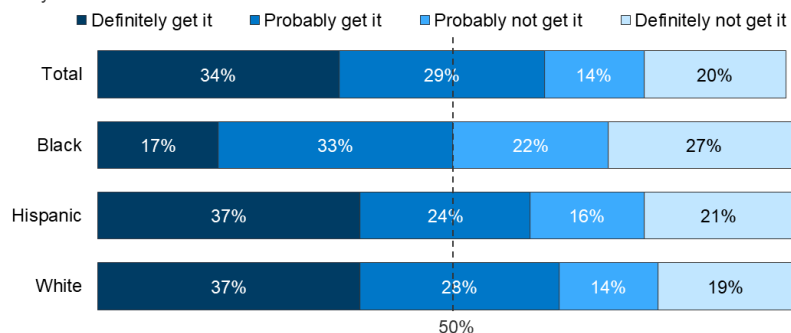
A wide racial and ethnic divide continues. Forty-eight percent of whites and Hispanics alike say they'd be willing to get vaccinated, more than double number of Blacks who say so, 21 percent. Men also remain more willing than women to get a COVID-19 vaccine, 51 vs. 38 percent ([Survey Center on American Life/Center for American Progress 9/11-9/21](#)).

Another poll, conducted in late August and the first half of September, found greater willingness to get a vaccine given that it was "determined to be safe by scientists and was available for free to everyone who

wanted it," with 63 percent overall saying they'd definitely or probably get it, including 65 percent of whites, six in 10 Hispanics and 50 percent of Blacks. Blacks were less than half as likely as Hispanic and whites to say they'd definitely get vaccinated, 17 vs. 37 percent.

Black Americans Less Likely To Say They Would Get COVID-19 Vaccine Even If It Was Free And Determined Safe By Scientists

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



SOURCE: KFF/The Undeclared Survey on Race and Health (conducted Aug. 20-Sept. 14, 2020). See topline for full question wording.

KFF

Higher reluctance among Blacks reflects, at least in part, concerns about safety, greater distrust of the health care system, skepticism that a vaccine will be tested properly and distributed fairly and a widespread belief that its development has failed to take the needs of the Black community into account. For example:

- Among those who express vaccine hesitancy, Blacks are more likely than whites to pick safety concerns (39 vs. 30 percent) or a lack of trust in the health care system,

government, or vaccines in general (35 vs. 23 percent) as the main reason. Whites are more apt to say they don't need or want it (39 vs. 21 percent).

- Seven in 10 Blacks overall think the health care system often treats people unfairly based on their race or ethnic background, compared with about four in 10 Hispanics and whites alike (43 and 41 percent, respectively). Fifty-five percent of Black people and 50 percent of Hispanics express skepticism that the healthcare system will do what is right for their community all or most of the time, as do 44 percent of whites.
- Four in 10 Blacks are at least somewhat confident a vaccine will be tested properly for safety and effectiveness, compared with 51 percent of Hispanics and six in 10 whites.
- Only a third of Blacks think a vaccine will be distributed in a way that is fair, compared with half of Hispanics and 57 percent of whites.
- Nearly two-thirds of Blacks lack confidence that development of a vaccine is taking the needs of Black people into account ([KFF/The Undeclared 8/20-9/14](#)).

Masks, Distancing and Restrictions

Seventy-two percent of Americans in one study favor requiring people to wear face masks when they're around others outside their homes, essentially unchanged from July ([AP-NORC 10/8-10/12](#)). In another, 65 percent say it's a good idea to pass a national mandate to require people to wear a mask in public places, down from 74 percent in August ([NPR/PBS/Marist 10/8-10/13](#)).

Three-quarters of registered voters think that wearing a mask and practicing social distancing can reduce their chance of catching the coronavirus a great deal (56 percent) or good amount (19 percent). Just 7 percent don't think it reduces their risk at all ([ABC/Post 10/6-10/9](#)).

Sixty-three percent favor requiring that gatherings be limited to 10 people or fewer, similar to July. However, fewer favor requiring bars and restaurants to close (41 percent) and requiring Americans to stay in their homes except for essential errands (44 percent), down 13 and 9 percentage points, respectively ([AP-NORC 10/8-10/12](#)).

Racial Disparities

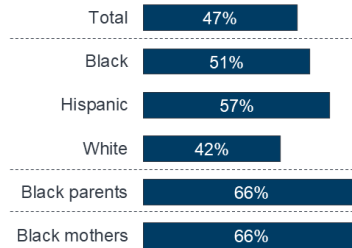
A poll conducted in August and the first half of September assessed racial and ethnic disparities in experiences during the pandemic. Among the results:

- Fifty-seven percent of Hispanics, 51 percent of Black people and 42 percent of whites say they or another adult in their household has lost a job, been placed on furlough or had their income or hours reduced since February because of the outbreak. This rises to 66 percent among Black parents with children younger than 18 living at home.
- Fifty-seven percent of Blacks and 53 percent of Hispanics say the pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to pay for basic necessities like housing, utilities and

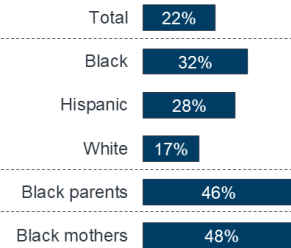
foods, compared with 45 percent of whites. Thirty-two and 28 percent of Blacks and Hispanics, respectively, report a major negative impact, vs. 17 percent of whites.

Black And Hispanic Adults Hit Harder Financially By Pandemic

Percent who say, since February, **they or someone in their household has lost a job, been placed on furlough, or had their income or hours reduced** because of coronavirus:



Percent who say the coronavirus pandemic has had a **major negative impact** on their ability to pay for basic necessities like housing, utilities, and food:



SOURCE: KFF/The Undeclared Survey on Race and Health (conducted Aug. 20-Sept. 14, 2020). See topline for full question wording.

KFF

- Black parents are more likely than white parents to report the pandemic has had a negative impact on their ability to care for their children, 52 vs. 43 percent. They're more than twice as likely to say it's been a major negative impact, 32 vs. 13 percent.
- White and Black people are more likely than Hispanics to say the pandemic has had a negative impact on their mental health, 65 and 62 vs. 54 percent. Twenty-eight percent of Blacks and Hispanics report a major negative impact, falling to 19 percent of whites.
- Among those working outside the home, six in 10 Black adults worry about getting exposed to coronavirus at work compared with 46 percent of whites.
- Four in 10 Blacks, a third of Hispanics and a quarter of whites know someone who has died from the virus.
- Differences subside when it comes to impacts on education. About eight in 10 Black (78 percent) and white (82 percent) parents alike report that the pandemic has negatively impacted their children's education, including six in 10 who say it's had a major negative impact. (The sample size of Hispanic parents was insufficient for analysis.)

Two-thirds of Black people think the federal government would be taking stronger action to fight the pandemic if white people were getting sick and dying at higher rates than people of color. Forty-two percent of Hispanics say the same, compared with a quarter of whites ([KFF/The Undeclared 8/20-9/14](#)).

Poverty

Using the U.S. Census Bureau's [Current Population Survey](#), two analyses find that the poverty rate in the United States has grown in recent months. In [one](#), researchers estimate that the number of people in poverty has increased by eight million since May. The [other](#) estimates that poverty has grown by six million in the past three months. Both suggest that the \$2 trillion CARES act helped to protect against increases in poverty in spring and early summer, but that these protective effects largely have disappeared ([NYT](#)).

Impact on Work

A third of employed adults say they're always working remotely to avoid catching or spreading the virus, a new low and well down from 51 percent in April. A quarter are sometimes working remotely, up from 18 percent in April, and 42 percent never are working remotely, up from 31 percent. Echoing this, 46 percent of employed people now say that all or nearly all employees currently are working on-site at their place of work, up from 28 percent in April and 37 percent in June ([Gallup 9/14-9/27](#)).

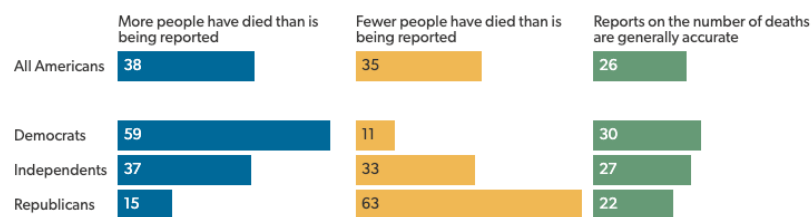
Coronavirus-Related Deaths

Just a quarter of Americans (26 percent) think news reports of COVID-19 deaths are generally accurate. Thirty-eight percent think more people have died than is being reported by the news, while about as many (35 percent) think news reports are overstating actual deaths. Six in 10 Democrats think more people have died than reported, while 63 percent of Republicans think fewer have died

([Survey Center on American Life/Center for American Progress 9/11-9/21](#)).

Most Republicans Say COVID-19 Deaths have been Overreported

Percentage who say . . .



Note: Figures may not add to 100 percent due to rounding. Survey of US adults (N=2,006). Source: American Perspectives Survey, September 2020.

A recent analysis suggests that the publicly reported death toll indeed may be an undercount. Using data from the [National Center for Health Statistics](#) and the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the report finds that 1,336,561 deaths occurred from March 1 to Aug. 1, 20 percent more than would be expected based on historical norms. Of the estimated 225,530 excess deaths, 67 percent listed COVID-19 as a cause. In addition to undocumented or unrecognized cases of COVID-19, some excess deaths may reflect disruptions to health care caused by the pandemic ([Woolf et al., 2020](#)).

Another analysis compares the United States with 18 other countries in documented COVID-19 deaths per capita. As of mid-September, the per capita death rate in the United States from COVID-19 was 60.3 per 100,000. That's comparable to Italy (59.1), higher than Australia (3.3) and Canada (24.6) and lower than Belgium (86.8). The analysis finds that the United States had a lower COVID-19 mortality rate than other high-mortality countries during the early spring, but that after May 10, the death rate in other high-mortality countries such as Italy dropped well below levels in the United States (9.1 vs. 36.9) ([Bilinski & Emanuel, 2020](#)).

Caregiving During the Pandemic

Seventeen percent of Americans are providing ongoing living assistance on a regular basis to an older family member or close friend, and for many of these caregivers, the pandemic has posed challenges:

- Thirty-six percent of those who were providing assistance before the outbreak began say their caregiving responsibilities have increased because of the pandemic. (Ten percent say they've decreased and 54 percent say they're about the same.) Those who have faced financial hardship because of the pandemic are much more likely than others to say their caregiving responsibilities have increased, 42 vs. 25 percent.
- Forty-three percent of caregivers say the outbreak has made them cancel or postpone medical care for the person they care for, three in 10 say the pandemic has deprived them of the financial resources they need to provide care and 23 percent apiece say the outbreak made them unable to get needed groceries or medication and health supplies.
- Among those who care for someone who lives in their own home, a third say the pandemic has made them less able to provide care as often and 27 percent say it's made them less able to get help around the house, such as housekeeping.
- Twenty-eight percent of caregivers who have employed someone to provide in-home living assistance say they have had to cancel that care due to the outbreak.
- Thirteen percent say the person they assist needed to move their primary residence because of COVID-19.

Forty-four percent of caregivers are extremely or very concerned about the risk of the person they care for becoming infected with COVID-19, while 28 percent express a similar level of concern about their own risk. Forty-three percent think the person they're providing care for will get a coronavirus vaccine if it becomes available; 23 percent think not and a third are unsure ([AP-NORC 8/27-9/14](#)).

Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation

A mid-September poll asking about misinformation and conspiracy theories found that a third of Americans call it accurate to say the coronavirus is no more serious than the common flu. About a fifth endorse other erroneous views about it.

- Those who say COVID-19 is no more serious than the common flu include 48 percent of Republicans and 25 percent of Democrats. Roughly six in 10 overall say this statement is inaccurate. (This and other items did not offer the alternative proposition.)
- Twenty-two percent say the claim that COVID-19 was intentionally planned by China as part of a biological weapons program is mostly or completely accurate, including 40 percent of Republicans and 10 percent of Democrats.
- One in five say the claim that hydroxychloroquine is a safe and effective way to treat COVID-19 is accurate. Forty-two percent of Republicans say so, compared with 5 percent of Democrats ([Survey Center on American Life/Center for American Progress 9/11-9/21](#)).

Government Response

Sixty-three percent of registered voters are at least somewhat confident that the federal government can handle the coronavirus outbreak in the United States, about the same as said so back in March when the pandemic was still fairly new.

Views of President Trump, however, are less positive. Numbers ranging from 57 to 66 percent, depending on the poll, disapprove of how Trump has handled the pandemic ([ABC/Post 10/6-10/9](#); [AP-NORC 10/8-10/12](#); [NBC/WSJ 10/9-10/12](#); [NPR/PBS/Marist 10/8-10/13](#)). Sixty-five percent of Americans think he has not taken the outbreak in the United States seriously enough, 54 percent disapprove of how his administration has handled his recent diagnosis ([AP-NORC 10/8-10/12](#)) and close to six in 10 have little to no trust in the information the administration has provided about his condition ([AP-NORC 10/8-10/12](#); [NPR/PBS/Marist 10/8-10/13](#)).

Moreover, nearly two-thirds of registered voters think Trump failed to take appropriate precautions to protect himself against the virus, 62 percent distrust what he says about it and six in 10 don't expect his administration will provide complete and accurate information about his health ([ABC/Post 10/6-10/9](#)).

Presidential Election

Fifty-five percent of registered voters pick Joe Biden over Trump to handle the outbreak, while roughly four in 10 say the reverse ([ABC/Post 10/6-10/9](#); [KFF 10/7-10/12](#); [NPR/PBS/Marist 10/8-10/13](#)). More also think Biden has a better approach to oversee the development and distribution of a COVID-19 vaccine, 51-42 percent ([KFF 10/7-10/12](#)).

Forty-six percent have major concerns that Trump will hurt Americans' health by not going far enough to respond to COVID-19; an additional two in 10 call this a moderate or minor concern. By comparison, 34 percent have major concerns that Biden will hurt the economy by going too far in his response, with three in 10 saying this a lesser concern ([NBC/WSJ 10/9-10/12](#)).

When it comes to casting a ballot, eight in 10 registered voters are very (33 percent) or somewhat (47 percent) confident that in-person polling places will be run safely, without spreading the virus ([Pew 9/30-10/5](#)). That said, just 41 percent plan to vote on Election Day, as opposed to voting early, either by mail or in person ([ABC/Post 10/6-10/9](#)).

State Results

In Arizona, 47 percent of registered voters say they personally worry about the coronavirus pandemic a lot and an additional three in 10 worry about it a little. By a 10-point margin, more trust Biden over Trump to handle the pandemic, 48-38 percent. Sixty-four percent plan to or have already voted by mail, compared with 21 percent who plan to vote in person on Election Day and 14 percent who have voted or plan to vote early in person ([Monmouth 10/8-10/13](#)).

In Georgia, 55 percent of likely voters say the spread of the coronavirus in the United States is out of control and 54 percent disapprove of how Trump is handling the response to the

pandemic. Four in 10 plan to cast their ballot at an early voting location (or already have), 31 percent plan to vote in person on Election Day and 30 percent have or plan to vote by mail.

In Ohio, a similar 53 percent say the spread of the virus is out of control and 51 percent disapprove of Trump's handling of the response. Fewer – 21 percent – plan to vote early in person (or already have), while 47 percent plan to vote in person on Election Day and 30 percent by mail ([Quinnipiac 10/8-10/12](#)).

In New Hampshire, 26 percent think COVID-19 is the most important problem facing the state, double the next most-cited issue, the economy. Eighty-three percent approve of Gov. Chris Sununu's handling of the situation, up from 76 percent in July and August. Fifty-six percent disapprove of Trump's handling of the situation. It was 61% in August. ([UNH 10/9-10/12](#)).

In North Carolina, 63 percent of registered voters say Gov. Roy Cooper has done a good job handling the outbreak, unchanged from last month. Seven in 10 are aware that Sen. Thom Tillis tested positive for COVID-19 after attending a White House event. Half think that before his diagnosis he had not been taking the pandemic seriously enough; 37 percent say the opposite, with the rest unsure. Forty-eight percent worry a lot about the pandemic, with 34 percent worried a little and 17 percent unworried. More trust Biden over Trump to handle it, 47 vs. 38 percent. Half plan on voting early in person, a third plan to vote in person on Election Day and 15 percent intend to vote by mail ([Monmouth 10/8-10/11](#)).

Also in North Carolina, 58 percent of likely voters do not think that Trump took adequate precautions against getting COVID-19 and 51 percent don't trust his administration to provide accurate information about his health. Among those who have not yet voted, 43 percent plan to vote early in person, 40 percent on Election Day and 14 percent by mail ([NYT/Siena 9/9-9/13](#)).

In Wisconsin, 62 percent of likely voters do not think Trump took adequate precautions and 56 percent distrust information about his health from his administration. Of those who have not yet voted, 59 percent say they'll vote in person on Election Day, 24 percent by mail and 15 percent early in person ([NYT/Siena 10/8-10/11](#)).

In Michigan, views of Trump's coronavirus diagnosis are fairly similar – 61 percent of likely voters do not think he took adequate precautions and 52 percent do not trust his administration to provide accurate information about his health. Of those yet to vote, half say they'll vote in person on Election Day, 38 percent by mail and 10 percent early in person ([NYT/Siena 10/6-10/9](#)).

In a Texas poll conducted in August and the first half of September, half of residents said they'd suffered financial hardship because of COVID-19, 46 percent said worry or stress related to it had negatively impacted their mental health and 36 percent said they or someone in their household had skipped or delayed medical care because of the pandemic. Forty-six percent were worried about another wave of cases in the state. Fifty-two percent said their household was very prepared for another wave; however, fewer than a quarter apiece thought the local, state and federal governments were similarly prepared. Six in 10 said they'd be at least somewhat likely to get a potential COVID-19 vaccine ([Episcopal Health Foundation 8/5-9/18](#)).

International Results

In Canada, 71 percent support requiring travelers to quarantine for 14 days when they visit other provinces or regions. Reminded of a recent increase in cases and potential harm of a second wave, seven in 10 at least somewhat support closing non-essential businesses, such as gyms or places of worship, and allowing restaurants to offer take-out only. A similar share supports one federal testing policy for the country rather than different rules for each province. Four in 10 say their mental health is worse than before the pandemic. Two in 10 say their alcohol consumption has increased. Eighty-one percent say they are staying at home more, down from 94 percent in April ([Nanos/CTV News 9/30-10/4](#)).

In Great Britain, which (as noted [last week](#)) recently implemented new restrictions because of a surge in cases, 43 percent say that in the past seven days they met with friends and family living outside their household less often and 18 percent said they're meeting with fewer people at a time. Four in 10 report no change in their social contacts. A quarter say they've left the house to eat or drink at a restaurant, café, bar or pub in the past week, and two in 10 apiece say they've left the house to meet up with people in a personal place (e.g., a home) or a public place. Each activity has dropped by double digits from peaks in mid- or late August. More than seven in 10 say they're worried about the effect of COVID-19 on their life right now, essentially unchanged since last week, which was the most since May. The average anxiety score, 4.3 on a 0-10 scale, is its highest since mid-April ([Office for National Statistics 9/30-10/4](#)).

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

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