



COVID-19 Survey Summary: February 19, 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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With infections down and vaccinations up, Americans' pessimism about the trajectory of the coronavirus pandemic has declined sharply since December, and economic optimism has advanced. Yet most Americans still foresee disruptions persisting well into 2021.

Newly released pandemic-related polls also find broad support for giving teachers and grocery store workers priority in COVID-19 vaccinations, along with high levels of confidence that all those who want shots will be able to get them by summer's end. Most approve of President Biden's work on the pandemic overall, but his administration's grades are lower on the issue of reopening schools.

Other analyses released this week reveal a rise in all-cause mortality relative to historical trends, a corresponding decline in life expectancy in the first six months of 2020 and widespread disruptions to health and dental care, especially among Black adults.

Pandemic and Economic Outlook

Thirty-nine percent of Americans think the coronavirus situation is getting worse, down sharply from 63 percent in December. Views that it's improving have nearly doubled, to 33 percent, leaving 28 percent who think it's staying about the same, up 8 percentage points.

There's a partisan aspect to these assessments: Optimism about the pandemic's direction is up 25 points among Democrats and 13 points among independents, while essentially unchanged among Republicans.

Yet even as views of the pandemic's trajectory have improved, expectations that the disruptions caused by it will persist have grown. More than half of Americans, 53 percent, now think disruptions to travel, school, work and public events caused by the virus will continue into the second half of 2021 or longer, up sharply from 33 percent in December. Just 37 percent think the disruptions will diminish in the first half of the year, down from 55 percent ([Gallup 1/25-1/31](#)).

Separately, reflecting the course of infection and vaccination rates, economic expectations are their best since the pandemic began. Three in 10 think the economy is getting better, up 11 points

from two months ago to a one-year high. A third still think it's getting worse, but that's down from 45 percent in January. (Thirty-seven percent say it's staying about the same). As with views of the pandemic's trajectory, the improved economic outlook largely reflects greater optimism among Democrats ([Bloomberg CCI 2/2-2/14](#)).

Vaccine Priorities and Expectations

Three-quarters overall (76 percent) say teachers in all states should be given priority for getting the COVID-19 vaccine, and nearly as many (73 percent) say the same of grocery store workers. Democrats are more apt than Republicans to think both groups should be prioritized, with independents falling in between.

More broadly, 73 percent are at least somewhat confident that people in their state who want a COVID-19 vaccine will be able to get one by the end of the summer, although just a quarter are "very" confident of this ([Quinnipiac 2/11-2/14](#)).

Remote Work

Most workers in the United States – 56 percent – continue to report working remotely at least some of the time in order to avoid catching or spreading the coronavirus, essentially unchanged since fall but down from a peak of 70 percent in April. The share always working remotely has dropped from 52 to 33 percent since April.

Four in 10 remote workers say that, if given the choice once restrictions on businesses are lifted, they would prefer to return to their workplace, up from a low of 28 percent in July. Forty-four percent would want to continue working remotely because they prefer it, matching the high set in December; and 17 percent would want to keep working remotely because of coronavirus concerns, down from 30 percent in September ([Gallup 1/25-1/31](#)).

Workplace Safety

A CDC analysis of June survey data explores the use of hazard controls, including physical barriers, masks and other personal protective equipment in non-healthcare workplaces. It finds that fewer than half of nonremote workers outside the healthcare field (46 percent) reported the use of such measures in their workplace. Among those who said these measures were in place, 56 percent said their employer required their use, while 44 percent said it was voluntary.

Among those who did not use hazard controls in the workplace, 77 percent did not think they were needed, 15 percent could not obtain them and 8 percent were prohibited from using them. Lower-income workers were more likely to report difficulty obtaining hazard controls and to say the use of such measures was banned by their employer; higher-income workers were more likely to report required use. Among workers for whom use was voluntary, those whose employers provided them with hazard controls were twice as likely to use them.

The report concludes that employer-provided hazard controls can increase voluntary workplace use, and that requiring and encouraging use of these protective measures may help to ensure worker safety ([CDC](#)).

Delayed and Foregone Care

A new analysis of September polling data finds that 36 percent of adults age 18-64 (i.e., non-seniors) reported missing (i.e., delaying or forgoing) health care because of concerns about exposure to the coronavirus or because their provider was limiting services during the pandemic. Nearly a quarter reported delaying or skipping multiple types of care for these reasons.

Forty percent of non-senior Black adults skipped or delayed care because of the pandemic, compared with 34 percent of whites and 36 percent of Hispanic/Latino adults. Black people also were more likely to have delayed or foregone multiple types of care, 29 vs. 21 and 22 percent. This disparity chiefly reflected more Black adults skipping care because of concerns about catching COVID-19, rather than because of providers limiting their services.

Forty-one percent of non-seniors with at least one chronic health condition reported missing care, as did 52 percent of those with mental health conditions, rising to 56 percent of those with both a physical and mental health condition.

Dental care was the most common type of missed care – a quarter of non-senior adults reported delaying or forgoing it. Two in 10 said they'd skipped seeing a general doctor or specialist and 16 percent passed on preventive health screenings or medical tests. One in 10 reported not going to hospitals, 6 percent skipped mental health care or counseling and 2 percent delayed or skipped treatment or counseling for alcohol or drug use.

Among those who reported delaying or forgoing care, a third said that doing so worsened one or more of their health conditions or negatively impacted their ability to work or perform other daily activities ([Urban Institute 9/11-9/28](#)).

In related work, a new CDC analysis of Medicare claims data finds a disruption in routine vaccinations among Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and older during the first four months of the pandemic. In the first week after the national emergency declaration on March 13, vaccination rates for four common vaccines were 25 to 62 percent lower than during the corresponding week in 2019. By the third week of April, vaccination rates were 70 to 89 percent lower than a year before, after which rates began gradually to recover. However, even in the last week of the study in mid-July, uptake rates for three of the four vaccines remained lower than a year earlier. The authors say that while the pandemic continues, healthcare providers should stress the importance of routine vaccinations and emphasize the patient safety procedures in place ([CDC 1/6-7/20](#)).

Pediatric Dental Care

Echoing these results, a January poll documents the pandemic's disruption of pediatric dental care. Among parents with a child age 3-18, one in three say COVID-19 has made it harder to get preventative dental care for their child. Indeed more, four in 10, have not even tried to get such

care since the pandemic began. Within this group, nearly-two thirds mention COVID-19 as a reason: Forty percent did not want to risk exposure and 23 percent say the dentist's office was closed or only seeing urgent patients.

Among those who did seek out dental care for their child, 69 percent were able to get an appointment in the usual timeframe, a quarter got an appointment after a delay and 7 percent were unable to get an appointment at all. Parents of children with Medicaid dental coverage were more likely than those with private dental insurance or no coverage to say they were unable to get an appointment, 15 vs. 4 and 5 percent, respectively.

In general, two-thirds of parents think it's safe for their child to get dental care right now, but 14 percent do not think so and two in 10 are unsure ([C.S. Mott Children's Hospital](#)).

Gender and Protective Behaviors

A new analysis of longitudinal survey data ([USC UAS 1/6-2/1](#)) finds that men who self-identify as “completely masculine” on a 6-point scale from completely masculine to completely feminine are less likely than others to say they'll get a COVID-19 vaccine, more resistant to face masks, less apt to social distance and more likely to say they have been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Sixty-eight percent of American men identify as “completely masculine.” Of them, 21 percent say they're very unlikely to get a vaccine, compared with 17 percent of other men; and a third agree that COVID-19 vaccines have many harmful side effects, compared with 27 percent of other men. Self-described “completely masculine” men also are more resistant to face masks, including being more likely than other men to agree that masks are too uncomfortable to wear (17 vs. 13 percent), to think they're dangerous to the health of the wearer (10 vs. 6 percent) and to agree that no one can force them to wear a mask because it's a “free country” (24 vs. 17 percent).

Forty-three percent of self-assessed highly masculine men say they've had visitors to their home in the past week compared with 36 percent of other men, and they're more likely than other men to say they've attended a gathering of 10 or more people (16 vs. 10 percent). Lastly, 2.2 percent of men who say they are highly masculine report having been diagnosed with COVID-19, compared with 0.8 percent of other men and 1.4 percent of women ([Cassino, 2021](#)).

Government Response

Fifty-eight percent of Americans approve of the way President Biden is handling the response to the coronavirus, about the same as two weeks ago. However, fewer – 42 percent – approve of how the Biden administration is handling the reopening of schools; 38 percent disapprove and 20 percent are unsure.

Forty-seven percent say the reopening of schools in their community is happening at about the right pace, but 27 percent say it's not happening quickly enough – and 18 percent think it is happening too quickly ([Quinnipiac 2/11-2/14](#)).

Excess Deaths

A new analysis of all-cause mortality data from March 15, 2020 to Jan. 30, 2021 reveals that deaths nationwide were 20 percent higher than normal, with more than half a million more Americans dying since mid-March than expected based on historical trends. That compares with an official COVID-19 death toll of 439,375 during the same time period, a discrepancy of 73,525 deaths, which may be attributable to flawed cause-of-death reporting as well as disruptions to healthcare caused by the pandemic.

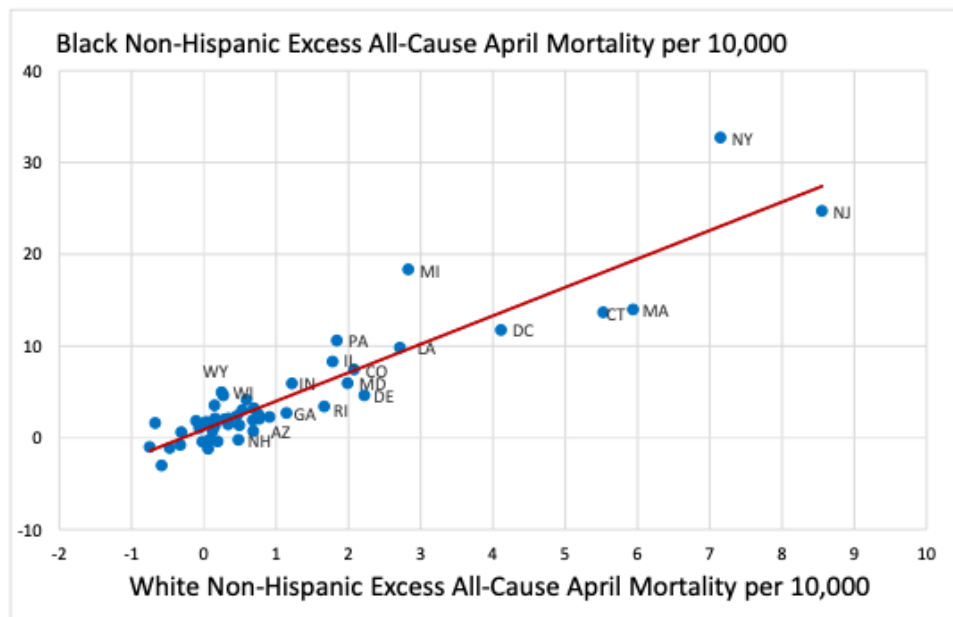
States with the highest share of excess deaths (i.e., the gap between observed and expected mortality) include New Jersey and Arizona, where the number of deaths were 33 and 32 percent higher than normal, respectively. By contrast, in Hawaii, the number of deaths during this period was just 1 percent higher than normal. Other states on the lower end of excess deaths include Maine (7 percent higher than normal), Washington (9 percent), New Hampshire and Oregon (both 10 percent). In New York City, deaths were 60 percent higher than normal ([New York Times 3/15-1/23](#)).

Using death counts for individuals age 11 to 99 from the U.S. Census Bureau's numerical identification database, which covers all individuals with a Social Security number, a different analysis of all-cause mortality estimates that in April, the first full month of the pandemic, 2.4 excess deaths occurred per 10,000 individuals in the United States. This is about 30 percent higher than the official number of COVID-19 deaths reported in that month.

Excess all-cause mortality in April increased with age. For example, although those 85 years old and older account for just 3 percent of the U.S. population age 25 and older, they accounted for 34 percent of the excess deaths in April.

Aligning with previous research, there also were significant racial disparities. After adjusting for differences in age, sex and geographic location, excess all-cause mortality was 6.8 per 10,000 for Black individuals, 4.3 for Hispanics, 2.7 for Asians and 1.5 for whites.

Exhibit 4. Association of Black Non-Hispanic and White Non-Hispanic Excess All-Cause Mortality Across States



There were substantial differences by state in the racial disparities in excess deaths. While Black and Hispanic individuals experienced higher excess mortality than whites in nearly every state, the differences were especially large in New York and New Jersey, two states that were particularly hard hit in April. Adjusted excess mortality in New York was 7.2 per 10,000 among whites compared with 32.7 among Black people. In New Jersey, white excess mortality was 8.6, while among Black individuals it was 24.7. Among Hispanics, excess deaths were 27.2 in New York and 20.5 in New Jersey.

In general, the analysis found that racial disparities were particularly pronounced in states where white excess mortality was higher. However, there was substantial variation. For example, even though Michigan and Louisiana had similar adjusted excess mortality among whites (3 per 10,000), Michigan had much higher Black excess mortality than Louisiana (18 vs. 10 per 10,000). Similarly, Pennsylvania had higher Black excess mortality than Rhode Island (11 vs. 3 per 10,000) despite similar excess mortality among whites (2 per 10,000) ([Polyakova et al., 2021](#); [U.S. Census Bureau](#)).

Nursing Home Deaths

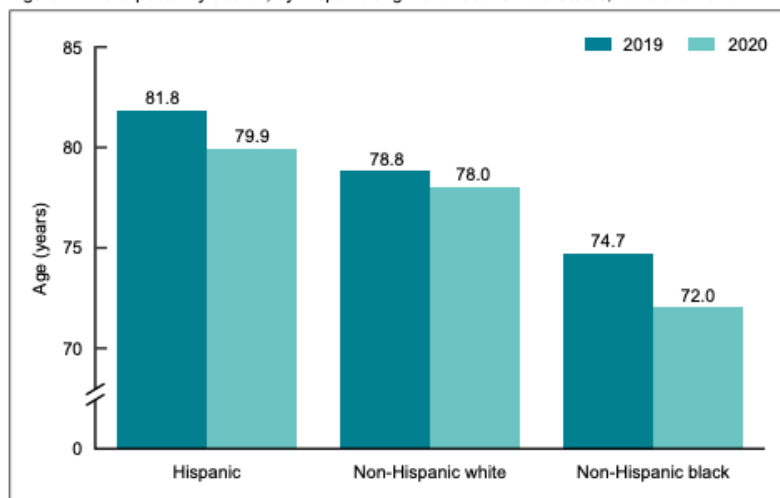
An analysis of COVID-19-related deaths in 13,312 nursing homes in the United States also reveals racial disparities. A total of 51,606 COVID-19-associated deaths were reported in these facilities as of Sept. 13, 2020, averaging 3.9 deaths per facility. However, the average number of deaths in nursing homes with the lowest proportion of white residents (those where white patients made up approximately 60 percent of the population or less) was 5.6, compared with 1.7 deaths on average in nursing homes with the highest proportion of whites (roughly 97 percent). Adjusting for the number of certified beds at the facility and county-level COVID-19 prevalence reduced, but did not eliminate, the discrepancy ([Gorges & Konetzka, 2021](#)).

Life Expectancy

Echoing results [reported last month](#), the National Center for Health Statistics released provisional data this week showing that the average life expectancy in the United States fell by a full year in the first six months of 2020, from 78.8 years in 2019 to 77.8 years. This drop brings life expectancy to its lowest since 2006.

Life expectancy for Black Americans declined by 2.7 years, erasing 20 years of gains and increasing the gap between Black and white Americans to its widest since 1998. Among

Figure 2. Life expectancy at birth, by Hispanic origin and race: United States, 2019 and 2020



NOTES: Life expectancies for 2019 by Hispanic origin and race are not final estimates; see Technical Notes. Estimates are based on provisional data from January 2020 through June 2020.
SOURCE: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System, Mortality data.

Hispanics, there was a 1.9 year drop in life expectancy, and among whites, life expectancy dropped 0.8 years.

Although COVID-19 was the primary driver of this decline, disruptions to healthcare more broadly, as well as an increase in overdose deaths, likely also played a role ([CDC](#); [New York Times](#)).

International Results

In Japan, eight in 10 have high hopes for the coronavirus vaccine, up 9 points since last month. However, half as many – 39 percent – say they will get vaccinated immediately; 52 percent instead say they’ll wait and see without rushing and 6 percent say they won’t get vaccinated. Four in 10 think that as more of the population gets vaccinated, people can return to their pre-pandemic lives, but six in 10 do not. Forty-seven percent think the state of emergency in Tokyo and nine other prefectures should continue until March 7; 22 percent think it should be extended again. Twenty-three percent approve of the coronavirus countermeasures taken by Prime Minister Suga’s administration, up 8 points in the past month ([Mainichi Shimbun 2/13](#)).

In Chile, vaccine uptake intentions have risen. One in 10 says they have been vaccinated and 65 percent say they will get vaccinated as soon as it is available to them, up from 53 percent last week and a low of 36 percent in mid-December. Twelve percent say they’ll get vaccinated, but later, down from 27 percent last week; 13 percent do not plan to get vaccinated, down from 20 percent. Fifty-three percent say they’re worried about the possibility of catching the coronavirus, down 16 points from a mid-January peak to the fewest since early November. Eight in 10 evaluate the government’s mass vaccination plan positively, up from 72 percent last week, and half now approve of the government’s management of the pandemic more broadly, up 9 points since last week to a pandemic high ([Cadem 2/10-2/12](#)).

In Great Britain, 22 percent say they’ve received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, up from 16 percent last week and 12 percent the week before. This includes nearly eight in 10 of those age 70 and older. Seventy-two percent overall say they have not yet been offered a vaccine, 5 percent have been offered and are awaiting vaccination and fewer than 1 percent were offered it but declined. In total, 92 percent either have been vaccinated or are very or fairly likely to get vaccinated if offered. Eighty-three percent support mass testing for the coronavirus and three-quarters say that if it were available in their area they’d be at least fairly likely to get tested even if they had no symptoms, up from 69 percent last week ([Office for National Statistics 2/3-2/7](#)).

In Mexico City, vaccination intentions also have risen – 57 percent of adults in the nation’s capital now say they want to get vaccinated as soon as possible, up from 45 percent a month ago. Three in 10 prefer to wait, down from 41 percent; 8 percent say they won’t get vaccinated and 3 percent already have. Six in 10 say that someone over age 60 lives in their home; of them, just a quarter say that person already has registered to receive the vaccine.

Support for social distancing restrictions declined from 72 percent in early January to 64 percent now amid a drop in perceptions that the pandemic is worsening (from 80 to 64 percent in the same period). Three-quarters personally know someone in the city who has been infected with

the virus, essentially unchanged since January. However, 65 percent now say they know someone in the city who has died from the virus, a new high ([El Financiero 2/5-2/6](#)).

In Ukraine, 57 percent say they would not agree to be vaccinated against COVID-19 even for free, up from 50 percent this summer. Just three in 10 say they would agree to get vaccinated and 14 percent are undecided. If they do decide to get vaccinated, 52 percent say the deciding factor would be the vaccine's proven efficacy, 12 percent say it'd be the country where the vaccine was manufactured and 8 percent say it'd be the manufacturing company. Fifteen percent say none of these factors is decisive and 11 percent are undecided ([R&B Group 1/20-2/1](#)).

In Australia, where community spread of COVID-19 has been virtually eliminated, just 17 percent think it's likely they'll be infected by the virus in the next six months, down from 34 percent in August. Fifty-seven percent say they've experienced anxiety and worry due to COVID-19, down from 65 percent in October. After dropping in the spring, life satisfaction rebounded to January 2020 levels in November and has stayed there. A measure of psychological distress dropped to its lowest level since the start of the pandemic. However, the share who say they're finding it difficult to manage on their current income increased 6 points since November to 23 percent, perhaps reflecting a decrease in government aid ([Australia National University 1/18-2/1](#)).

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

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