

# Worry increases, distancing decreases with COVID second wave

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Victoria's COVID-19 second-wave outbreak and related lockdown has seen a spike in anxiety and worry among Australians everywhere, but particularly in Victoria, new data from The Australian National

University (ANU) shows.

The latest survey forms part of the ANU Center for Social Research and Methods COVID-19 impact monitoring program, taking in the views of over 3,000 people during August. It found more than three-in-five Australians (62.6%) felt anxious or worried about the [coronavirus](#)—an increase from 57.3% in May.

The survey also shows fewer Australians are following social distancing measures than before—with only Victorians maintaining the highest level of vigilance.

Study co-author, Professor Nicholas Biddle, said the biggest increase in [anxiety](#) and worry occurred among females, jumping from 60.9% in May to 68.3% in August.

"Young Australians also continue to have the highest rates of anxiety and worry in terms of age groups," he said. "Worry and anxiety among Australians aged 25-34 years increased from 63.4% in May to 69.2% in August. And given the circumstances in Victoria, it is unsurprising there has been a greater increase in worry and anxiety among people in that state—jumping from 58.9% in May to 68.1% in August."

The poll also shows more Australians think they are likely to be infected by COVID-19 as a consequence of the second wave of infections, with increases particularly large for males.

"Among females, 36.3% now think infection is more likely—up from 35.6% in May," Professor Biddle said. "And among males, 34% think they are likely to be infected. This is up from 29% in May."

Co-author, Professor Matthew Gray, said the latest poll also revealed interesting and "worrying" trends related to physical distancing behavior.

"We found there has been a significant decrease in people following physical distancing requirements compared to earlier in the year," Professor Gray said.

In total, 72.2% of Australians reported that in the seven days preceding the August survey they always or mostly avoided crowded places. This is compared to 94.3% in April.

A smaller percentage said they always or mostly avoided public places (55.8%), a substantial decline from April (86.5%). There was a smaller decline in the percentage of people who said they always or mostly kept 1.5 meters from others from 96.0% in April to 86.9% in August.

"Even more interestingly though, the change was not consistent across the population," Professor Gray said.

"For example, declines were greatest outside of Victoria. But even in that state, there has been fewer people following the requirements since April."

The survey also found:

- 40.5% of Australians say they felt lonely (up from 35.7% in May);
- An increase in psychological distress between May and August;
- More Australians are worried about losing their jobs up to an average expected probability of 0.25 across Australia, despite an increase in hours worked by 1.2 hours over the period; and
- A decline in overall life satisfaction from a 6.96 out of 10 in May to 6.85 in August.

The survey is also the first longitudinal study to compare Victorians' experience and attitudes to COVID-19 with other Australians. It found

that among Victorians, life satisfaction decreased from 6.78 out of 10 in May to 6.08 in August.

Other findings show [psychological distress](#), loneliness, expectations of job losses and the likelihood of infection was higher in Victoria compared to the rest of the country, while satisfaction with the direction of the country was lower.

**More information:** The full results are published [online](#) and form part of the COVID-19 monitoring program led by the ANU Center for Social Research and Methods.

Provided by Australian National University

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