

More than half of Americans know someone infected or ill with COVID: Poll

October 22 2020, by Dennis Thompson, Healthday Reporter



(HealthDay)—More than half of all Americans have been personally

affected by COVID-19 at this point in the pandemic, according to a new *HealthDay-Harris Poll* survey.

The national survey was conducted by The Harris Poll between Oct. 8 and 12. It found that 55% of U.S. adults now say they know someone in their immediate or extended network of family and acquaintances who's been infected, hospitalized or passed away from COVID-19.

About two in every five people said they'd had even more direct experience with COVID-19, with either themselves or someone very close to them falling ill, being hospitalized or dying.

"By now, we're all accustomed to regularly seeing the sobering figures for COVID infection and [death rates](#), but these findings translate to something so much bigger in terms of the full and relentless impact of the virus on millions of Americans," said Robyn Bell Dickson, managing director of The Harris Poll.

These results come in the midst of a COVID-19 resurgence in the United States, with the nation averaging 59,000 new cases a day. There have been more than 8.3 million reported infections, and around 220,000 U.S. deaths caused by COVID-19.

The online poll of 2,021 U.S. adults also found that 39% reported a direct impact on their lives from the pandemic, including:

- Having personally had COVID-19 (7%) or being hospitalized (4%) from their infection.
- Residing in a household with someone who had COVID-19 (6%).
- Having a close friend, family member or loved one who became infected with COVID-19 (34%), was hospitalized (19%), or

passed away (13%).

Overall, more than one in 10 adults have a loved one who has passed away due to COVID-19, the survey found.

Shifts in outlook

People who've been personally affected by COVID-19 tend to see the pandemic differently from those who've so far remained relatively untouched by the virus, the results showed.

Those who have direct experience with COVID-19, either personally or through a loved one, are more likely to be very concerned that they or a loved one will die from COVID-19. Nearly two-thirds (64%) reported this high level of concern, versus 52% of those with no direct experience or whose only experience is through an acquaintance.

Those without direct experience are also likely to be more optimistic that the pandemic will be under control by early 2021, 56% versus 49% of those with direct experience.

Adults whose personal experience of COVID-19 was more severe, with either themselves or a loved one struggling for life in a hospital or dying, were also more likely to agree with these statements:

- I wish more people took COVID-19 seriously (87%, versus 80%).
- I am extremely worried about getting COVID-19 (78%, versus 59%).
- I am very concerned that I or a loved one will die from COVID-19 (73%, versus 53%).

"It makes sense that people who have experience with the disease will carry a different outlook with them, given that at the beginning of 2020 no one knew much at all about the burgeoning threat of [coronavirus](#)," said Lynn Bufka, senior director of practice transformation and quality at the American Psychological Association.

"As people have more experience with COVID, they are finding the messages regarding the pandemic to be more consistent and mapped on to their own experience," Bufka said.

Anxiety and resilience

The growing number of people who have personal experience with COVID-19 is adding to the uncertainty that already disrupts the daily lives of all Americans, Bufka said.

"Collectively, we're all faced with this pandemic, not knowing when it will end. We have no way to put some predictions around it and feel comfortable with those predictions," she added.

"We're all sitting in a period of uncertainty with the pandemic, with the [economic impact](#) of it, and then you layer in other issues like grappling with systemic racism and the political discourse, there are just a lot of things that are elevating our levels of uncertainty," Bufka continued.

"We know that uncertainty is connected to anxiety. It would not be surprising at minimum to see more individuals struggling with anxiety right now, because it's harder to feel safe, secure and in control when so much feels outside of your control."

People also are dealing every day with feelings of loss and grief, ranging from things as profound as illness and death down to the simple need for a regular routine, Bufka said.

"Routines help us in so many ways because they make our lives predictable. They make things less uncertain. They also free up our mental space for tackling the things that are novel," Bufka said.

"If your schedule changes dramatically or if the kinds of decisions you're having to make vary day to day, that takes mental energy, which is harder to deal with," she explained. "So we see people struggling with decision making, with handling novel problems, all of that because mentally, cognitively, their attention is taken with what they're dealing with in the [pandemic](#)."

It's also becoming harder to expect help from those around you, she suggested.

"People are remarkably resilient and can adapt to all kinds of things, but when it feels like everybody's in the same situation at the same time, you may not have the social support you need," Bufka said. "It's not like you can rely on your best friend who's doing OK. He or she might also be struggling."

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more about [COVID-19](#).

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Citation: More than half of Americans know someone infected or ill with COVID: Poll (2020, October 22) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-americans-infected-ill-covid-poll.html>

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