

# Survey measures health care delays during pandemic's beginning

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At the start of the COVID-19 outbreak, a University of Illinois Chicago researcher conducted a survey asking respondents if they experienced health care delays because of the pandemic. In addition to learning about the types of delays, the study also presented a unique opportunity to capture a historic moment at the pandemic's beginning.

Elizabeth Papautsky, UIC assistant professor of biomedical and health information sciences, is first author on "Characterizing Healthcare Delays and Interruptions in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Pandemic Using Data from an Internet-Based Cross-Sectional Survey," published in the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*.

The study was conducted through an internet survey from April 5-May 5, 2020, and over 2,500 people responded. The results showed 48% of respondents experienced delayed health care, with the three most common delays being dental (38%), preventative (29%) and diagnostic (16%).

Fear of COVID-19 infection, health care provider discouragement, and the feeling that their health care concerns weren't as important as others were the top reasons people listed for delaying care, according to the study.

The study's results are not surprising, but worrisome as implications may include long-term [health care](#) decline, Papautsky said. For example, due to COVID-19's impact on preventive and diagnostic care, an uptick in cancer diagnoses and at higher stages is expected, she added.

Despite a convenience sample, which is often frowned upon in research, Papautsky said, important lessons can be learned.

"We captured a fleeting moment in time," she said. "This is an opportunity to learn how to do research in very dynamic situations. What lessons can we learn for when there are other situations where you need to get a survey out quickly and how can we do that better."

One surprising thing about the study was the number of respondents: 2,570 people, invited via social media, completed the 40-minute survey.

"People really cared about it. That shows the power of [social media](#) and the power of asking questions that people are concerned about," Papautsky said.

While the conditions for this study cannot be replicated, the methodological lessons learned can serve as a sort of "pilot study" for future crises, creating more diverse and inclusive research that drives [health](#) equity forward, the study reports.

"There is an urgent need for sharing lessons learned, disseminating effective strategies for reaching more diverse populations, and encouraging the [research community](#) to employ and improve upon these strategies in future research," Papautsky said.

**More information:** Elizabeth Lerner Papautsky et al, Characterizing Health Care Delays and Interruptions in the United States During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Internet-Based, Cross-sectional Survey Study, *Journal of Medical Internet Research* (2021). [DOI: 10.2196/25446](https://doi.org/10.2196/25446)

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