

Will virus be 'over'? Most Americans think not: AP-NORC poll

January 27 2022, by Kate Brumback, Nathan Ellgren and Jocelyn Noveck



Travelers pass a sign near a COVID-19 testing site in Terminal E at Logan Airport, on Dec. 21, 2021, in Boston. A new AP-NORC poll shows that few Americans – just 15% – say they'll consider the pandemic over only when COVID-19 is largely eliminated. By contrast, 83% say they'll feel like the pandemic is over when it's largely a mild illness, like the seasonal flu. Credit: AP Photo/Charles Krupa, File

Early in the pandemic, Ryan Wilson was careful to take

precautions—wearing a mask, not really socializing, doing more of his shopping online.

The 38-year-old father and seafood butcher from Casselberry, Florida, says he relaxed a bit after getting vaccinated last year. He had a few friends over and saw his parents more, while making sure to still mask up at places like the grocery store. The recent virus surge hasn't caused him to change his behavior much, because he's vaccinated and has read that the variant causes less [severe illness](#).

And, like many, Wilson has come to believe COVID-19 is probably never fully going away.

"It'll become endemic and we'll be stuck with it forever," he says. "It's frustrating, but what can you do about it?"

Many Americans agree that they're going to "be stuck with it forever"—or, at the least, for a long time. A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that few—just 15%—say they'll consider the pandemic over only when COVID-19 is largely eliminated. By contrast, 83% say they'll feel the pandemic is over when it's largely a mild illness.

The poll shows that 59% of Americans think it's essential that they personally be vaccinated against COVID-19 to feel safe participating in public activities.



Travelers pass through Salt Lake City International Airport on Dec. 27, 2021, in Salt Lake City. A new AP-NORC poll shows that few Americans – just 15% – say they'll consider the pandemic over only when COVID-19 is largely eliminated. By contrast, 83% say they'll feel like the pandemic is over when it's largely a mild illness, like the seasonal flu. Credit: AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File

But, underscoring what authorities call alarmingly low COVID-19 vaccination rates in U.S. children ages 5 to 11, just 37% of parents consider it essential that their children are vaccinated before they return to normal. And although [boosters provide significantly better protection](#) against COVID-19, especially the [omicron variant](#), than a two-shot course of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, just 47% of Americans think it's essential that they get one.

Wilson, in Florida, said that while he is vaccinated, he doesn't plan to have his 5-year-old daughter vaccinated because he's heard the odds of healthy children suffering anything more than cold symptoms are low.

In Minneapolis, 36-year-old public health researcher Colin Planalp got his 6-year-old son vaccinated as soon as he could. "Kids can get really sick from COVID," he says, faulting health authorities for not making that more clear to the public.

Although kids tend to fare better than adults, experts say they still can suffer from [serious illness and long-term health impacts](#) from the virus.

The poll shows more Americans are taking precautionary measures against the virus than before the omicron surge.

Overall, 64% now say they are always or often avoiding large groups and 65% are wearing face masks around others, both up from 57% in December. Sixty percent say they are regularly avoiding nonessential travel, up from 53% one month ago. That level of precaution is the highest since last spring, before millions of Americans were fully vaccinated.



People eat inside the Siena Pizza restaurant in New York City on Dec. 9, 2021. A new AP-NORC poll shows that few Americans – just 15% – say they'll consider the pandemic over only when COVID-19 is largely eliminated. By contrast, 83% say they'll feel like the pandemic is over when it's largely a mild illness, like the seasonal flu. Credit: AP Photo/Ted Shaffrey, File

Early in the pandemic, Planalp and his wife worked at home for months on end, and kept their young son home. But when they got vaccinated they allowed themselves to go out more, to visit family out of state, even to work part-time in the office.

Then the delta variant hit, and they ratcheted up their precautions. With omicron, they upped them even more.

"I've switched to wearing N95 masks because I'm no longer confident in the regular cloth masks, and I hardly go out at all anymore," Planalp says. "We've canceled travel plans. My son has been out of school for more than a week now and hopefully he'll get to go back in a week. But who really knows?"

Planalp, too, doesn't think the virus is going anywhere—and isn't sure it will get milder, either: "We're not going to be done with this. It's going to change over time and we just can't predict exactly how it's going to change."

Vaccinated Americans remain much more likely to practice precautions. Seventy-three percent of vaccinated Americans say they frequently wear a mask around others, compared with 37% of unvaccinated Americans.

David Close, 50, who is unvaccinated, says he never changed any of his behavior. "It's been over for me," he says. "I never really went into any type of pandemic fear."

Americans more likely now than in December to wear a mask, avoid crowds

A new AP-NORC poll finds Americans are more likely now than in Dec. 2021 to wear masks and avoid crowds, as worries about COVID-19 have ticked back up amid record-breaking cases and hospitalizations.

Percentage who say they always or often ____ :



Results based on interviews with 1,161 U.S. adults conducted Jan. 13–18. The margin of error is ± 3.8 percentage points for the full sample.

Source: AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

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Close, who moved from Tampa, Florida, to Vonore, Tennessee, in May, says he, his wife and their two kids all had COVID-19 in October. He thinks his wife became infected at work, but they didn't take precautions to keep her isolated from the rest of the family.

"I got into bed every night and laid in bed and fell asleep next to her because that's what I've always done," he says.

Close had a fever of about 103 or 104 for about 24 hours and was back up and feeling great within 36 hours, he says. He lost his taste and smell for about 10 days.

"I can always make it through an illness," he says. "I'm not fearful of things like that."

Studies show that even for people who have had it already, [vaccination provides additional protection](#) against COVID-19, which has so far killed more than 850,000 Americans.

In Minersville, Utah, Jamie Costello, 57, a math teacher and mother of eight, has not been vaccinated—not because she opposes vaccines, but because she has had severe reactions to flu shots, and has recovered from COVID-19. Like many Americans, Costello feels COVID is something that will come to feel as familiar as the flu.



Waiter Juan Rodrigues, left, asks a customer to show his vaccination card before being allowed to sit inside the Fred 62 restaurant in the Los Feliz neighborhood of Los Angeles, on Nov. 29, 2021. A new AP-NORC poll shows that few Americans – just 15% – say they'll consider the pandemic over only when COVID-19 is largely eliminated. By contrast, 83% say they'll feel like the pandemic is over when it's largely a mild illness, like the seasonal flu. Credit: AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File

"It's a very fast-mutating virus," she says. "We're just going to eventually have to say, well, it's the flu and COVID season, instead of just the flu season. It's just there, and we have to get as back to normal as we can."

The AP-NORC poll of 1,161 adults was conducted Jan. 13-18 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.8 percentage points.

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Citation: Will virus be 'over'? Most Americans think not: AP-NORC poll (2022, January 27)
retrieved 10 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-01-virus-americans-ap-norc-poll.html>

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