



# NEWSLETTER

MONITORING THE FUTURE - NEWS UPDATE

DECEMBER 2021

## YOU CANNOT BE REPLACED!

You were scientifically selected to be included in the follow-up sample so that your responses represent the views of thousands of people your age. If we lose contact with you, no substitution can be made, and the views of adults similar to you will not be as well represented by the study. The success of the study depends upon your willingness to continue to complete and return the questionnaire to Monitoring the Future. For this reason, we work hard to keep track of you and other participants around the country and the world. We are indeed grateful for your cooperation. Please know that your responses are kept completely confidential.



## IT'S GOOD TO SEE YOU AGAIN

This newsletter contains results from the followup surveys that you completed for the Monitoring the Future study. It represents our commitment to sharing results of the study with our participants. We are also committed to distributing the information we gain from this study to policymakers and the public. Political leaders, influential organizations, and the general public have consistently shown their interest in the attitudes and actions of younger and older adults, and Monitoring the future is an effective means of communicating your viewpoints and experiences to them.

The important study is designed to look at changing behaviors and preferences of Americans across adulthood. We believe that studying the way young and middle adults are today will tell us a lot about the way the whole nation will be tomorrow.

This year's newsletter contains updates on some topics that you may have seen in previous newsletters, as well as some new topics.



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John Schulenberg, MTF Panel  
Study Director

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### Dear Valued MTF Participants:

First, I hope you and yours are hanging in there with the ongoing pandemic and all the challenges it has caused. We were initially concerned with whether the pandemic would adversely affect our data collection procedures, but in seeing the results across the full study, we determined that any effects were minimal, thus giving us confidence in our findings.

Second, I want to thank you for your continued participation in the U.S. national Monitoring the Future (MTF) surveys. We could not do what we do without your continued involvement. Each of you represents about 10,000 same-aged people in the U.S., making your participation invaluable and irreplaceable. We are grateful for your time and dedication over the years.

**Why do we do what we do?** Good social policy regarding health and wellbeing depends on good science. Without valid and reliable national estimates of various health compromising and health enhancing behaviors, social policy is based on opinion, folklore, and guess-work. Thus, the research group I work with started this national survey study way back in 1975 (when I was in high school!) to begin to examine a variety of behaviors and attitudes among teens and adults in an effort to let the nation know what its population is experiencing. With continued funding from the National Institutes of Health, we have kept the study going, adding in new high school seniors each year and following many through young and middle adulthood. Our oldest respondents now in their 60s, with age 65 surveys coming soon.

**Why do you stay involved?** You may ask yourself this on occasion, and I appreciate that you continue to find it important among all else you are doing. We hear from many of you that you like the experience of staying involved and getting the new surveys, with some indicating that they look forward to it because it helps them learn more about themselves. Others let us know that they feel duty-bound to stay in this, their way of giving something back. Please know that your involvement has made a difference and will continue to do so.

**What is done with the data?** We report aggregate responses in annual publications and press releases, and use the aggregate data for scientific peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and other reports, including these annual newsletters to you. Our findings, again always based on aggregate data, inform the National Institutes of Health and other government agencies. We want to make sure the findings are disseminated to inform the nation regarding trends in our population's health and wellbeing and to advance the science. We have well over a million people in our study now, and each and every participant's identity and personal information are always protected, and thus your confidentiality is assured. We never share your contact information with anyone outside of our study, and we only contact you regarding the study. We have now completed our transition from mail to online surveys. We encouraged you to take the survey online, although paper surveys will be mailed to you if you wish.

Finally, I am delighted to welcome Professor Megan Patrick as the incoming MTF Panel Study Director, as I am beginning my transition to retirement. I have enjoyed running this study for the past several years in part because I have been inspired by the continuing involvement of you and so many other participants. With your help, we have made a difference. Professor Patrick will take over in spring 2022, and I know she will do well to take the MTF Panel Study into the future!

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. We have learned much from you over the years, and we look forward with your help to continuing our efforts.

With Best Wishes,  
John Schulenberg, MTF Panel Study Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. Schulenberg'.

## A Snapshot of Early Pandemic Response

The COVID-19 pandemic has by now touched all of our lives and forced our society into rapid change. At Monitoring the Future we know that we cannot properly see our present and envision our future without first understanding the past. As we finalized our 2020 survey we realized that we were living through a potential turning point in history's course—so we included questions about the pandemic just before opening our survey. Responses began coming in during March of 2020—right at the beginning of the U.S. response to COVID-19—and we finished collecting responses in November of 2020 as the pandemic

spread into every state.

In our survey we asked 4,653 respondents ages 19–30 two questions about the COVID-19 pandemic: 1) “Have you been concerned about whether you have COVID-19 in 2020?”, and 2) “Have you been tested for COVID-19 in 2020?” Although sentiments changed rapidly as we moved from the early stages of the pandemic, we wanted to share the results with you as a way of reflecting on the magnitude of the pandemic's impact.

### Concern about Having COVID-19

In the early months of the pandemic most respondents weren't worried about contracting the virus—45% of men and 43% of women answered that they were **not concerned**. On the other end of the spectrum and in the minority, 19% of men and 22% of women said they **were concerned** about whether they had COVID-19. The remainder fell in between and reported feeling **somewhat concerned**. Looking at Figure 1, you will see a graph showing responses by gender. You will also see that women tended to be more concerned about having COVID-19 than men—yet the vast majority of men and women reported they were not worried at all.

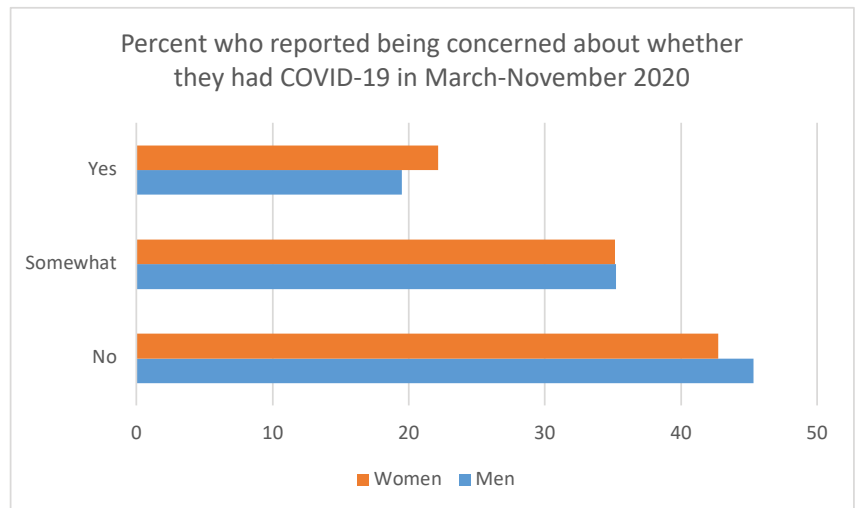


Figure 1

### Getting a COVID-19 Test in 2020

Likewise, most respondents said they hadn't been tested: 92% of both men and women answered **not tested** on the survey. Of those who did get tested, six percent of men and seven percent of women reported a **negative test**, and less than two percent of both women and men had either a **positive test** or were **waiting for results**. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the responses. These might seem like low numbers now, but at the pandemic's beginning tests were not readily available to people with

mild or no symptoms.

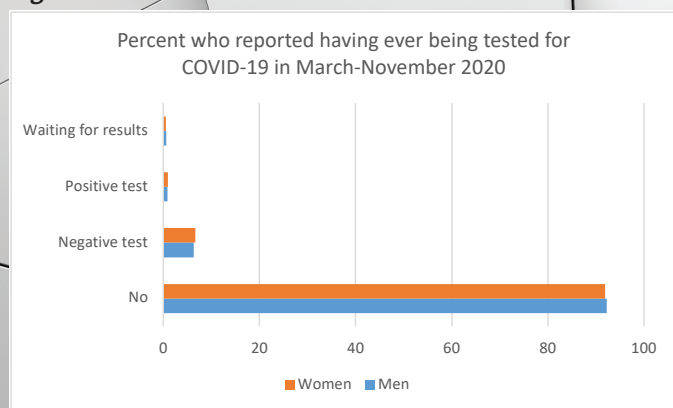
Figures 3 and 4 both sort by different levels of concern about getting COVID-19 to show the percent of respondents who had been tested. As you compare both figures, you'll see that men and women did not differ—both figures show about the same distribution of concern and testing status. As you might expect, testing rates were higher for those who were concerned about having COVID-19. Most all of the positive COVID-19 tests were among those

who expressed concern.

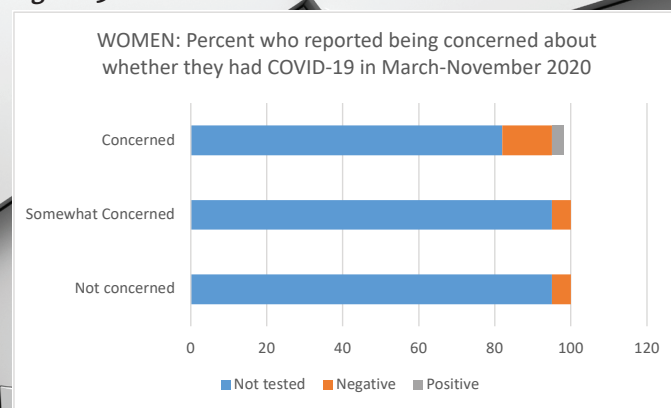
We are currently collecting our data for the 2021 panel survey, so we will have more to say about COVID-19 concerns and possible effects next

year—and we will be able to compare this year's responses to the data from 2020. In the meantime, we sincerely hope that you and your loved ones are staying well and healthy.

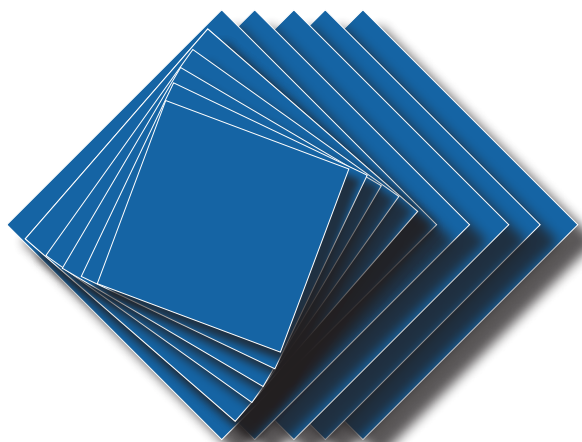
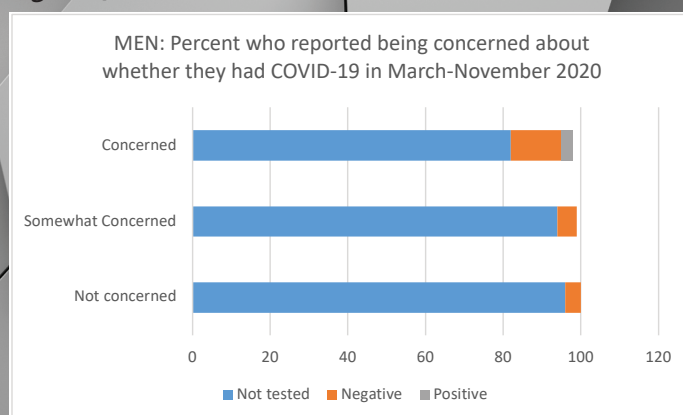
**Figure 2**



**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



Some of you have asked us for a summary of your individual answers from the years you have been a part of this survey. Because we promise confidentiality and will never connect names and responses outside of our research team, we are unable to accommodate these requests. We hope that this newsletter, which includes a summary of results from a variety of topics mailed to all respondents every year, is informative and interesting.