



NEWSLETTER

MONITORING THE FUTURE - A SPECIAL THANKS!

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.



THANKS TO OUR RESPONDENTS

Thank you! As a Monitoring the Future study participant, you have completed many questionnaires for us since you graduated from high school. Your participation has contributed to the success of this research project.

The transitions you have experienced from high school until now provide a unique perspective for us to see how behaviors and attitudes change as people progress through their adult years.

This newsletter represents our commitment to distributing results of the study to our participants. We are also committed to distributing the findings from this study to policymakers and the public.

This important study is designed to look at changing behaviors and preferences of younger Americans as they grow into their middle years. We believe that studying how adults change over time will tell us a lot about how early events and characteristics affect later health and wellbeing.



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MONITORING THE FUTURE
IS FUNDED BY





John Schulenberg, MTF Panel
Study Director

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.

We sent our web-based survey to about half of you in 2020, and we asked respondents ages 35–60 (2,072 in total, with 304 to 386 in each age group of 35, 40, 45, 50, 55, and 60) 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

Figure 1 shows the percent of each age group answering if they were concerned, somewhat concerned, or not concerned about having COVID-19. Considered in overall averages across the age groups, men and women differed somewhat in their answers: while 18% of both men and women said they **were concerned**, 31% percent of men and 26% of women answered they were **somewhat concerned**, and 51% of men and 57% of women answered that they were **not concerned** about whether they had COVID-19. The percentages of being concerned were consistent across the age groups, but people in their 50s and 60s were more likely to be somewhat concerned or concerned.

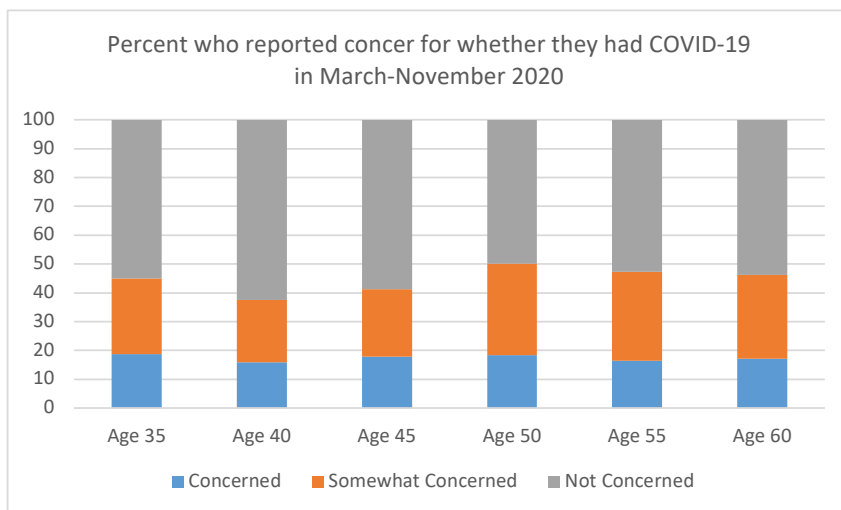


Figure 1

Getting a COVID-19 Test in 2020

Figure 2 shows the percent of each age group answering if they had been tested and the results of tests if they got one. Most said they had not been tested: overall (averaged across the age groups) 97% of men and 95% of women were not tested. It is important to note here that in the early stage of the pandemic tests were not always readily available.

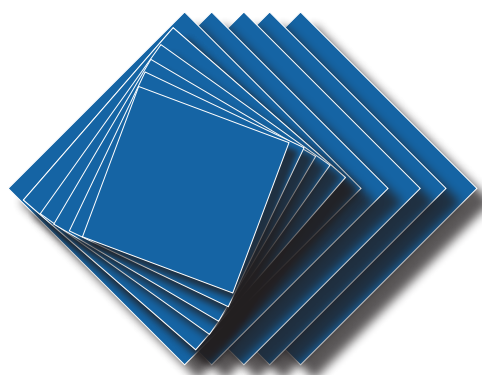
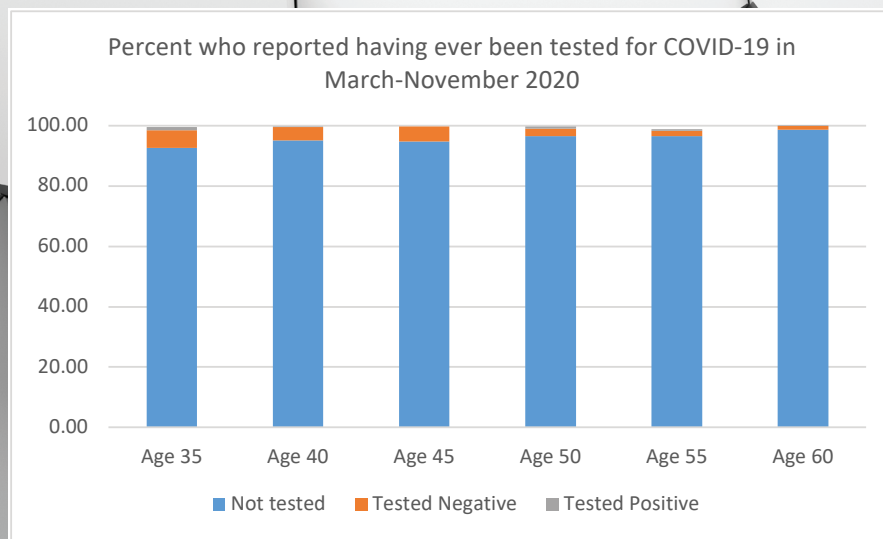
The percentage of people getting tested decreased somewhat with age—the percentages of those getting tested were somewhat higher among 35-45 year olds (about 5% tested and all were negative). Only the age 35 group reported positive tests (less than 1%). Among the 50-60 year olds, only about 3% reported getting a test and those were negative.

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.

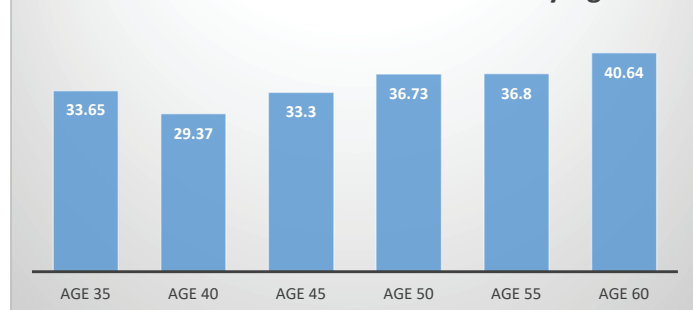
Figure 2



In 2020, we asked respondents questions regarding their perceptions about the future, both their own and the country in general over the next five years on a scale of “Get much better, Get somewhat better, Stay about the same, Get somewhat worse, Get much worse”. The figures show the percent of those responding that things will “Get much better” or “Get somewhat better” by age group. The perception that their **life would get better** in the next five years decreased with age, but still, the majority perceived that their life would get better from 35

through 55, with it being just below 50% among those age 60. In contrast, the perception that **things will get better in our country** over the next year increased somewhat with age. Thus, whereas those aged 50–60 were lowest in terms of optimism about their own lives getting better, they were highest in terms of optimism about things getting better in our country over the next five years.

Percent Reporting Things in this Country Will Get Better in the Next 5 Years by Age



Percent Reporting Their Life Will Get Better in the Next 5 years by Age

