



Seniors Speak out on COVID:

A Survey of Medicare Beneficiaries

August 2022

Introduction

More than two years after the start of the pandemic, many Americans have returned to something like normal life. However, COVID-19 continues to have an outsized impact on the lives of seniors, many of whom are at higher risk from the disease.

In a survey of more than 2,500 Medicare beneficiaries, we learned many remain deeply concerned about COVID and few say their lives have returned to normal. Many seniors would support reinstating strict containment measures this fall if case numbers rise.

A majority say the government's handling of COVID will be a top-three factor when it comes to voting in November's midterm election. However, their take on government management of the pandemic splits sharply on partisan lines.

Our survey also shows that many of the behavioral changes adopted by seniors to reduce their risk of COVID exposure may become permanent, with fewer seniors willing to engage in popular social activities.

Analysis & Highlights

COVID is still disruptive for US seniors: Only 8% say their lives are back to normal now, but 39% say they are less worried than a year ago.

COVID will be an important election issue for Medicare beneficiaries: 62% say the government's handling of COVID will be one of their top three issues when voting this November.

Seniors continue to scrutinize the government response to COVID: 21% say their confidence in the government's handling of COVID has increased in the past year; 48% say it is unchanged; 31% say it has decreased.

Many support the return of strict measures to reduce spread of COVID: 62% say they would support reimposing social distancing and masking rules if case counts increase; 47% would get boosters 1-2 times per year indefinitely if recommended.

COVID behavioral changes may be permanent: 73% remain less likely to go on a cruise, while 52% are less likely to travel by plane. In May of 2021, those figures were 58% and 31%, respectively.

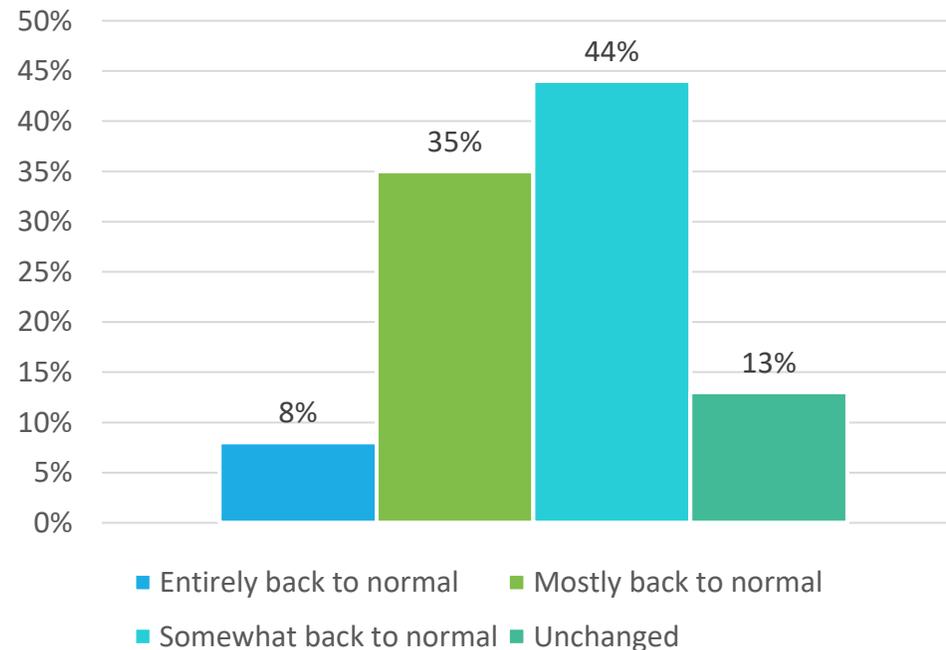
Politics sharply influences perspective: 86% of Democratic voters would support a return to strict social health measures this fall, compared to 32% of Republican voters. Republicans are more likely than Democrats to have already contracted COVID at least once (37% vs. 22%, respectively).

The Slow Return to Normalcy

COVID continues to upend normal life for many seniors and Medicare beneficiaries

- Only 8% say their lives are completely back to normal.
- 35% say their life is “mostly back to normal.”
- 44% say their life is “somewhat back to normal.”
- 13% say their life is unchanged from the height of the pandemic.

“How much has your life returned to normal since the height of the COVID pandemic?”



Many say their worries about COVID are easing

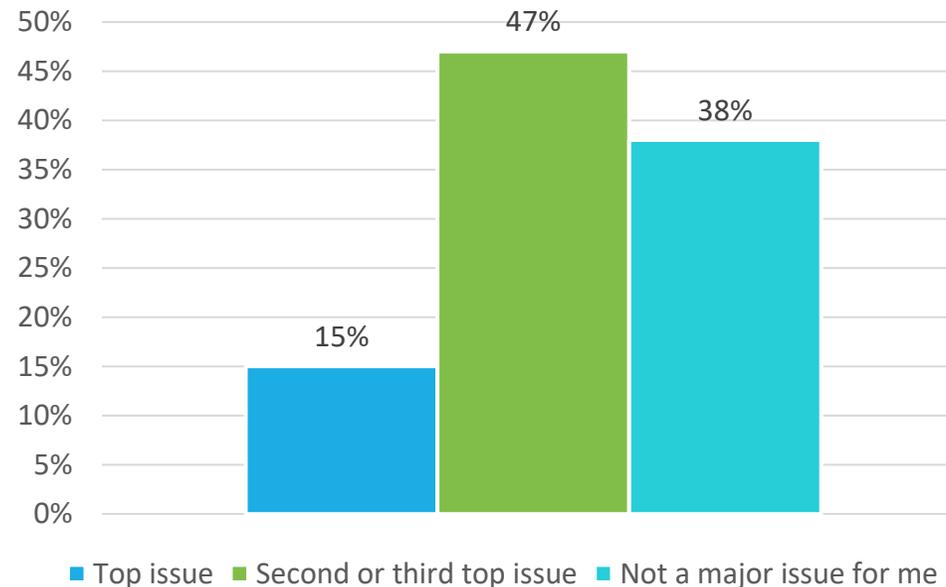
- 39% of respondents are less worried than they were a year ago.
- 16% say they are not worried at all.
- However, more than a third (38%) are just as worried about COVID as they were a year ago.
- 8% are more worried.

COVID and November's Midterm Elections

COVID will be an important election issue for Medicare beneficiaries

- 62% say COVID is still a top-three issue in November's election; 78% of general population respondents said the same in November of 2021*.
- 38% say COVID is not a major consideration when it comes to voting.

“If November's election were held today, how much would your feelings about the government's handling of COVID impact your vote?”



Political affiliation makes little difference in response to this question

- About six in 10 of all respondents put COVID in their top three voting issues for November, regardless of party affiliation.

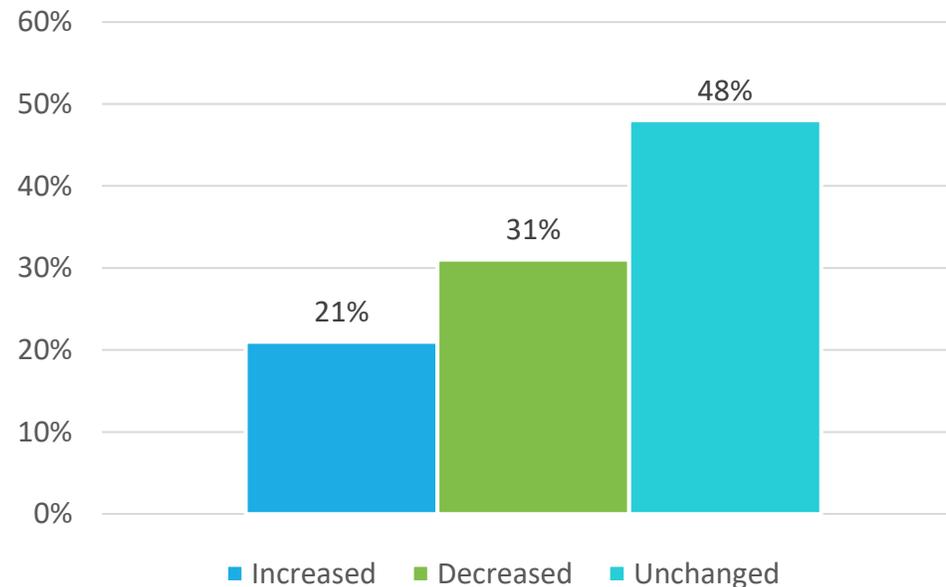
* See eHealth's Health Insurance Trends survey report, published in November of 2021.

Confidence in Government's Handling of COVID

Medicare beneficiaries have mixed feelings about the government's response to COVID

- 21% say their confidence in the government's response to COVID has increased over the past year.
- 31% say their confidence has decreased.
- 48% say their feelings are unchanged compared to one year ago.

“Compared to a year ago, has your approval of the government's response to COVID increased or decreased?”



Republicans and men are more likely to say their confidence in government's response has decreased

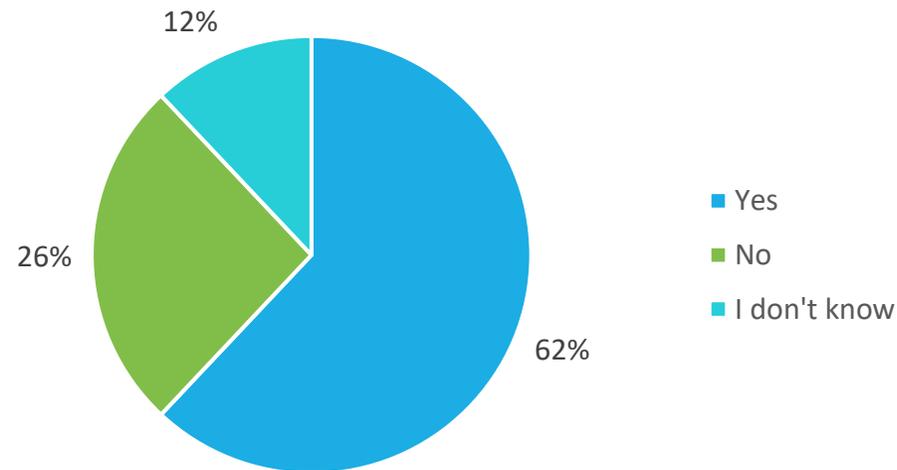
- 51% of Republican voters say their confidence has decreased in the past year, compared to 27% of Independent and 16% of Democratic voters.
- 34% of men say their confidence has decreased in the past year, compared to 28% of women.

Reinstating Strict Health Measures

Most would support a return to strict restrictions to prevent spread of COVID

- 62% would support the return of strict measures like mask mandates and social distancing this fall.
- 26% would not support a return to strict measures.
- 12% are unsure.

“Would you support the reinstatement of strict public health measures (mask mandates, social distancing) if cases or hospitalizations increase significantly this fall?”



Though more likely to have contracted COVID, Republican voters are less likely to support strict health measures

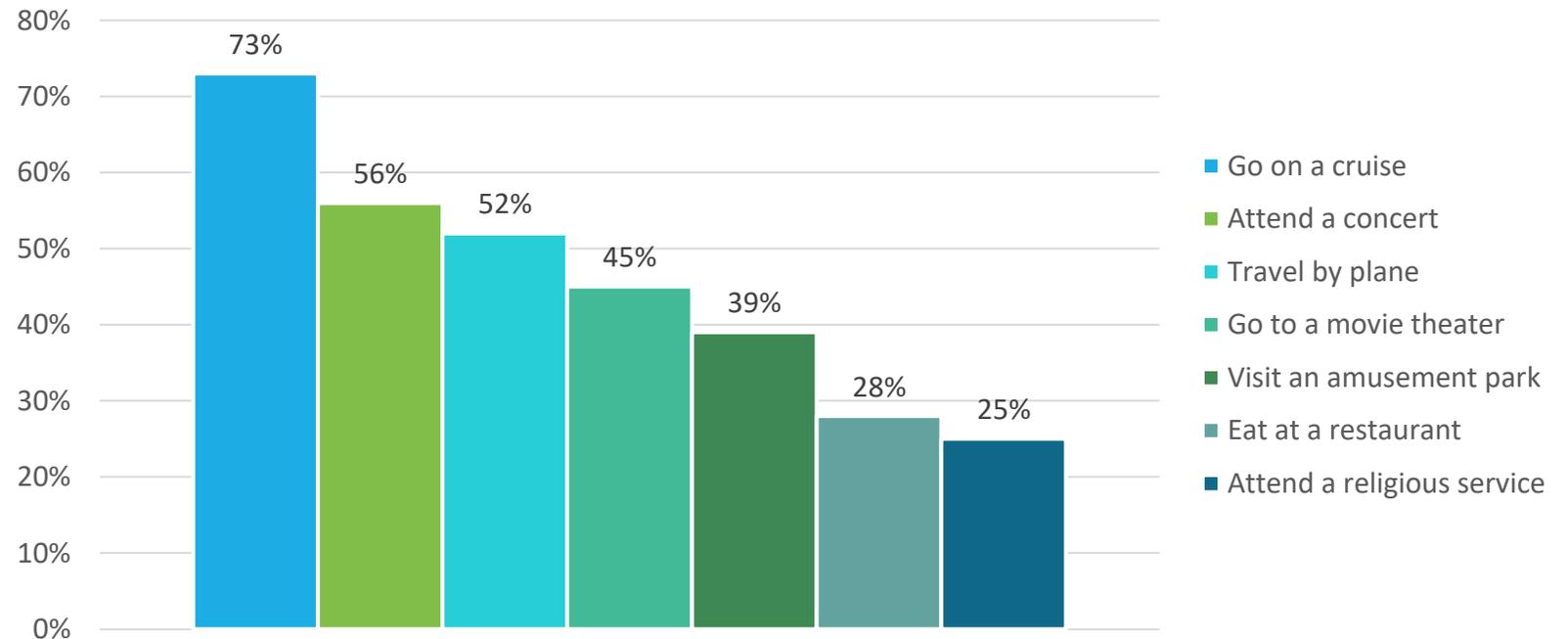
- 86% of Democratic voters would support reinstatement of strict health measures this fall, compared to 67% of Independents and 32% of Republican voters.
- 37% of Republican voters say they have contract COVID at least once, compared to only 22% of Democratic voters.

COVID's Long-Term Impacts on Behavior

Lifestyle changes driven by COVID may become permanent for an increasing number of seniors

- 73% say they are less likely to go on a cruise, up from 58% in May of 2021*.
- 56% are less likely to attend a concert, compared to 33% in May of 2021.
- 52% are less likely to travel by plane, compared to 31% in May of 2021.

“Which of the following activities are you less likely to engage in today compared to before the pandemic? Select all that apply.”



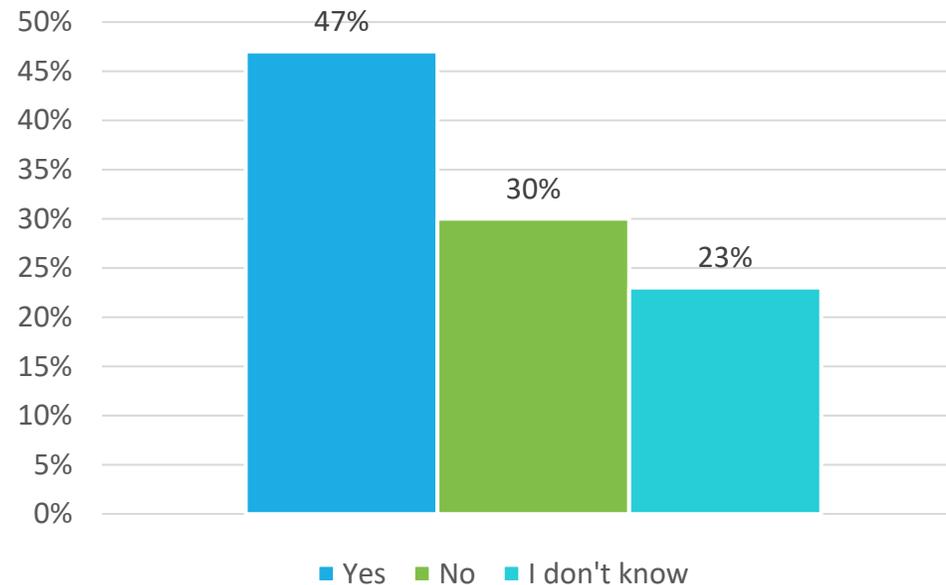
* 2021 data from eHealth's Health Insurance Trends survey report published in May of 2021.

COVID Boosters and Medicare Beneficiaries

Fewer Medicare beneficiaries are willing to commit to ongoing COVID boosters

- 47% of respondents say they would get 1-2 COVID boosters per year indefinitely, compared to 62% in eHealth's November 2021 survey*
- 30% say they would not get ongoing boosters.
- 23% are unsure.

“If recommended by your doctor or the government, would you get a COVID booster shot 1-2 times per year indefinitely?”



Democrats and those who have never contracted COVID are most likely to commit to boosters

- 70% of Democratic voters are willing to get COVID boosters indefinitely, compared to 24% of Republicans and 49% of Independents.
- 51% of those who have never had COVID say they would get boosters, compared to 38% of those who have had COVID at least once.

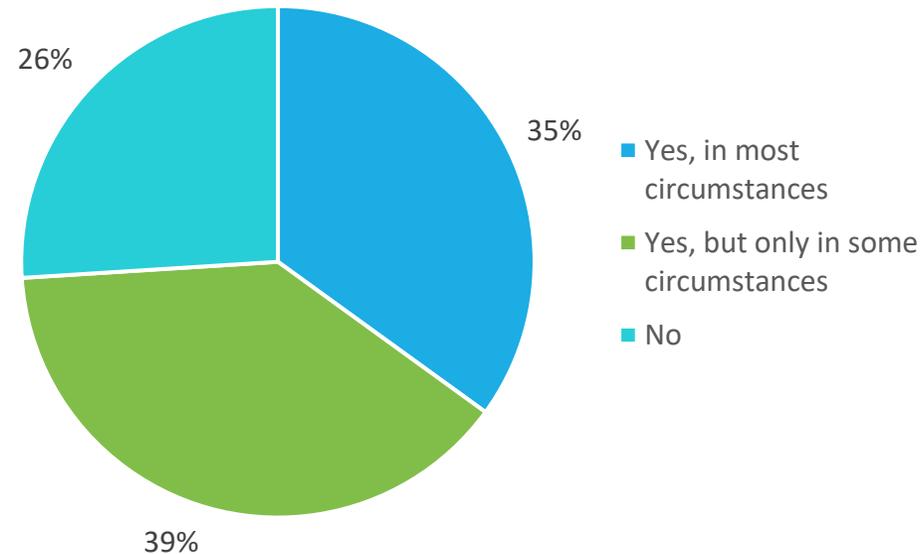
* See eHealth's Health Insurance Trends survey report, published in November of 2021.

Masking and Medicare Beneficiaries

More than two thirds are still using masks in at least some circumstances

- 35% say they are still using masks in public in most circumstances.
- 39% use masks in public only in some circumstances.
- 26% are not using masks in public at all.

“Are you still using masks in public places?”



Political affiliation and gender illustrate divide in mask use among seniors

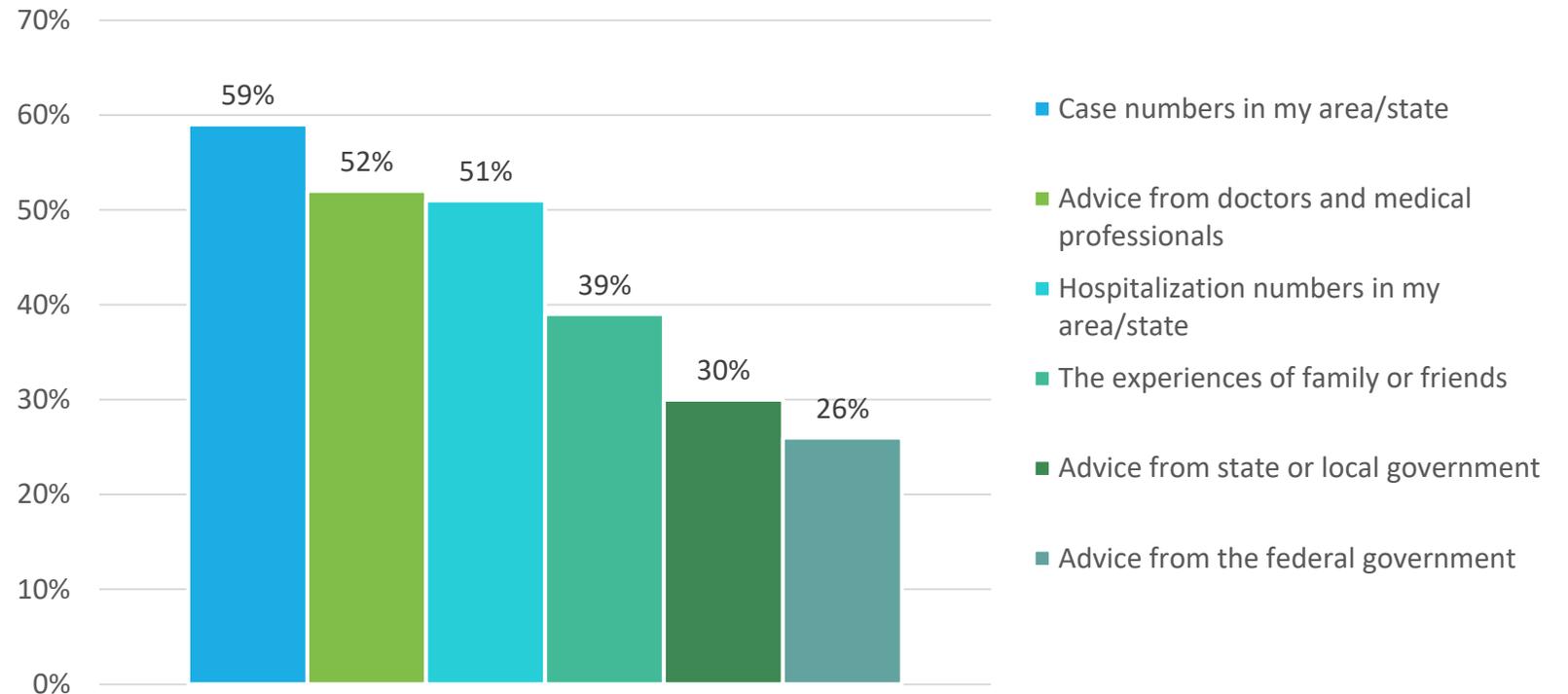
- 50% of Democratic voters say they continue to use masks in most circumstances, compared to only 15% of Republicans and 35% of Independents.
- 33% of men say they no longer use masks in any circumstances, compared to 22% of women.

Gauging Personal Risk of COVID

Most gauge their risk based on case numbers and medical advice

- 59% gauge their personal risk by COVID case numbers in their area.
- About half look to advice from medical professional (52%) or local hospitalization numbers.
- Respondents are more likely to gauge their risk based on state and local guidance (30%) than federal guidance (26%).

“What factors do you consider when gauging your personal risk from COVID today? Select all that apply.”



Methodology Note

The findings presented in this report are based on a voluntary survey of Medicare beneficiaries who purchased a Medicare Advantage, Medicare Supplement (Medigap) or Medicare Part D plan from eHealth, with coverage still in effect at the time of the survey. The voluntary survey was conducted online in late July of 2022 and a total of 2,519 responses were collected. Percentages have been rounded to the nearest full percentage point and may add to slightly more or less than 100% due to rounding. For the purposes of this report, Democratic and Republican voters are those who indicate they are more likely to vote for the party in question, while Independents are those who say they are equally likely to vote for candidates from either party.

About eHealth

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