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**THE COVID STATES PROJECT:
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY
REPORT #42: THE TRAJECTORY OF
HEALTH-RELATED BEHAVIORS IN NEW YORK**

USA, March 2021

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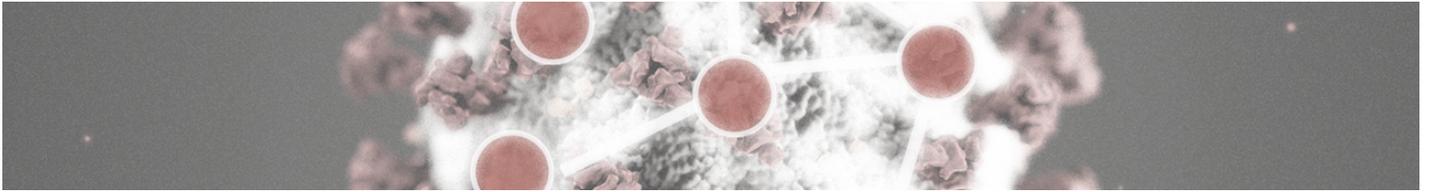
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OF NEW JERSEY



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Report of March 5, 2021, v.1

The COVID States Project

From: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States

A joint project of:

Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

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COVER MEMO

Summary Memo — March 5, 2021

The COVID States Project

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Partners: Northeastern University, Harvard University/Harvard Medical School, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University

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From April 2020 through January 2021, we conducted multiple waves of a large, 50-state survey, some results of which are presented here. You can find previous reports online at covidstates.org.

Note on methods:

Over 16 survey waves, we polled 239,012 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The data were collected between April and March 2021 by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender. In addition to balancing on these dimensions, we reweighted our data using demographic characteristics to match the U.S. population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education, and living in urban, suburban, or rural areas.

For this report, we split our 9th survey wave, collected from October 23 to November 4, 2020, into its October and November responses, and included them in our October and November waves, respectively. The periods covered by each of the final 9 survey waves used in this report are as follows: Late April Wave: 4/17/20-4/26/20, Early May Wave: 5/2/20-5/15/20, Late May Wave: 5/16/20-5/31/20, Late June Wave: 6/12/20-6/28/20, Late July Wave: 7/10/20-7/26/20, August Wave: 8/7/20-8/26/20, September Wave: 9/4/20-9/27/20, October Wave: 10/2/20-10/31/20, November Wave: 11/1/20-11/23/20, December/January Wave 12/16/20- 1/11/21, and February Wave: 2/5/21 - 3/1/21.

The trajectory of health-related behaviors in New York

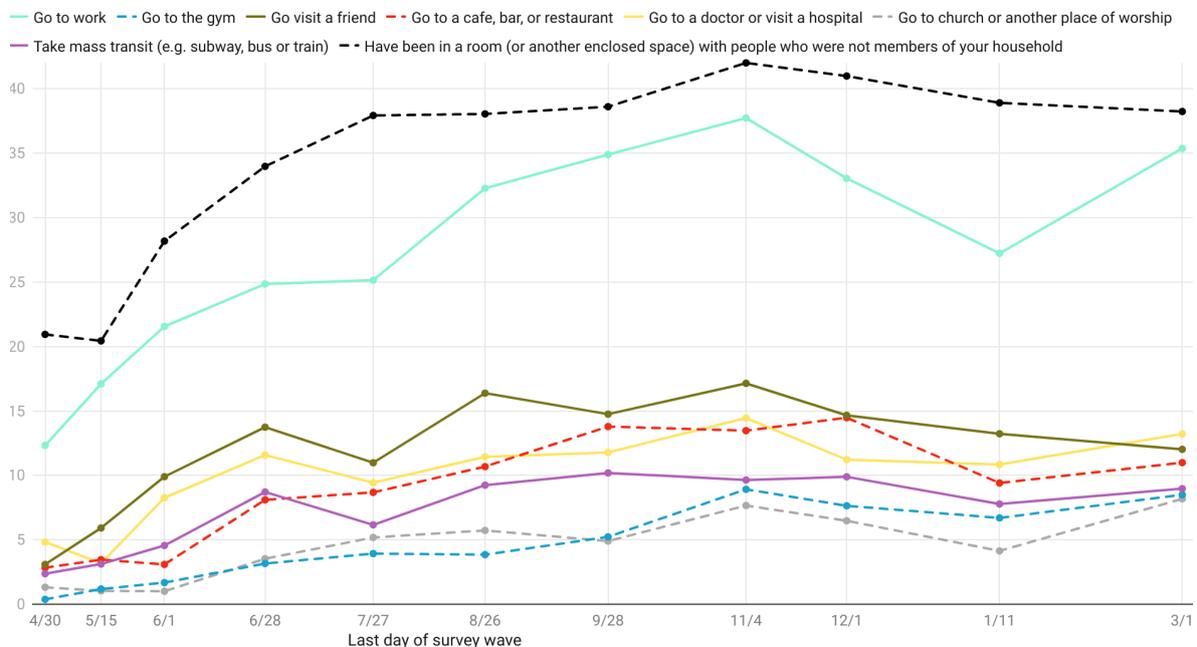
New York is similar to other states in the northeast, in that it had its initial spike in COVID-19 cases during March and April, with a second wave that peaked in December and January. In this report, we examine New Yorkers' health-related behaviors that facilitate or inhibit the spread of the disease, focusing specifically on social distancing and mask wearing.

Findings

The major pattern we find in the data is a substantial relaxing of social distancing behaviors since the spring of 2020, with some tightening in the late fall/early winter that year. In *Figure 1*, we show trends in 8 different activities outside of the home that people reported engaging in within the 24 hours prior to taking our survey. The activities include going to work, to the gym, to a bar or café, to a place of worship, to the doctor, visiting a friend, taking mass transit, or being in a room with people who live outside one's household.

In the last 24 hours, did you or any members of your household do any of the following activities outside of your home?

Percentage of respondents for New York state across 11 survey waves. The data is reweighted using demographic characteristics to match the New York state population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education and living in urban, suburban or rural areas.



New York state Sample: N1 = 542 (04/16/20 - 04/30/20), N2 = 625 (05/02/20 - 05/15/20), N3 = 620 (05/16/20 - 06/01/20), N4 = 658 (06/12/20 - 06/28/20), N5 = 465 (07/10/20 - 07/27/20), N6 = 618 (08/07/20 - 08/26/20), N7 = 688 (09/04/20 - 09/28/20), N8 = 849 (10/02/20 - 11/04/20), N9 = 716 (11/04/20 - 12/01/20), N10 = 523 (12/16/2020 - 1/11/2021), N11 = 563 (02/05/2021 - 03/01/2021)

Source: The COVID-19 Consortium for Understanding the Public's Policy Preferences Across States (A joint project of: Northeastern University, Harvard University, Rutgers University, and Northwestern University) www.covidstates.org
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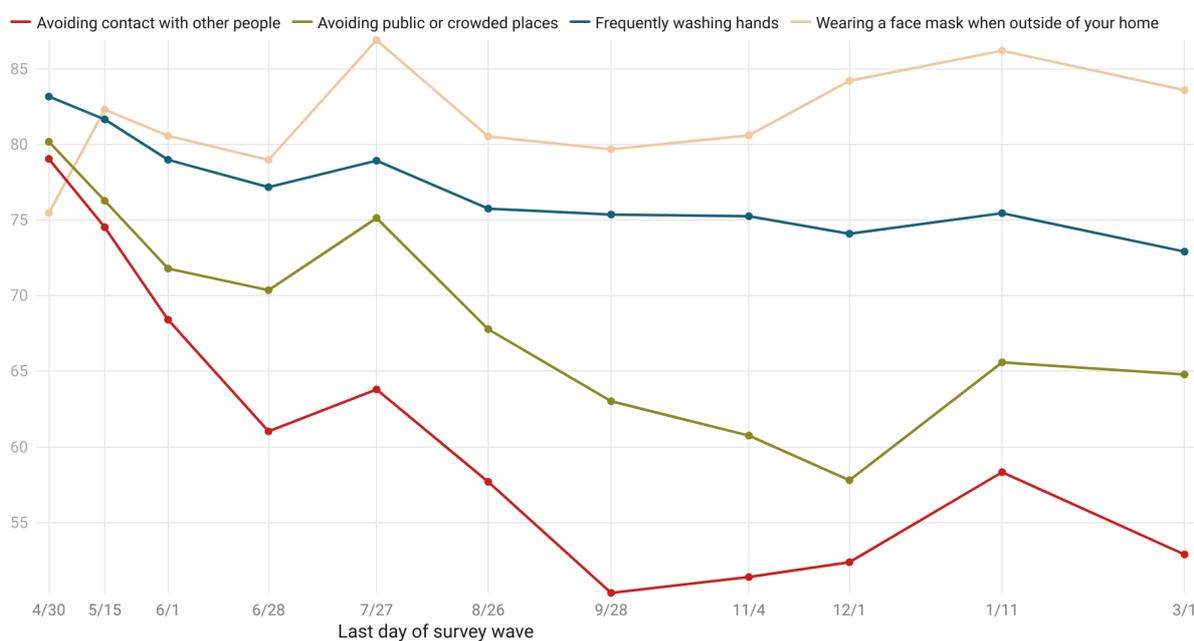
Figure 1.

The percentage of respondents who reported being in a room with someone who was not a part of their household roughly doubled since the spring, jumping from 20% in April to nearly 39% in February. This number increased to over 40% in fall 2020, peaking in November. Similarly, the percentage of respondents who reported going to work outside their home increased steadily from 12% in April to a peak of 37% in November. While this rate dropped to 27% between November and January, it rebounded to 35% in February.

Notably, the rate of engagement in all 8 surveyed activities declined between October and December 2020, as the second wave of the COVID-19 virus hit the country. This trend was most starkly apparent in the percentage of people who reported going to work. The percentage of respondents who reported visiting a friend, going to a place of worship, or taking mass transportation all decreased in February 2021 to levels not observed since mid-summer 2020.

In the last week, how closely did you personally follow the health recommendations listed below?

Percentage of respondents for New York state answering "very closely" across 11 survey waves. The data is reweighted using demographic characteristics to match the New York state population with respect to race/ethnicity, age, gender, education and living in urban, suburban or rural areas.



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Figure 2.

We also asked respondents about their adherence to a series of recommended behaviors aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19 (see *Figure 2*). With one important exception, the data in *Figure 2* indicates that adherence to all of these behaviors dropped substantially between the spring and fall of 2020.

Avoiding crowded places dropped from 80% in April to 63% in February 2021. In the same timeframe, avoiding contact with other people dropped from 79% to 53%. The one key exception to the downward trend is mask wearing. New York (already one of the highest mask-wearing states in the spring of 2020) jumped from 75% adherence in April 2020 to 83% in February 2021.

In the fall months, we saw a notable increase in adherence to all health behaviors. Between October and December, adherence to the surveyed behaviors increased, with the percentage of respondents reporting that they avoided contact with other people increasing from 51% to 58%. These trends may be attributable to the significant spikes in cases in late November and December, in addition to the public awareness of those COVID-19 upticks. As cases subsided, so too did the increased adherence to recommended behavior. For example, avoiding contact with other people dropped from 58% in January to 53% in February.

Conclusions

While adherence to health and safety guidelines has decreased overall in New York since the spring, spikes in caseloads near the end of 2020 may have contributed to higher rates of social distancing, safer behaviors outside of the home, and stricter following of public health recommendations. The critical question for the moment is how New Yorkers will respond to the current situation, wherein: (1) case counts have gone down, (2) vaccination rates have gone up, but (3) more transmissible and [likely more deadly variants](#) of COVID-19 are spreading around the country. Do New Yorkers let down their guard because of the apparent reduced levels of risk, or do they maintain their vigilance in the face of an uncertain third wave of the virus? At present, our data suggest that they are relaxing some of their adherence to social distancing, mask wearing, and hand washing. This change of behavior may be premature, especially in light of the apparent plateau in COVID-19 activity they are experiencing, at rates that remain higher than some neighboring states.

Appendix: Report Data

The data for this report are available through an [interactive web application](#). The online dashboard displays state-by-state information about behaviors and policy attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also includes data about public adherence to health guidelines like hand washing, mask wearing, and social distancing.

The application also provides access to data and charts showing public attitudes about federal, state, and local government policies aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, the dashboard offers access to metrics on approval of the way the president and state governors are handling the pandemic.

Users of the dashboard can select states to explore data and generate graphics that can be downloaded in PDF or PNG format. All the data that used in the dashboard can be found on the home page and downloaded in a comma separated values (CSV) format.

State behavior dashboard: lazerlab.shinyapps.io/Behaviors_During_COVID