

Coronavirus Concerns Led More Than 1 in 10 Nonelderly Adults to Delay or Forgo Health Care in Spring 2021

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Many adults have gone without needed health care during the COVID-19 pandemic over concerns about being exposed to the novel coronavirus in hospitals, doctor's and dentist's offices,¹ and other health care settings. New data from the Urban Institute's April 2021 Health Reform Monitoring Survey show that 1 in 4 nonelderly adults (24.9 percent) reported delaying or forgoing care for this reason in the past 12 months (data not shown). And more than 1 in 10 (11.0 percent) reported having this experience in the past 30 days (figure 1), showing that coronavirus concerns led some adults to continue delaying or forgoing care into this past spring. Unmet health care needs can adversely affect health and other daily activities and could potentially worsen chronic health conditions among adults who have them.

Findings

In April 2021, 11.0 percent of adults ages 18 to 64 reported they had delayed or forgone at least one type of care in the past 30 days over worries about exposure to the coronavirus, and 6.3 percent had unmet needs for multiple types of care (figure 1). Hispanic/Latinx and Black adults delayed or did not get care at higher rates than white adults (16.2 percent and 13.3 percent versus 8.7 percent; data not shown), and adults with family incomes below 250 percent of the federal poverty level were more likely than adults with higher incomes to avoid care (14.9 percent versus 8.2 percent; data not shown). Adults most commonly delayed or did not get dental care in the past 30 days (6.8 percent), followed by general doctor or specialist visits, preventive health screenings or medical tests, and hospital visits (figure 1).

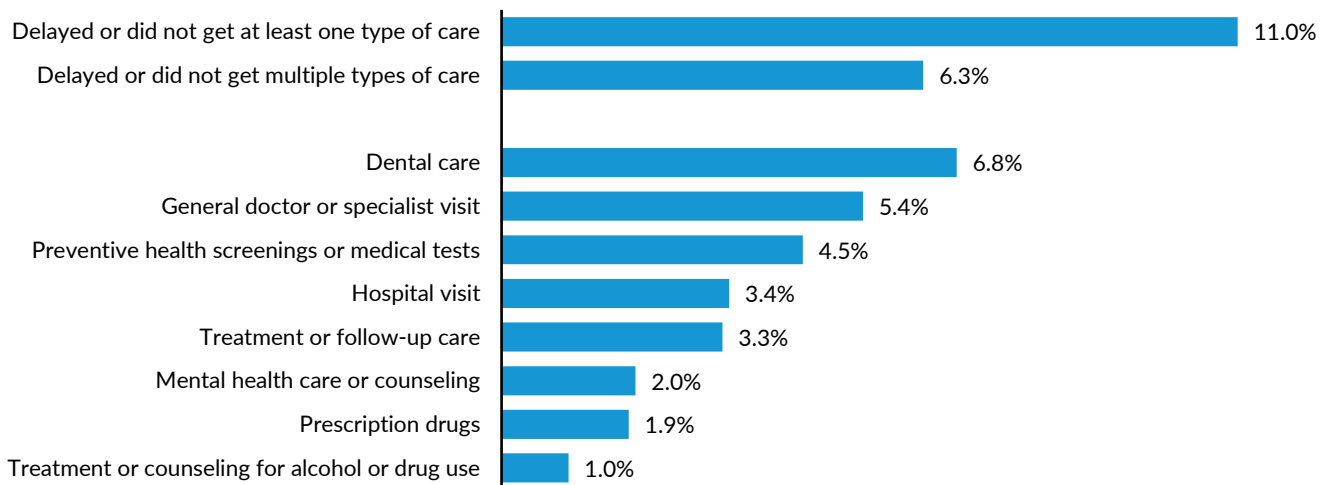
About 1 in 6 adults with two or more chronic health conditions (16.7 percent) and nearly 1 in 7 adults with one chronic condition (13.5 percent) reported unmet needs for at least one type of care, compared with 1 in 13 adults with no chronic conditions (7.6 percent; figure 2). Adults with multiple chronic conditions were more than twice as likely as those with no conditions to report unmet needs for multiple types of care (9.9 percent versus 4.2 percent).

Conclusions

In the early spring of 2021, as COVID-19 case rates began falling from their peak but many nonelderly adults were not yet vaccinated, people continued avoiding health care settings because of coronavirus exposure concerns. Unmet needs were high for adults with chronic health conditions, which could reflect both their greater health care needs and greater concerns about virus exposure. Containing the pandemic by ensuring broad vaccination coverage and equitable access to the vaccines will be critical to easing fears about contracting the virus. Progress toward herd immunity is especially important for immunocompromised adults, who gain less protection from the vaccines. As vaccination rates increase and more states loosen restrictions on many activities, more people may try to obtain missed care. To meet these needs and address care gaps, it will be important for providers and health plan staff to actively identify and reach out to patients, especially those with chronic health conditions, who have missed preventive and chronic care.

FIGURE 1

Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Who Reported Delaying or Forgoing Health Care in the Past 30 Days over Coronavirus Concerns, April 2021



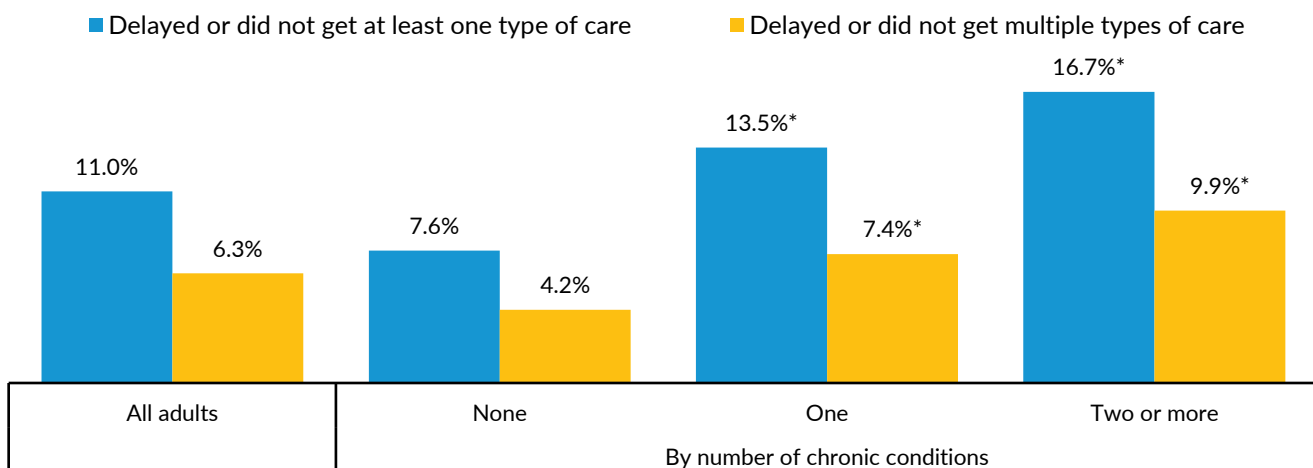
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Source: Health Reform Monitoring Survey, April 2021.

Notes: The survey asked respondents whether they needed care but did not get it because they were worried about being exposed to the coronavirus. We cannot distinguish between delayed and forgone care.

FIGURE 2

Share of Adults Ages 18 to 64 Who Reported Delaying or Forgoing Health Care in the Past 30 Days over Coronavirus Concerns, Overall and by Number of Chronic Conditions, April 2021



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Source: Health Reform Monitoring Survey, April 2021.

Notes: The survey asked respondents whether they needed care but did not get it because they were worried about being exposed to coronavirus. We cannot distinguish between delayed and forgone care.

* Estimate differs significantly from that for adults without chronic health conditions at the 0.01 level, using two-tailed tests.

¹ Dulce Gonzalez, Michael Karpman, Genevieve M. Kenney, and Stephen Zuckerman, "Delayed and Forgone Health Care for Nonelderly Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic" (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2021).