

FEWER THAN 6 IN 10 TENNESSEE PARENTS REPORT WEARING MASKS ALL THE TIME, NEARLY HALF UNLIKELY TO VACCINATE THEIR CHILDREN FOR COVID-19

COVID-19 has surged in Tennessee and public health organizations are urgently asking that people take measures to limit virus spread and prepare for flu season. The Vanderbilt Child Health Poll asked a statewide sample of Tennessee parents about their family's COVID-19 control measures and their plans to vaccinate against COVID-19 and influenza.

Although evidence is clear that masks reduce viral transmission at the individual level and reduce case spread at the population level, only 57% of parents reported wearing a mask or face covering every time they were in stores, businesses, or outside the home in the past month. Overall, 57% of parents believe that masks protect themselves and most parents believe that wearing a mask is important for children (68%), easy (66%), and protects others (66%).

Mask wearing and perceptions of masks varied by race/ethnicity. Most non-Hispanic Black parents (73%) reported always wearing a mask, compared to 61% of Hispanic and 52% of non-Hispanic White parents. Larger percentages of non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic parents compared to non-Hispanic White parents believe that masks protect themselves (74%, 74%, 52%), others (74%, 72%, 64%), are easy to wear (73%, 73%, 65%), and are important for children (79%, 78%, 65%).

Since the start of the pandemic, Tennessee has not issued a statewide mask mandate and instead has permitted mayors to choose whether to implement and enforce local mandates. Overall, 49% of parents strongly agreed or agreed they would be more likely to wear a mask if there was a state mandate. Forty-six percent were more likely to wear a mask if there was a national mandate.

Vaccinating children against seasonal influenza annually is recommended by the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As the COVID-19 pandemic surged, public health officials have encouraged influenza vaccination to protect individuals and alleviate stress to our health system. Despite these recommendations, 64% of parents reported that they were very likely or likely to vaccinate their child against influenza this season. Non-Hispanic White (66%) and Hispanic parents (65%) were more likely to plan to vaccinate their children against influenza than non-Hispanic Black parents (56%).

It is likely that a COVID-19 vaccine will be approved soon for adults, with studies and approvals for children likely to follow. Vaccinating children against COVID-19 will likely become important to protecting them from the virus and controlling community spread. Tennessee parents were asked how likely they would be to get the COVID-19 vaccine for their child if a safe and effective vaccine was developed and approved by the US Food and Drug Administration in the next 12 months. Overall, only about half (53%) of parents reported that they were very likely or likely to get the COVID-19 vaccine for their child, lower than the proportion indicating that they would get the flu vaccine. Hispanic parents were more likely (61%) than non-Hispanic White (54%) and non-Hispanic Black parents (44%) to plan to vaccinate their children against COVID-19.

We also asked parents who they trusted to provide accurate information about the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines. For COVID-19 information, parents ranked the CDC (38%), Tennessee Department of Health (38%), research (37%) and their child's health care provider (35%) as the most trusted, but no person or group exceeded 40%. A similar pattern followed for vaccines with a child's health care provider described as the most trusted (41%) followed by the CDC (37%), research (32%) and Tennessee Department of Health (31%).



There were some key differences noted by race and ethnicity. For example, the highest rated source of information for COVID-19 was a child's healthcare provider for Hispanic parents (46%), compared to research studies (39%) for non-Hispanic White parents and the Tennessee Department of Health for (44%) non-Hispanic Black parents.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

COVID-19 has disproportionately affected individuals from marginalized racial ethnic groups, due, at least in part to structural racism that has adversely affected where families live, work, learn, and play. These inequities manifest in greater likelihood of being an essential worker, living in a crowded, multi-generational home, or not having access to health care leading to greater risk of virus exposure and the conditions associated with severe disease.

No group reported mask wearing at recommended levels, but non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic parents were more likely to wear masks and facial coverings than non-Hispanic White parents. Non-Hispanic Black parents were much less likely to endorse vaccinating their children against both seasonal influenza and COVID-19, which is particularly relevant given their increased risk of COVID-19. There is an urgent need for medical and public health communities to better understand COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among parents and focus on building trust by creating a rigorous process focused on transparency and inclusion.

SUMMARY

COVID-19 has surged in Tennessee and public health organizations are urgently asking that people take measures to limit virus spread and prepare for flu season. However, many Tennessee parents have not consistently embraced mask wearing and are hesitant to vaccinate their children against the virus. Although public health organizations and medical professionals were frequently cited as trustworthy sources of information, mistrust is common among Tennessee parents.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS

CDC Help Stop the Spread of COVID-19 in Children

Ways to protect children from getting and spreading COVID-19

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/children/protect-children.html>

CDC Vaccine Information for You and Your Family

Benefits, safety, FAQs, and more about COVID-19 vaccines

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/index.html>

AAP Healthy Children

What we know about COVID-19 and how you can protect your family and others

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/2019-Novel-Coronavirus.aspx>

AAP Healthy Children

Using physical distancing to keep you and your family safe during COVID-19

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Social-Distancing-Why-Keeping-Your-Distance-Helps-Keep-Others-Safe.aspx>

AAP Healthy Children

When and how to use hand washing for disease prevention

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/prevention/Pages/Hand-Washing-A-Powerful-Antidote-to-Illness.aspx>

AAP Healthy Children

Cloth face coverings for children during COVID-19

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Cloth-Face-Coverings-for-Children-During-COVID-19.aspx>

AAP Healthy Children

The Flu

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/chest-lungs/Pages/The-Flu.aspx>



Lead Authors: Kecia Carroll, MD, MPH; Sarah Loch, MPH

Project Leads: Stephen Patrick, MD, MPH, MS; Kim Lovell, MPH, MBA

Contributors: Alese Halvorson, MSc; Carolyn Heinrich, PhD; Laura Henkhaus, PhD; Mia Letterie; Melissa McPheeters, PhD, MPH; Tamarra Spalding, MPH; Amanda Stone, PhD; Joe Zickafoose, MD, MS

Full results at www.childpolicy.org/poll



VANDERBILT
Center for
Child Health Policy