

"TEMPUS

Study Confirms That Americans Neglected Their Healthcare During COVID-19 Pandemic

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From the beginning of the pandemic, health experts were concerned that millions of Americans would defer treatment of existing illnesses—including [cancer](#)—and postpone routine preventative screenings given the justifiable fear of contracting COVID-19.

Now, more than a year after COVID-19 forced the country to a complete halt, a clearer picture is starting to emerge surrounding Americans' approach to care during this challenging time: healthcare was put on the back burner for a variety of reasons. To better understand this, Tempus recently surveyed 1,078 Americans on the state of their health during the pandemic, their reasons for neglecting healthcare care in some cases, and their general awareness of preventive healthcare.

Uncovering Reasons for Lack of Treatment for New Health Concerns

We began by asking about new health concerns that emerged over the past year, unrelated to COVID-19. Fifty-nine percent of those surveyed said they experienced adverse health symptoms but did not seek treatment for them. Of this group, 79 percent reported they already suffer from conditions that are considered co-morbid with respect to COVID-19, including obesity, heart conditions, diabetes, cancer, and chronic lung diseases.

Unsurprisingly, when asked why they did not seek treatment for a given symptom, most people cited their fear of contracting COVID-19 (58 percent). More than half (51 percent) also cited the cost of care, and 34 percent cited the hassle of scheduling an appointment.

Of the survey respondents who were already undergoing treatment for an illness when the pandemic started, 61 percent said they suspended treatment at some point during the pandemic, and 66 percent—including those suffering from COVID-19 co-morbidities—postponed or canceled a medical appointment. This is precisely what public health experts were worried about: people neglecting care for already dangerous health conditions in fear of contracting COVID-19.

But deferring healthcare wasn't just limited to adults. 50 percent of parents surveyed reported that their children missed medical appointments during the pandemic, including routine check-ups and appointments related to existing illness.

How Financial Situations Impacted Healthcare

The financial impact of the pandemic also had consequences on healthcare. With millions of Americans having lost their job—which led to lost wages and loss of employer-sponsored health insurance—it's no surprise that the cost of healthcare was the second most cited reason for people missing medical appointments during the pandemic. Among all survey respondents, 48 percent said they did not pursue some type of healthcare during the pandemic because of a loss of insurance or income. Additionally, 31 percent cited cost as the reason they stopped taking one or more prescription medications.

Exposing the Truth About American's Preventative Healthcare Knowledge

Given the importance of preventative healthcare—which includes a dedication to routine screenings—we asked people about how the pandemic has disrupted these routines. We also explored to what extent Americans are aware of up-to-date guidelines for the most commonly recommended screenings.

Sixty-six percent of those surveyed said they postponed or canceled one or more routine health checks during the pandemic. Of the group that deferred care, 83 percent were suffering from COVID-19 comorbidities. The reasons people cited were consistent with our other queries—fear of contracting COVID-19 was most prominent (63 percent), followed by the cost of care (43 percent), and an inability to get check-ups scheduled with doctors (29 percent).

When Tempus asked people if they know up-to-date guidelines for various screenings, 56 percent stated they are "very aware" of what is recommended. Unfortunately, that was not demonstrated when people were asked about specifics.

Of the seven most common preventative health screenings—dental, vision, skin cancer, HPV/Pap, breast cancer, colon cancer, and prostate cancer—just two percent of our respondents knew all seven guidelines and only 16 percent knew at least five of seven guidelines.

Looking to the future, we asked our survey respondents what might be helpful to them to ensure they take necessary preventative health measures. Fifty-three percent wish screenings were easier to schedule, 45 percent wish they could bundle screenings together instead of doing them all separately, and 42 percent wish they could access preventative healthcare in a more convenient location, like a local pharmacy.

A major aspect of preventative health care is awareness of family medical history. Fortunately, we found 84 percent of respondents take family medical history "seriously," and 61 percent say it influences their lifestyle choices. Lifestyle choices frequently influenced include: exercise (67 percent), diet (61 percent), stress (49 percent), alcohol consumption (39 percent), and sun exposure (38 percent).

While we cannot yet comprehend the full impact of millions of Americans neglecting routine healthcare and deferring illness treatment for more than a year, we're starting to see a light at the end of the tunnel. Americans have begun to return to their doctors' offices to resume routine check-ups and postponed treatments, as well as seek care for new health concerns. Although the consequences of neglected healthcare over the past year cannot be unwound, the story remains the same with regard to the future prospects of our collective thriving—nothing beats vigilance in preventative health care and healthy lifestyle choices. We hope the pandemic has reinforced that truth.

Methodology

Between March 17 – 27, 2021, we surveyed 1,078 Americans about their experience of health and health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Forty-nine percent of our respondents were female and 51 percent male, with an average age of 39 years old and an age range of 18 to 70 years old.

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