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THE COVID STATES PROJECT:
A 50-STATE COVID-19 SURVEY
REPORT #25: PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR MEASURES AIMED AT CURBING COVID-19

USA, November 2020

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Report of November 27, 2020, v.2

Correction: State-level tables and charts were removed due to a data processing error that affected them. An updated version of those numbers is available in our Report #32.

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 — November 27, 2020

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From April through November, 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:

Between November 3 and 23, we surveyed 19,766 individuals across all 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The survey was conducted by PureSpectrum via an online, nonprobability sample, with state-level representative quotas for race/ethnicity, age, and gender (for methodological details on the other waves, see covidstates.org). 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. This was the latest in a series of surveys we have been conducting since April 2020, examining attitudes and behaviors regarding COVID-19 in the United States.

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Contents

Public support for restrictive measures aimed at curbing the spread of COVID-19

As COVID-19 continues to surge nationwide, some particularly hard-hit localities are implementing (or re-implementing) relatively strict measures to protect public safety. While many of these measures have been shown to be effective at slowing down COVID-19 transmission in the US (and other countries) in earlier months, the potential implementation of measures such as closing non-essential businesses, adopting distance learning, and restricting restaurants to take-out have provoked fierce debates around the country. While some advocates have sought to frame the debate as a choice between public health and education, on the one hand, or the economy, on the other, in many respects the decisions that public health officials face are far more complicated, and public views on these topics more nuanced.

Based on evidence around the world, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recently refined its messaging to communities and provided clear guidelines on the risks of an array of activities -- such as indoor dining and keeping schools open by implementing multiple prevention measures -- in the presence of high COVID-19 transmission. Many European countries have prioritized keeping schools open over bars and restaurants. The corresponding prioritization in the US has been more varied.

In the post-election (November) wave of our survey, we asked respondents whether and to what extent they approved or disapproved of seven such measures intended to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including: (1) asking people to stay at home and avoid gathering in large groups (which, for economy of words, we will frequently refer to as "*stay-at-home*"), (2) requiring most businesses other than grocery stores and pharmacies to close (which we will refer to as "*businesses*"), (3) canceling major sports and entertainment events ("*events*"), (4) prohibiting K-12 schools from teaching in person ("*schools*"), (5) limiting restaurants to carry-out only ("*restaurants*"), (6) restricting international travel to the US ("*international travel*"), and (7) restricting travel within the US ("*domestic travel*"). We offered participants four response options: strongly approve, somewhat approve, somewhat disapprove, and strongly disapprove. We collapsed this into two categories: approve or disapprove. We present our overall findings below, broken out by population subgroups, and by state.

Key takeaways

(1) Substantial majorities (6 in 10, or more) of Americans support *all seven* restrictive measures.

(2) Majorities of Americans -- and in most cases *large* majorities -- in *every state* support five of the seven restrictive measures. The exceptions are prohibiting K-12 schools from teaching in-person classes and closing most businesses other than grocery stores and pharmacies. In the latter two cases, support falls below 50% in three states for businesses and two states for schools (yet both are still supported by majorities in all other states).

(3) Support is particularly strong for prohibiting international travel and requesting that people stay at home and avoid large gatherings.

(4) Americans across nearly all subgroups (partisanship, race, gender, age) and states are, in general, *least* supportive of closing businesses other than grocery stores and pharmacies, followed by prohibiting K-12 schools from teaching in-person.

(5) The greater a respondent's concern about contracting COVID-19 for either their family members or themselves, the greater their support for restrictive measures. Similarly, belief that COVID-19 is increasing in a respondent's state is also positively related to their support for restrictions.

(6) Families with children at home are about as likely as other respondents to support restrictive measures, including closing K-12 schools to in-person classes.

(7) Americans are starkly divided along partisan lines. Democrats and Biden voters are substantially more supportive of nearly all of the queried measures than Republicans or Trump voters, especially for closing in-person K-12 schools, non-essential businesses, and eat-in restaurants. Nevertheless, all four subgroups (Democrats, Republicans, Trump Voters, Biden Voters) are *least supportive* of closing non-essential businesses.

Overall national support for restrictive measures

Substantial majorities of Americans approve of all seven restrictive measures we surveyed (see Figure 1)**.** Americans, on average, approve of stay-at-home requests and restricting international travel to the US (with average approval rates of 85% and 88%, respectively), as well as canceling sports/entertainment events and restricting restaurants to take-out only (78% and 74%, respectively). Americans register lower (albeit still quite high) levels of approval toward the other measures, including restricting domestic US travel (70%), prohibiting K-12 schools from in-person teaching (69%) and finally, closing non-essential businesses, which receives the lowest average level of support across the seven measures in our survey (60%).

Race and gender

We next compare attitudes across gender and race/ethnicity (also shown in Figure 1). **We find only modest differences between men and women, with the largest gender gap being 7 percentage points for *events*, with women more likely than men to favor curtailing sports/entertainment events (82% vs. 75%).** The gaps for *schools* and *businesses* are small (2% each).

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by gender

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve]

	Total	Male	Female
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	85%	83%	86%
Requiring most businesses to close	60%	59%	61%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	78%	75%	82%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	74%	71%	76%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	88%	86%	89%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	70%	67%	73%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	69%	68%	70%
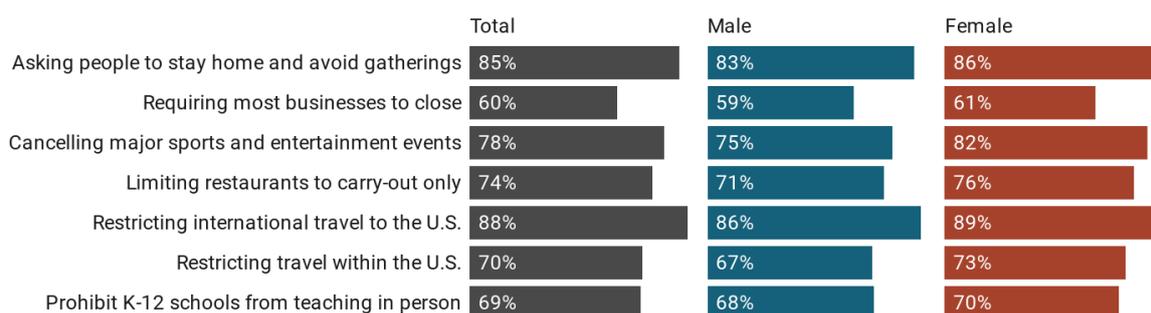
National sample, N = 19,766, Time period: 11/03/2020-11/23/2020

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. Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread, by gender

Turning to race/ethnicity (see Figure 2), **the two largest racial gaps are 18 and 17 percentage points for *schools* and *restaurants* respectively, comparing Black vs. white respondents, with Black respondents being more supportive than their white counterparts of both restrictions. White respondents in our survey are least likely to approve of six of the seven measures**, with the exception of prohibiting international travel. For this last measure, white respondents are about as likely as other racial/ethnic groups to support (88%, with all groups ranging from 86% to 89%). Black and Asian American respondents are most likely to support *stay-at-home* (92% and 93%, respectively), closely followed by Hispanics (87%), and whites (82%). Black respondents are the most supportive group for closing non-essential businesses (72%), followed by Hispanics and Asian Americans (69% and 67%, respectively) with, again, whites being least supportive (55%). For *events*, Asian American respondents are most likely to approve of public-safety-related restrictions (89%), followed by Black respondents (84%), Hispanics (81%) and whites (76%).

Black respondents are the most supportive group for prohibiting K-12 schools from in-person teaching (82% approval), followed by Asian Americans (81%), Hispanics (75%) and whites (64%). With respect to *restaurants*, Black respondents are again the most supportive group for take-out-only restrictions (86%), followed by Asian American respondents (85%), Hispanics (81%), and whites (69%). For *international travel*, 89% of Black respondents, 88% of whites and Asian Americans, and 86% of Hispanics support such restrictions. Finally, 79% of Black and 78% of Asian American respondents support prohibiting domestic travel, compared to 73% of Hispanics, and 68% of whites.

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by race and ethnicity

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve]

	African American	Asian American	Hispanic	White
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	92%	93%	87%	82%
Requiring most businesses to close	72%	69%	67%	55%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	84%	89%	81%	76%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	86%	85%	81%	69%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	89%	88%	86%	88%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	79%	78%	73%	68%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	82%	81%	75%	64%
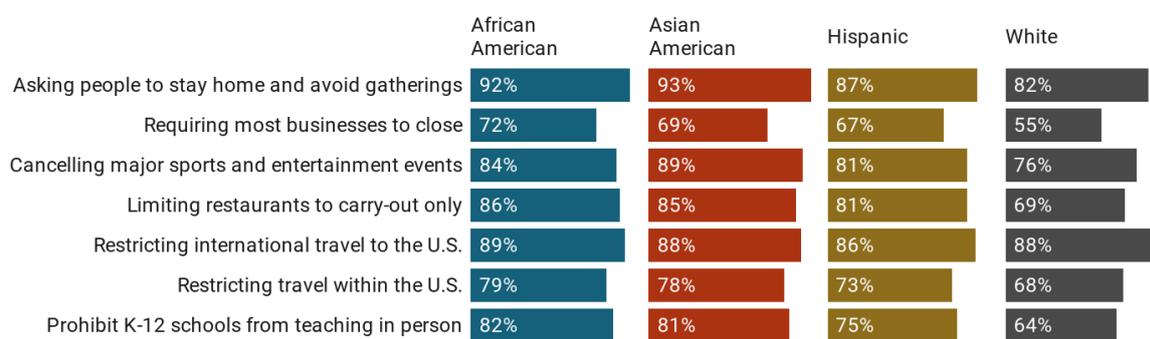
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Figure 2. Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread, by race and ethnicity

Partisanship

All three partisan groups are *least* supportive of closing non-essential businesses, while Republicans and Independents are *most* supportive of prohibiting international travel, which is the second-most-supported restriction among Democrats. However, there are large partisan gaps for the other COVID-19-related restrictions (see Figure 3). Overall, when we break respondents out by political party or vote choice, we find stark differences across the partisan divide. Democrats are most supportive of asking people to stay at home and avoid large gatherings (96%), as well as prohibiting international travel (92%), followed by canceling sports/entertainment events (90%), limiting restaurants to take-out only (89%), prohibiting in-person K-12 schools (85%), and restricting domestic US travel (82%). Finally, Democrats are least supporting the closing of non-essential businesses (78%).

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by party

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve]

	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	96%	72%	85%
Requiring most businesses to close	78%	40%	57%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	90%	65%	78%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	89%	56%	74%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	92%	85%	87%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	82%	57%	69%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	85%	48%	68%
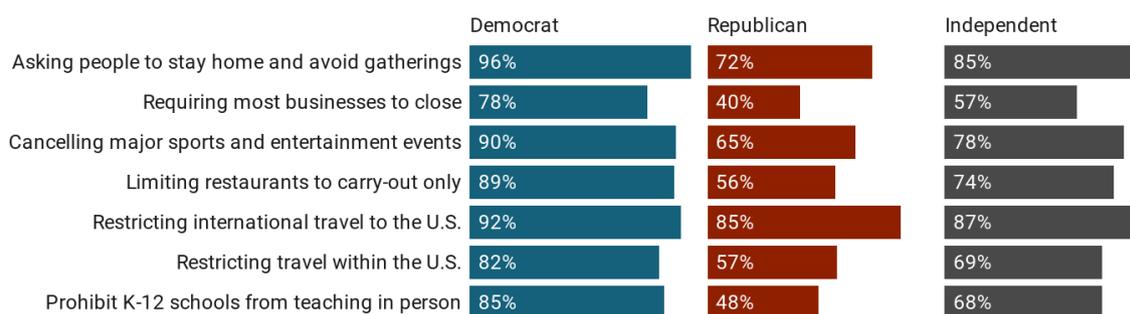
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Figure 3. Support for measures to curb covid-19 spread, by party

Republicans have a similar, albeit not identical, preference ordering, with a majority supporting five of the seven restrictive measures, while being almost evenly divided on the sixth. However, they are less supportive than Democrats of *all* of the restrictions, with the near-exception of *international travel*, for which their 85% approval level – the highest among Republicans -- differs from Democrats by only 7 percentage points. The gaps are larger for the other measures, with the next highest approval level being 72% for *stay-at-home*, followed by *events* (65%), *domestic travel* (57%), *restaurants* (56%), and *schools* (48%).

Finally, like Democrats, Republicans are least supportive of closing non-essential businesses (40%). However, **Democrats are 38 percentage points more likely than Republicans to support closing non-essential businesses. This gap is closely followed by closing in-person K-12 schools and limiting restaurants to take-out, with corresponding partisan gaps of 37 and 33 percentage points, respectively.**

As is frequently the case in public opinion surveys, Independents fall in between Democrats and Republicans for all seven restrictive measures, though **sizable majorities of Independents support all seven measures.**

We next compare respondents who indicated that they voted for President Trump versus former Vice President Joe Biden in the 2020 election. Unsurprisingly, we see similar patterns here as between partisan groups -- Biden voters are more supportive across the board relative to Trump voters -- albeit with **slightly larger gaps between Trump and Biden voters than between partisan groups** (see Figure 4). This suggests that the presidential election and the candidates running in it may have enhanced political polarization around COVID-19 even beyond the usual partisan gaps. **The largest such gap is for _businesses_ (42 percentage points; 36% for Trump voters vs. 78% for Biden voters), followed by _schools_ (41 points; 44% vs. 85%)**, _restaurants_ (39 points; 50% vs. 89%), _events_ (30 points; 61% vs. 91%), _stay-at-home_ (28 points; 69% vs. 97%), and _domestic travel_ (29 points; 54% vs. 83%). The exception, again, is _international travel_, where we see a relatively modest 9-point gap (84% vs. 93%).

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by 2020 vote

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve"]

	Joe Biden	Donald Trump	Another candidate
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	97%	69%	81%
Requiring most businesses to close	78%	36%	50%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	91%	61%	76%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	89%	50%	72%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	93%	84%	85%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	83%	54%	62%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	85%	44%	63%
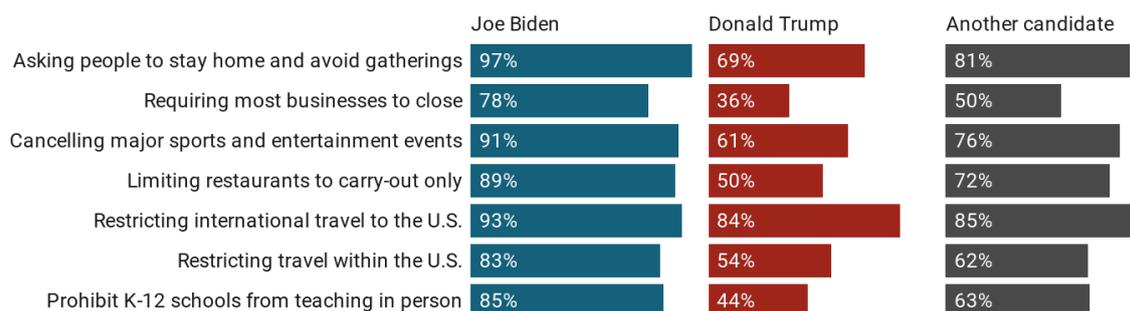
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Figure 4. Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread, by 2020 presidential vote

Generational differences

Comparing across age cohorts, **we find a mix of small and moderate gaps in approval of restrictive measures** (see Figure 5)**.** The largest generational gaps emerge for *schools* and *restaurants*. Three quarters of the 35-44 age cohort approves of prohibiting K-12 schools from in-person teaching, compared to 63% among respondents of age 65 or older. For *restaurants*, the highest level of support for restrictions comes from respondents of age 18-24 (80%), compared to 69% among respondents of age 65 or older.

Overall, the youngest respondents (age 18-24) are the most supportive age cohort for *stay-at-home* (87%), while respondents of age 55-64 are the least supportive group (albeit by a small gap) of *stay-at-home* requests (83%). Nearly two-thirds (65%) of respondents age 35-44 support closing businesses, while the least supportive cohorts are age 55-64 and age 65 or older (56% each). For *international travel*, the highest level of support for restrictions emerges among respondents of age 65 or older (92%), and the lowest level of support arises among respondents of age 18-24 (83%). The most supportive group for restrictions of *events* is the 35-44 age cohort with 81%, while the least supportive age cohort is 45-54 (76%). Finally, for *domestic travel*, the highest support level for restrictions appears among respondents age 35-44 (74%), and the lowest level is among respondents age 25-34 (68%).

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by age

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve"]

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	87%	84%	86%	84%	83%	86%
Requiring most businesses to close	63%	62%	65%	60%	56%	56%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	79%	77%	81%	76%	78%	79%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	80%	76%	79%	73%	70%	69%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	83%	84%	86%	88%	91%	92%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	71%	68%	74%	70%	69%	69%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	71%	69%	75%	71%	65%	63%
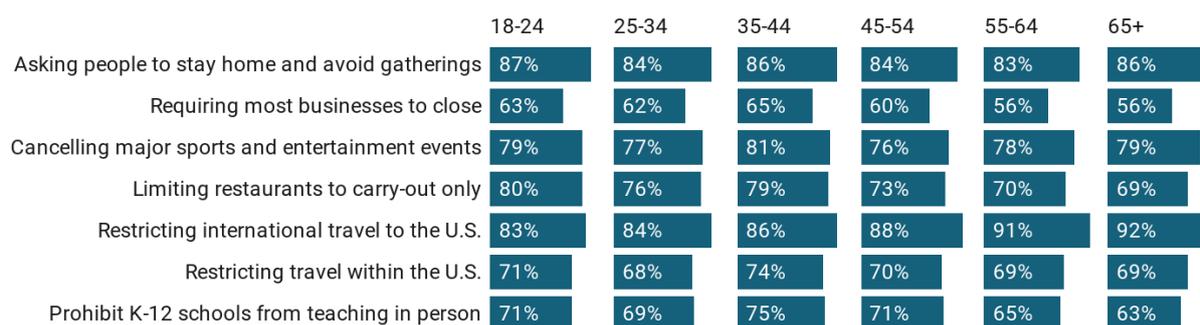
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Figure 5. Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread, by age

Parental concerns

Interestingly**, large majorities of respondents with children in their household support all seven restrictive measures, including *schools*** (see Figure 6). For most of the restrictions, we find only minor differences between respondents with and without children at home. The gap is only 2 percentage points for *stay-at-home* (84% support among respondents without kids at home; 86% among respondents with kids at home), *events* (78% support among respondents without kids at home; 80% among respondents with kids at home), and *international travel* (88% support among respondents without kids at home; 86% among respondents with kids at home).

We see the biggest gaps between respondents with and without children at home for *businesses* and *restaurants*. The gap is 8 percentage points for *businesses* (58% for respondents without kids at home, compared to 66% support among respondents with kids at home), and 7 percentage points for *restaurants* (72% for respondents without kids at home, compared to 79% support among respondents with kids at home.

We find gaps of similar magnitudes between parents of children under age 6, age 6-12, or age 13-17, with no gap larger than 7 percentage points.

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by parent status

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve]

	No kids	Kids any age	Kids age 0-5	Kids age 6-12	Kids age 13-17
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	84%	86%	83%	87%	87%
Requiring most businesses to close	58%	66%	61%	66%	67%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	78%	80%	78%	81%	80%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	72%	79%	75%	79%	81%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	88%	86%	83%	86%	88%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	69%	73%	68%	73%	75%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	68%	71%	71%	69%	72%
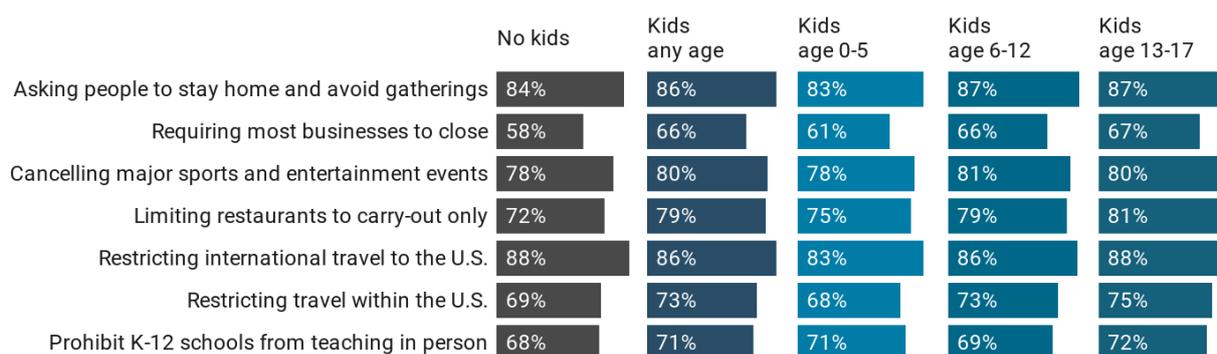
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Figure 6. *Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread, by parent status*

Concerns about COVID-19

When we compare respondents who have minimum levels of concern for themselves or their family members contracting COVID-19 with their counterparts reporting maximum levels of concern, we see dramatic differences in support for restrictive measures (see Figure 7). **The largest overall gap emerges for _schools_. In this case, as respondents move from minimum to maximum levels of concern (for either themselves or family members) with contracting COVID-19, their likelihood of supporting prohibiting K-12 schools from in-person teaching increases by 56 percentage points, from 26 to 82 percent. A close second is _restaurants_, for which the corresponding increase is 55 points, from 36% to 91%.** For _stay-at-home_, the support gap is 49 percentage points, from 48% to 97% as we move from minimum to maximum concern. For _businesses_, the gap is 53 percentage points, from 25% to 78%. The corresponding support gaps for _events_ (from 46% to 91%), _international travel_ (from 63 to 93 percent), and _domestic travel_ (from 37% to 86%) are 45, 30, and 49 percentage points, respectively.

Note that all of these patterns are similar, albeit with somewhat smaller differentials, when we compare support for restrictions among respondents who believe the prevalence of COVID-19 is rising in their state with respondents who believe it is declining (not shown).

Support for measures to curb COVID-19 spread by COVID-19 concerns

Do you approve or disapprove of the following measures which federal, state, and local governments could take to prevent the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) in the next 30 days?
[Percent respondents who say they "somewhat approve" or "strongly approve]

	Getting COVID-19: Not at all concerned	Getting COVID-19: Very concerned	Family getting COVID-19: Not at all concerned	Family getting COVID-19: Very concerned
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	48%	97%	46%	95%
Requiring most businesses to close	25%	78%	28%	74%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	46%	91%	44%	89%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	36%	91%	34%	88%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	67%	94%	63%	93%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	37%	86%	36%	82%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	33%	86%	26%	82%
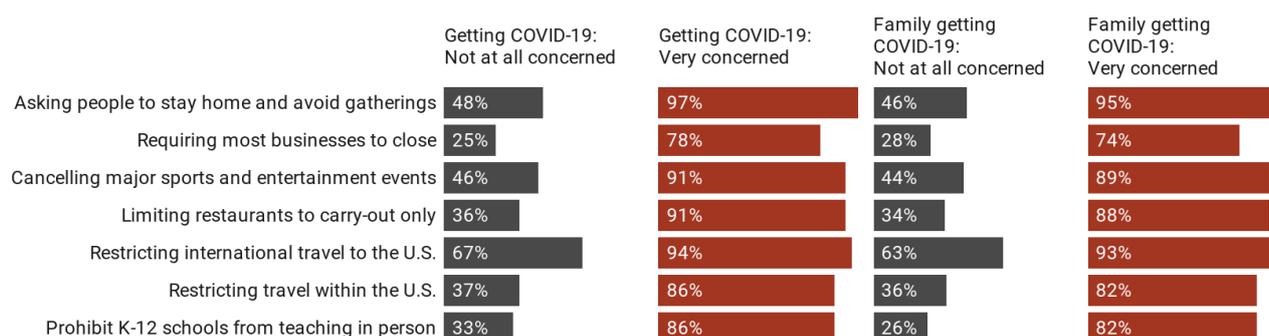
National sample, N = 19,766, Time period: 11/03/2020-11/23/2020

Figure 7. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by COVID-19 Concerns

Appendix A: Data Tables

Table 1. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by Gender

Measure	Total	Male	Female
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	84.8%	83.3%	86.2%
Requiring most businesses to close	59.8%	58.8%	60.6%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	78.3%	74.7%	81.6%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	74.0%	71.3%	76.4%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	87.7%	86.0%	89.2%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	70.0%	66.8%	72.8%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	68.8%	67.5%	70.1%

Table 2. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by Race and Ethnicity

Measure	African American	Asian American	Hispanic	White
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	92.1%	93.1%	87.0%	82.3%
Requiring most businesses to close	72.2%	68.8%	67.3%	55.0%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	84.3%	88.7%	81.1%	75.7%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	85.8%	84.6%	80.9%	69.4%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	89.2%	88.1%	85.6%	87.9%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	78.5%	77.6%	72.5%	67.5%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	82.2%	80.5%	74.5%	64.0%

Table 3. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by Party

Measure	Democrat	Republican	Independent
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	96.2%	71.7%	84.8%
Requiring most businesses to close	77.7%	40.1%	57.3%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	89.9%	64.8%	77.7%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	88.8%	56.0%	73.9%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	91.8%	84.5%	86.8%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	82.4%	56.8%	68.5%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	84.5%	48.1%	68.1%

Table 4. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by 2020 Presidential Vote

Variable	Joe Biden	Donald Trump	Another candidate
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	96.80%	68.70%	80.70%
Requiring most businesses to close	78%	35.80%	50.30%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	91.10%	61%	76.10%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	89.30%	50.40%	72%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	92.70%	84.30%	85.40%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	83%	53.50%	62.40%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	84.80%	43.90%	63.10%

Table 5. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by Age

Measure	Age			
	18 to 24	25 to 44	45 to 64	65+
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	87.0%	84.9%	83.4%	85.6%
Requiring most businesses to close	63.2%	63.1%	57.7%	55.8%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	79.4%	78.7%	77.0%	79.1%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	79.5%	77.6%	71.3%	69.4%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	83.3%	85.0%	89.4%	91.6%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	70.7%	70.7%	69.8%	69.0%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	70.6%	71.9%	68.4%	62.9%

Table 6. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by Parent Status

Variable	No kids	Kids any age	Kids age 0-5	Kids age 6-12	Kids age 13-17
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	84.20%	86.30%	83.30%	87.20%	87%
Requiring most businesses to close	57.50%	65.60%	60.60%	66.40%	67.30%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	77.60%	79.90%	77.70%	80.70%	80.40%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	72.10%	78.90%	75.20%	79.20%	80.50%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	88.20%	86.20%	83.10%	86.10%	87.70%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	69%	72.70%	67.90%	72.90%	75%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	68.10%	70.50%	71.10%	68.80%	71.80%

Table 7. Support for Measures to Curb COVID-19 Spread, by COVID-19 Concerns:

Variable	Getting COVID-19:		Family getting COVID-19:	
	Not at all concerned	Very concerned	Not at all concerned	Very concerned
Asking people to stay home and avoid gatherings	47.80%	96.70%	45.80%	95.20%
Requiring most businesses to close	25.30%	78.20%	27.50%	74.10%
Cancelling major sports and entertainment events	45.60%	90.70%	43.70%	89.40%
Limiting restaurants to carry-out only	36.20%	90.50%	34.40%	88.40%
Restricting international travel to the U.S.	67.10%	93.60%	63.30%	93.10%
Restricting travel within the U.S.	36.60%	85.60%	35.80%	82.10%
Prohibit K-12 schools from teaching in person	33.40%	85.50%	26.30%	82.30%