

→ Mark your confusion.

→ Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)

→ Write a 250+ word response to the article.

(If you are a teacher or student who would like to modify this Google Doc, go to File > Make a Copy. I cannot and do not respond to Share requests -- my apologies!)

## Is COVID over in the minds of Americans?

By Grayson Quay for *The Week*, June 21, 2022

*International travelers can now re-enter the country without a negative COVID-19 test, and Google searches for "COVID" have dropped to March 2020 levels. Is the pandemic over in the minds of Americans? Here's everything you need to know:*

### Do people still care about COVID?

In epidemiology terms, the pandemic is clearly ongoing. Johns Hopkins points out that "relative to the low point in late March and early April, we've seen more than a tripling of cases" by the end of May, and CDC data shows hospitalizations trending upward.

A May Axios poll, however, found that one in three Americans now say the pandemic is "over," and even White House medical adviser Anthony Fauci said in late April that the United States is no longer in "the full-blown pandemic phase."

Google searches for "COVID" are at their lowest point since March 2020 after hitting an all-time high during January's Omicron wave.

Some people stopped caring even earlier. Writing for *The Atlantic* in December, Matthew Walther delivered a stark message to urban liberals still fretting about COVID: "No one cares." The elites were still taking it seriously, but "outside the world inhabited by the professional and managerial classes in a handful of major metropolitan areas, many, if not most, Americans are leading their lives as if COVID is over, and they have been for a long while," Walther wrote.

Walther's piece was controversial at the time, but in the following months, the arc of history has bent in his direction. In January, 20 percent of Americans told Gallup that "Coronavirus/Diseases" was the biggest problem facing the United States. By June, that number was down to just four percent. During the same period, the share of Americans naming inflation, gas prices, or the economy as the country's biggest problem jumped by a combined 19 percent.

### What restrictions are still in place?

Most COVID restrictions across the country have been lifted. In April, Philadelphia reinstated an indoor mask mandate but dropped it again after less than a week. Philadelphia school officials have also imposed a mask requirement for summer school students, as did Sacramento, California. In Alameda County, California — which includes Oakland, authorities mandated masks in most indoor spaces earlier this month after abandoning the requirement in February.

In New York City, masks are optional everywhere except on public transit. Last week, Mayor Eric Adams stopped requiring children between the ages of two and four to wear masks at pre-schools and daycares.

Michael Brendan Dougherty of National Review castigated Adams for leaving the requirement in place as long as he did, accusing the mayor of pandering to the kind of person who is only too happy to use his "child's face as an anti-Ron DeSantis yard sign" and for whom "fear and neuroticism" are "a lifestyle choice."

It's also possible that more jurisdictions could re-impose restrictions if a new COVID wave emerges. Jennifer Nuzzo, who directs the Pandemic Center at Brown University's School of Public Health told *The New York Times* that we could see "another giant peak" in new COVID cases, "possibly later in the summer for the southern states, and the fall and winter." On Tuesday, New York Gov. Kathy Hochul (D) extended her state's COVID emergency through July 14.

Privately enforced mask mandates and vaccine requirements also persist in certain venues. Washington,

D.C.'s Kennedy Center requires play-goers to provide proof of vaccination upon entry and remain masked for the entirety of the performance. Last month, Apple re-instated mask mandates at about 100 stores. McDonalds' website says that the "wearing of gloves and masks/face coverings by employees who are interacting with customers" is "standard" practice at all U.S. locations.

The answer to the question "Is COVID over?" may depend in large part on your race and socioeconomic status. Black and Hispanic Americans, who are more likely to hold service industry jobs, report higher rates of mask-wearing at work, as do low-income Americans. Black, Hispanic, and low-income workers also feel more exposed to COVID in the workplace.

In a piece written last year for Bloomberg, Tyler Cowen decried what he called "mask apartheid." Why, he asked, should rich, well-educated, mostly white conference attendees go unmasked while the working-class people of color serving their food are forced to cover up?

### **Are new vaccines coming?**

Yes, but we don't know how well they'll work, and most people don't seem particularly interested in getting them.

Earlier this month, Axios reported that new subvariants of the Omicron strain "appear to be even more immune-resistant than the original." New versions of the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines designed to combat the original Omicron strain — known as BA.1 — could be available by fall, but it's unclear how effective they'll be at combatting the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants expected to become dominant in the next month.

Eighty-three percent of Americans ages five and up have had at least one dose of a vaccine, while 71 percent are fully vaccinated. No vaccine has yet been approved for children under five. A group of outside advisers to the Food and Drug Administration met Wednesday to discuss proposals from Pfizer and Moderna to provide low-strength doses of their vaccines to very young children.

The New York Times notes that "Pfizer's vaccine was about only 28 percent effective in preventing symptomatic infection in children aged 6 months through 4 years old," while Moderna's was 51 percent effective for children aged six months to two years and 37 percent effective for children between two and five.

Most parents don't seem interested. A poll by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that only 18 percent of parents with children under the age of five planned to vaccinate their kids as soon as it was approved.

### **Response option(s):**

- After reading the article, what is one main idea that you find most remarkable (meaning, "most worthy of a remark" -- so it can be interesting, concerning, confusing, alarming, offensive, etc)? What is it that you find so remarkable? Explain.
- After reading the article, what additional questions do you have? Research these on your own and write about what you find.
- Summarize any point made in the article and respond.