



## **CAMPUS PANDEMIC ATTITUDES AMIDST THE OMICRON SURGE**

### Survey Data Update

**JANUARY 28, 2022**

Survey data collected during the Omicron surge include some concerning indications of pandemic fatigue among college students, albeit with gains in one key metric—booster uptake.

- In a disheartening result, vaccine rejection has not eased among college students, even as it's increased in the face of Omicron among adults unaffiliated with the college community. One in seven students is not at all likely to get a coronavirus shot.
- At the same time, after a slow start for college students, booster uptake is up sharply in both groups, although it still lags considerably among students.
- Attitudinally, concern about the pandemic and the perceived risk of in-person gatherings have risen since November among unaffiliated adults—while significant trends are not apparent among college students.
- Behaviorally, mitigation measures such as mask wearing and social distancing are up in the non-college population, while essentially steady among students, albeit with sample sizes a limitation analytically.
- Trust in state and federal leaders for pandemic-related information has held steady among unaffiliated adults, but among students has dropped by double digits.

This report analyzes these trends chiefly using four waves of data from the probability-based Axios-Ipsos pandemic tracking poll—two waves conducted before identification of the Omicron variant (Nov. 5-8 and 19-22, 2021) and two during the Omicron surge (Jan. 7-10 and 21-24, 2022). Sample sizes of college students are small—respectively,  $n=120$  and  $n=103$ —and further study is warranted.

We also evaluate longer-term results that indicate continued disparities among students by race and ethnicity in vaccine uptake. These gaps are not apparent when accounting for uptake intentions, suggesting that Black students in particular may face continued barriers to vaccination or a preference to wait and see.

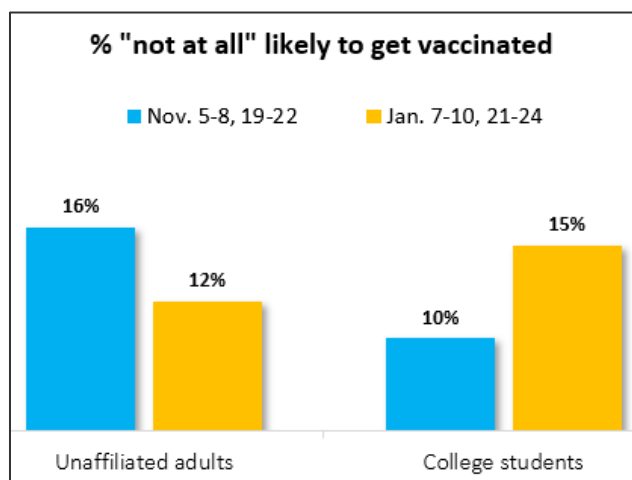
Results also indicate much higher pandemic concern among Black students compared with others, and higher levels of mitigation behavior such as mask wearing and social distancing.

This analysis was produced for the American College Health Association's Campus COVID-19 Vaccine Initiative by [Langer Research Associates](#). It is made possible by Axios-Ipsos' generous agreement to include the ACHA's question identifying college community members in its ongoing pandemic surveys.

## Vaccine Uptake and Intention

The November and January data don't include adequate sample sizes of college employees. As such we only compare college students with unaffiliated adults, the 89 percent of adults who are neither college students nor employees.

In one divergent trend, the share of unaffiliated adults who virtually rule out vaccination—saying they're "not at all likely" to get a coronavirus shot—eased from 16 percent in November to 12 percent during the Omicron surge, down a statistically significant 4 percentage points. By contrast, the share of students saying they're not at all likely to get a shot advanced numerically from 10 percent in November to 15 percent, a nonsignificant difference given sample sizes.



Trends in booster uptake are more encouraging. Among unaffiliated adults who are vaccinated, the number who report having received a booster shot has risen sharply, by 35 points, from 33 to 68 percent. It's increased by a similar 30 points among college students during the same period, from 20 to 50 percent (with particularly small samples). However, that still significantly trails the rate among unaffiliated adults, now by 18 points.<sup>12</sup> Data from mid-December and early January did not show a significant increase in booster uptake among students, so this is a recent shift.

It should be noted that the pandemic is a moving target. With the Omicron surge now receding in some parts of the nation, it remains to be seen how pandemic-related attitudes and behavior may change in the future.

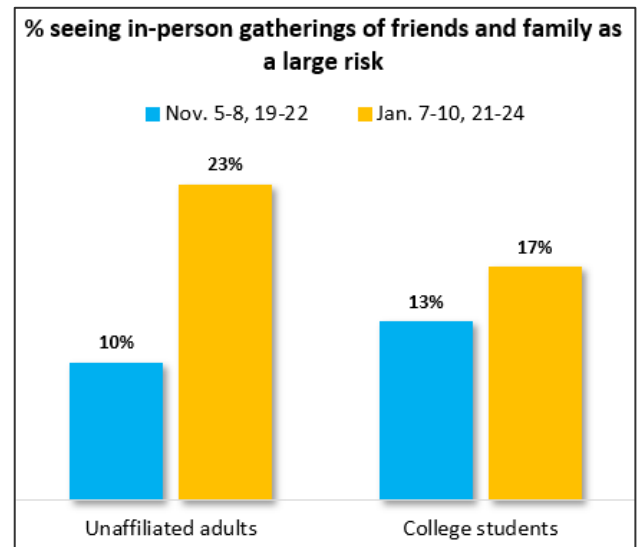
<sup>1</sup> Note, the sample sizes of vaccinated college students are  $n=89$  in November and  $n=81$  in January; results should be regarded with caution.

<sup>2</sup> Booster uptake is highly correlated with age, peaking among those age 65+ (84 percent), compared with those age 50-64 (69 percent), 30-49 (60 percent) and 18-29 (52 percent) in January data. The mean respondent age is 28 among college students vs. 50 among unaffiliated adults.

## Associated Attitudes

Reflecting the latest surge in cases, 47 percent of unaffiliated adults were extremely or very concerned about the coronavirus outbreak in January data, up 10 points from November. Concern among college students was about the same, 46 percent, but in their case largely unchanged from November, 42 percent.

The number of unaffiliated adults who see a large risk to their health and well-being in attending in-person gatherings of friends and family outside their household also rose, from 10 percent in November to 23 percent in January, while not significantly changed among students, +4 points to 17 percent.



Students' concerns on another item did increase, +15 points in seeing travel by airplane or mass transit as a large risk to their health and well-being. Again this rise was not seen in December/early January data, marking it as another recent change. It's up among unaffiliated adults as well, +11 points from November to January, landing at 38 percent in both groups.

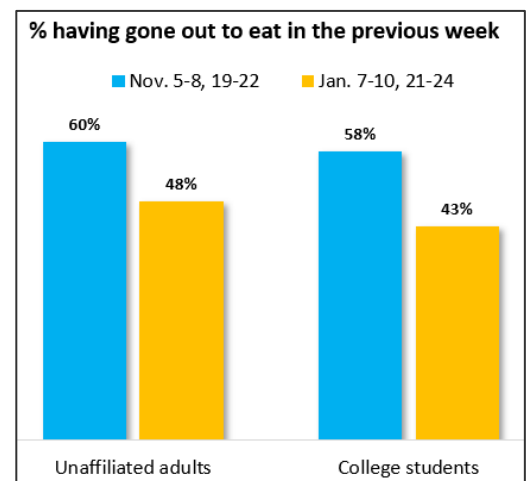
## Behavior

In terms of behavioral measures, the share of unaffiliated adults who report wearing a mask when leaving the home (at all times or sometimes) rose 7 points from November to 73 percent. In the same period, it went from 73 to 76 percent among college students, a nonsignificant shift.

On social distancing, maintaining at least six feet of distance from others when leaving home (again, at all times or sometimes) is up 5 points among unaffiliated adults, to 75 percent. It's directionally similar among students, up 6 points to 77 percent, but again that is not a significant difference given sample sizes.

Both groups have trended in the same direction in having gone out to eat in the previous week. This fell 15 points to 43 percent among students and 12 points to 48 percent among unaffiliated adults.

Another behavior also showed significant pullback in both groups. The share of unaffiliated adults who report having visited a non-grocery retail store in the previous week fell 11 points, to 51 percent, and 14 points among college students, to 49 percent.



## Mental Health

In a further gauge, the share of unaffiliated adults saying their mental health has gotten worse in the previous week rose from 10 to 13 percent. College students held essentially steady in reporting that their mental health worsened—one in five says so (i.e., 19 percent), another concerning finding.

## Trust

Sharp shifts appear in college students' lower trust in federal and state leaders to provide accurate information about the pandemic. Their trust in Joe Biden fell by 19 points to 38 percent from November to January. Trust in the federal government fell a slight 13 points, to 42 percent; in the state government, 15 points, to 43 percent. Trust in the CDC is down a nonsignificant 8 points, to 64 percent. In all these measures, trust among unaffiliated adults is essentially unchanged.

Trust in Joe Biden			
	Nov.	Jan.	
Unaffiliated	46	46	=
College students	57	38	-19

## Longer-term Trends Among Groups

Similar shares of students (78 percent) and unaffiliated adults (76 percent) report having received at least one vaccine dose in January data, each essentially the same as in November. Accounting for future intentions, 79 percent of students and unaffiliated adults alike say they're vaccinated or very likely to be vaccinated, also about the same.

Across 11 waves of data (Aug. 13, 2021, to Jan. 24, 2022) for adequate sample sizes, white students (73 percent) remained slightly more apt to have received at least one vaccine dose than Black students (64 percent), with Hispanic students in between (69 percent).<sup>3</sup>

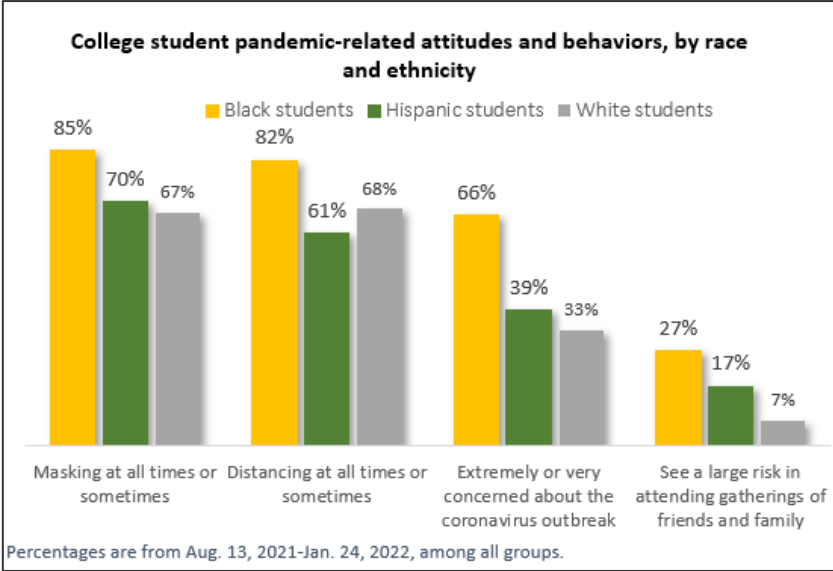
However, as was the case in our September report, the three groups are not significantly different when accounting for future intentions. About eight in 10 white, Black, and Hispanic students alike said they either were vaccinated or were very or somewhat likely to get vaccinated. This suggests that Black students may face more barriers to getting vaccinated, may be more inclined toward a wait-and-see approach, or both.

At the same time, across this period, Black students outpaced others in self-reported mitigation practices. Black students (85 percent) were more apt than Hispanic (70 percent) or white (67 percent) students to wear a mask all the time or sometimes, as well as more likely to practice social distancing when leaving the home (82 percent among Black students, compared with 68 percent of white students and 61 percent of Hispanic students).

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<sup>3</sup> [Recent polling](#) among all adults suggests that racial and ethnic disparities in uptake have narrowed over time. In the most recent wave of Axios-Ipsos data (Jan. 21-24, 2022), roughly equal shares of white (78 percent), Black (83 percent) and Hispanic (74 percent) adults have been vaccinated. Further study is warranted to determine whether these disparities have similarly closed among college students.

Risk perceptions are a factor: Sixty-six percent of Black students were extremely or very concerned about the coronavirus outbreak, falling to 39 percent of Hispanic students and 33 percent of white students. And 27 percent of Black students saw a large risk in attending in-person gatherings of friends and family outside their household, slightly higher than among Hispanic students (17 percent) and four times the level among white students (7 percent).<sup>4</sup>



Combining six waves of data (Oct. 22, 2021, to Jan. 24, 2022), again for sufficient sample sizes, about three-quarters of graduate students and undergraduates alike reported having received at least one vaccine dose. That’s a shift from our September report (using data from June 25-Aug. 30, 2021), when uptake was higher among graduate students than undergraduates, 75 vs. 61 percent. The two groups also are similar in terms of masking, distancing, concern, and risk perceptions in October-January results.

Looking to college employees across nine waves of results (Sept. 10, 2021, to Jan. 24, 2022), 79 percent of faculty/administrators and staff/contractors alike reported having been vaccinated. In April 16-Aug. 30, 2021, data, uptake was 76 percent among faculty/administrators and 69 percent among staff/contractors (not a significant difference). As with students, the two groups also are not significantly different on behaviors or associated attitudes in this update.

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**Note:**

*Pre-Omicron results covered in this summary include 120 college students and 1,880 unaffiliated adults in Nov. 5-8 and 19-22, 2021, data.*

*Results from Jan. 7-10 and 21-24, 2022, include 103 college students and 1,959 unaffiliated adults.*

*All differences characterized in this report have been tested for statistical significance.*

<sup>4</sup> n=94 Hispanic students.



*The [Campus COVID-19 Vaccination and Mitigation \(CoVAC\) Initiative](#) is a project of the American College Health Association, funded by a cooperative agreement with the U.S Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

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