

March 2021

# KFF/The Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers

*The Washington Post/KFF Survey Project*

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KFF



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## KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers

The latest partnership survey from the Kaiser Family Foundation and *The Washington Post* examines the experiences and attitudes of frontline health care workers during the coronavirus pandemic. More than one year into a global pandemic that has infected almost [29 million Americans including more than 500,000](#) who have died due to the coronavirus, one of the most directly impacted groups has been frontline health care workers. These individuals, who work across many different health care fields including doctors and nurses, nursing home managers, front desk clerks, as well as those who assist with patient care such as bathing, eating, cleaning, exercising, or housekeeping, have been on the front lines of an industry providing care for the sickest adults. The spread of COVID-19 throughout the country overwhelmed many health care settings with intensive care units at capacity and other facilities struggling to keep both patients and employees safe. Now, with three COVID-19 vaccines currently being distributed to adults across the country, this project takes a look at the toll of the last year on frontline health care workers.

The project includes interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,327 frontline health care workers (direct contact with patients and their bodily fluids), representing hospitals, doctors' offices, outpatient clinics, nursing homes and assisted care facilities, and those working in home health care. The sample includes workers who work in many, and multiple, different aspects of patient care including patient diagnosis and treatment ( $n=636$ ), administrative duties ( $n=251$ ), and/or assisting with patient care such as bathing, eating, cleaning, exercising, and housekeeping ( $n=526$ ). The survey also included a comparison survey of 1,002 U.S. adults. For more information about sampling and method of recruitment, see methodology.

This survey is the 35th in a series of surveys dating back to 1995 that have been conducted as a part of *The Washington Post*/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey Project.

## Vaccine Intentions Among Frontline Health Care Workers

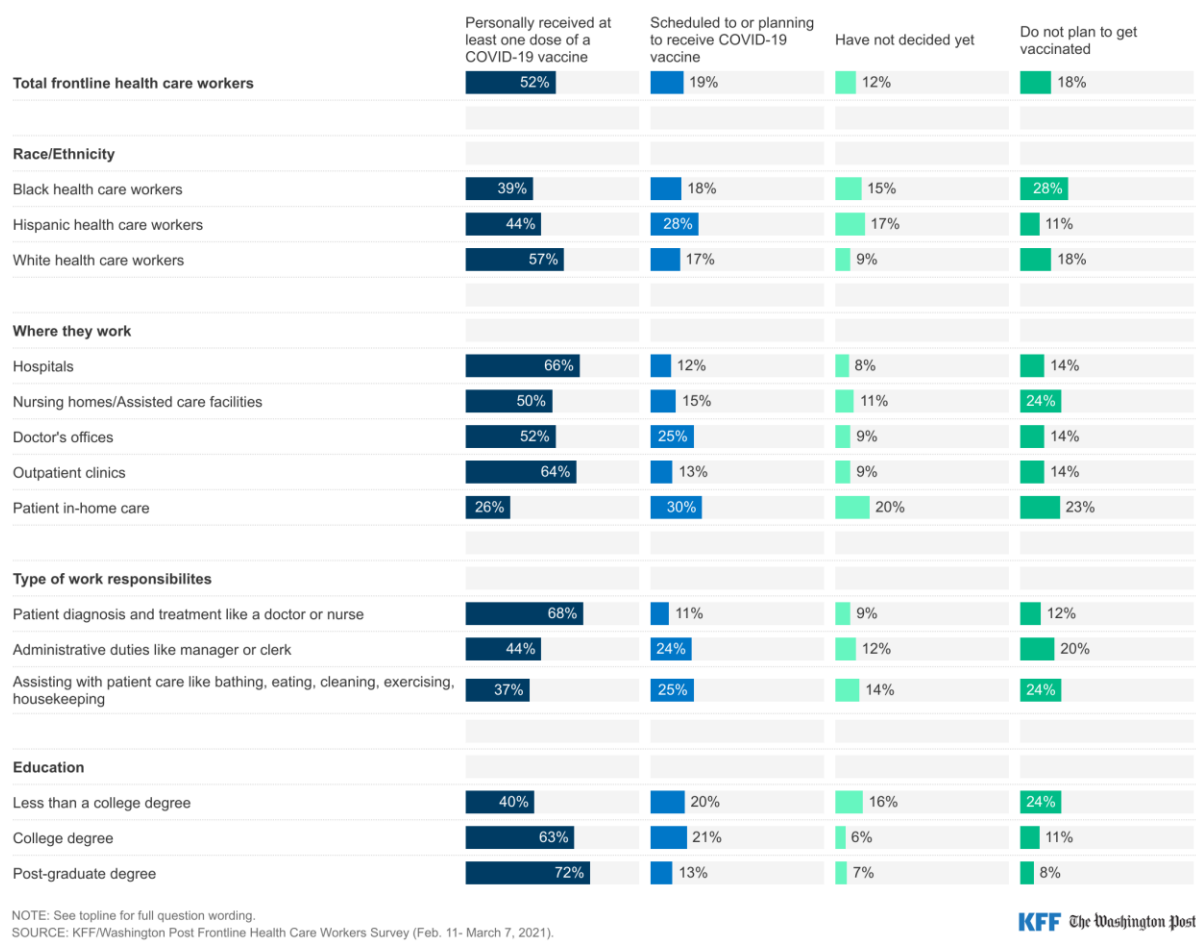
As of early March, just over half (52%) of frontline health care workers say they have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, including 42% who have received both doses. This leaves 48% of frontline health care workers who have not yet received a COVID-19 vaccine despite the fact that health care workers who have direct contact with patients were the among the first groups prioritized for vaccine access across all states (NOTE: the survey was fielded February 11- March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021, at the start of which both the Pfizer vaccine and Moderna vaccine had already received emergency use authorization from the Food and Drug administration, the Johnson & Johnson single dose vaccine was authorized during the survey field period on February 27, 2021).

Majorities of health care workers working in hospitals (66%) and outpatient clinics (64%) say they have received a COVID-19 vaccine, compared to half of those working doctors' offices (52%), or in nursing homes or assisted care facilities (50%), and just one in four (26%) home health care workers. Similarly, about seven in ten (68%) of those responsible for patient diagnosis and treatment like a doctor or a nurse report receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, compared to about four in ten of those who perform administrative duties (44%) or who assist with patient care such as bathing, eating, cleaning, exercising, and housekeeping (37%).

Less than half of Black frontline health care workers (39%) and Hispanic frontline health care workers (44%) report personally receiving a COVID-19 vaccine, compared to six in ten (57%) White health care workers, mirroring the disparities found in vaccine uptake rates among the national adult population. While [the KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#) has found a steady increase in the share of Black adults and Hispanic adults who report being vaccinated for COVID-19 or saying they will get the vaccine as soon as it's available to them, these populations remain more likely than White adults to say they're waiting to see how the vaccine works for other people before getting vaccinated themselves.

Figure 1

## Vaccine Intentions Among Frontline Health Care Workers Differs By Race/Ethnicity, Where They Work, Type Of Work They Do, And Education

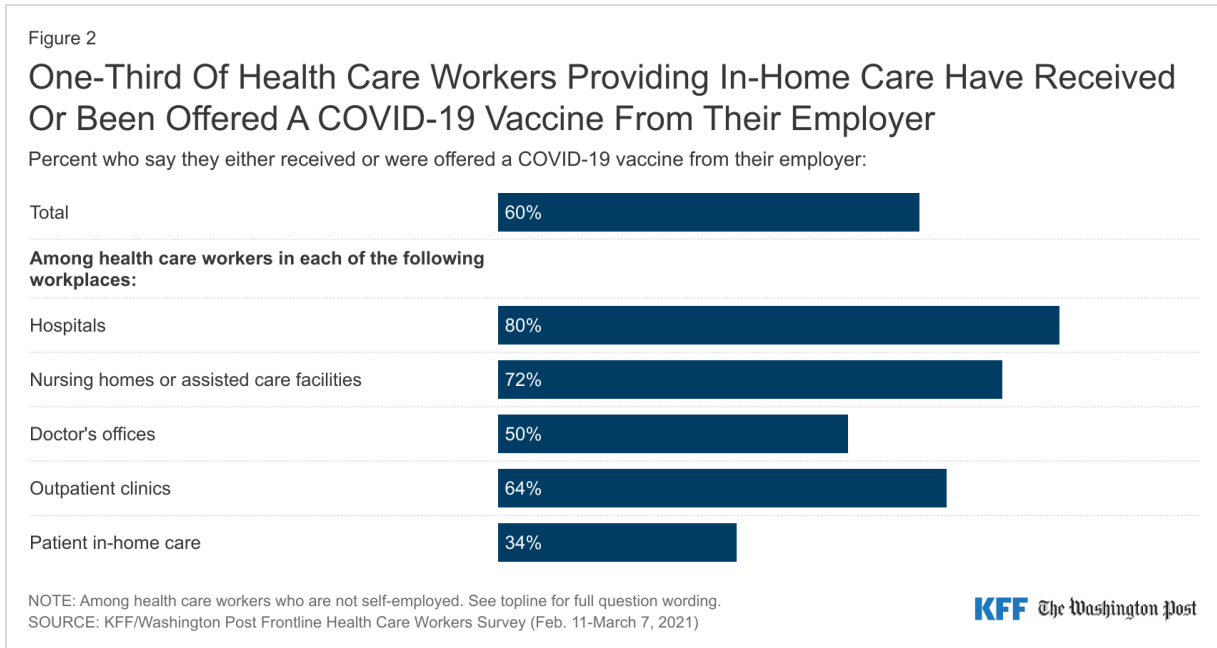


The unvaccinated group includes one in five frontline health care workers who either have their vaccine scheduled (3%) or who plan to get vaccinated but haven't scheduled it yet (15%), as well as 12% who have not decided whether they will get vaccinated, and one in five (18%) who say they do not plan on receiving a COVID-19 vaccine. About three in ten (28%) of Black health care workers say they do not plan on getting vaccinated, as do one-fourth of health care workers working in nursing homes or assisted care facilities (24%) or providing patient in-home care (23%), those who assist with patient care (24%), and health care workers without a college degree (24%).

## WHY ARE NEARLY HALF OF HEALTH WORKERS NOT VACCINATED? THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS

The role of employers in getting frontline health care workers vaccinated may be a factor for the nearly half of frontline health care workers who say they have not received a COVID-19 vaccine. Reflecting the overall vaccination rates among frontline health care workers, the share of workers who were offered a

COVID-19 vaccine from their employer was much lower among those working in patients' homes. One in three home health care workers (34%) say they have either been offered or received a COVID-19 vaccine from their employer compared to eight in ten of those working in hospitals (80%), and majorities working in nursing homes or assisted care facilities (72%), outpatient clinics (64%), and doctors' offices (50%).

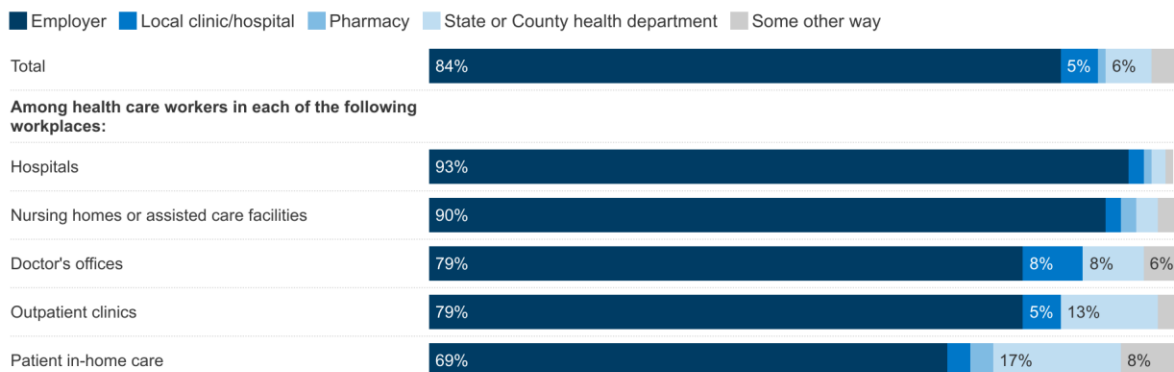


More than eight in ten (84%) vaccinated health care workers who are not self-employed say they received a COVID-19 vaccine from their employer, including 93% of vaccinated workers who work in a hospital, 90% of those working nursing homes or assisted care facilities, eight in ten of those working doctor's office (79%) or outpatient clinics (79%), and seven in ten (69%) home health care workers. About one in five (17%) vaccinated health care workers who provide in-home care say they received a COVID-19 vaccine from their state or county health department.

Figure 3

## Most Vaccinated Health Care Workers, Regardless Of Where They Work, Say They Received COVID-19 Vaccine From Their Employer

Did you receive a COVID-19 vaccine through your employer, or some other way?



NOTE: Among health care workers who have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and are not self-employed. See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021).

KFF The Washington Post

The vast majority of health care workers who were able to get vaccinated through their employer say it was easy to schedule their COVID-19 vaccine, including 70% who say it was “very easy.” On the other hand, four in ten (41%) of the vaccinated health care workers who did not get a vaccine from their employer (16% of all non-self employed vaccinated frontline health care workers) say it was difficult to schedule. The majority of self-employed frontline health care workers had not received a COVID-19 vaccine (61%).

Figure 4

## Larger Shares Of Vaccinated Health Care Workers Who Received COVID-19 Vaccine From Employer Say It Was Easy To Get Vaccinated

How easy or difficult was it for you to schedule to receive a COVID-19 vaccine?



NOTE: Among health care workers who have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and are not self employed. See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

KFF The Washington Post

Among those who are not self-employed and have not received a COVID-19 vaccine but are planning to get vaccinated or have a vaccine appointment scheduled, six in ten say they plan on getting it through their employer (60%) while 6% say they were offered it from their employer are planning to get it somewhere else. An additional 28% say they were not offered a COVID-19 vaccine from their employer.

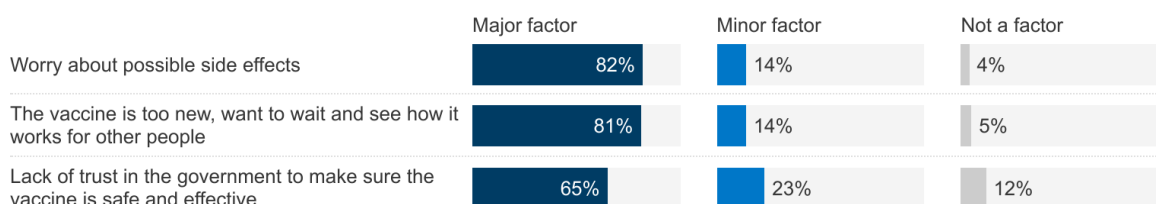
## WHY ARE NEARLY HALF OF HEALTH WORKERS NOT VACCINATED? CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY AND EFFICACY

Concerns about vaccine safety and effectiveness are major factors why some frontline health care workers say they have not received a COVID-19 vaccine. Among the nearly half of health care workers who have not received a COVID-19 vaccine, eight in ten say worries about potential side effects (82%) and thinking the vaccine is too new and wanting to wait to see how it works for others (81%) are major factors in their decisions on whether to get vaccinated. In addition, two-thirds (65%) say distrust in the government to ensure safety and effectiveness is a major factor. The concerns of the unvaccinated health care workers mirror the concerns among the general public and highlight challenges for national vaccination adoption.

Figure 5

### Worries Around The Newness Of The Vaccine And Possible Side Effects Are Major Factors Why Health Care Workers Have Not Received A Vaccine

Is each of the following a **major factor** in your decision on whether to get a COVID-19 vaccine, a **minor factor**, or **not a factor**?



NOTE: Among health care workers who have not received a COVID-19 vaccine. See topline for full question wording.  
SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

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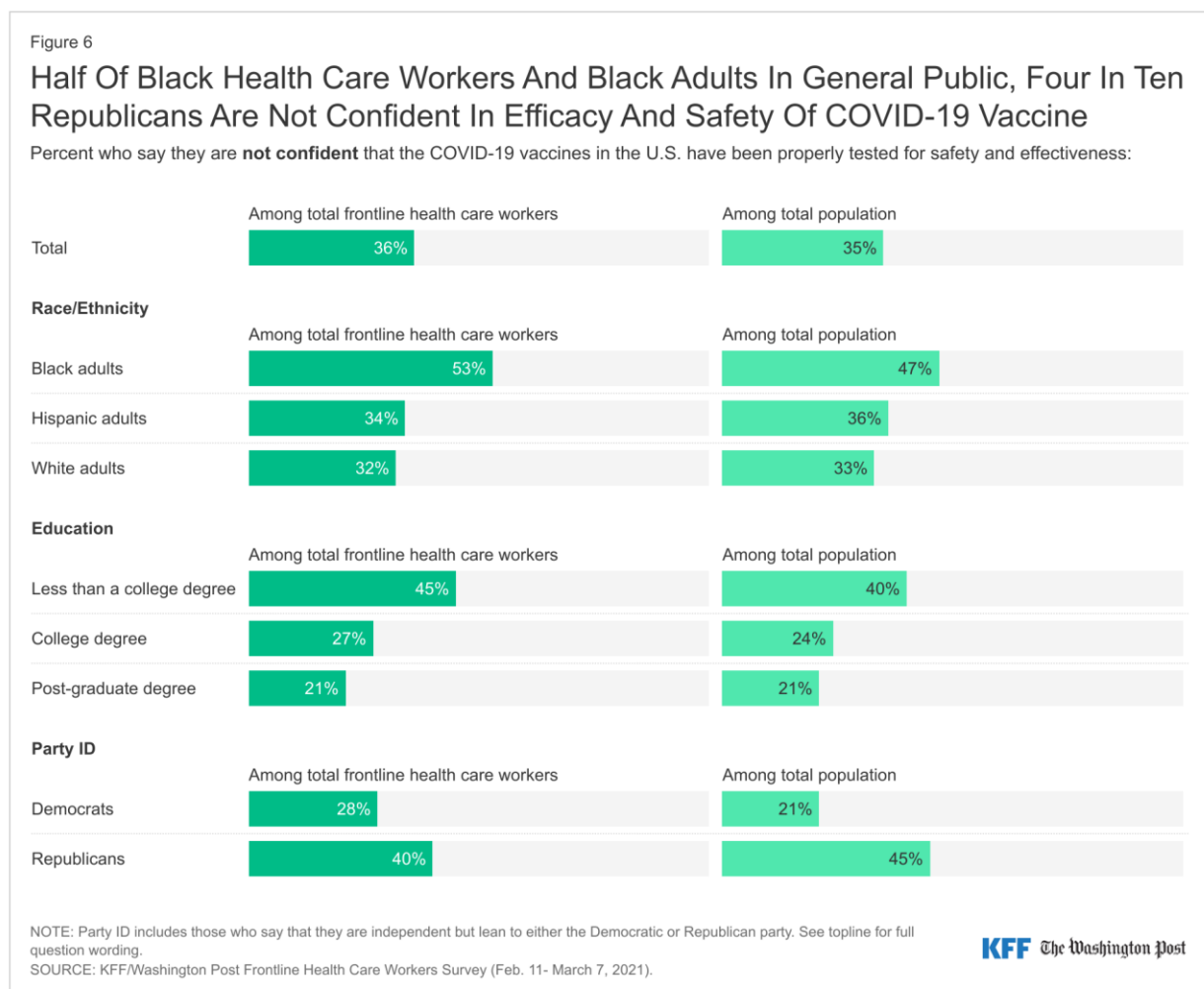
The top concerns are consistent across key demographic groups, with larger shares saying side effects and newness of the vaccines are major factors in their decision to not get a COVID-19 vaccine than lack of trust in the government (but still a majority say it is a major factor). Notably, three-fourths of Black health care workers who have not received a COVID-19 vaccine (77%) say distrust of the government to ensure safety and effectiveness is a major factor in their decision, compared to smaller shares of White and Hispanic health care workers (60% and 61%).

While large majorities of unvaccinated health care workers say worries about possible side effects are a major factor why they haven't been vaccinated, few (6%) vaccinated health care workers report experiencing major side effects. The majority of vaccinated health care workers (60%) say they experienced minor side effects and one-third (34%) say they didn't experience any side effects. The most commonly reported major side effects include pain (4%), headaches (3%), fever (3%), tiredness (3%), and chills (2%). According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), most of these reported side effects would be classified as mild to moderate, and are common.

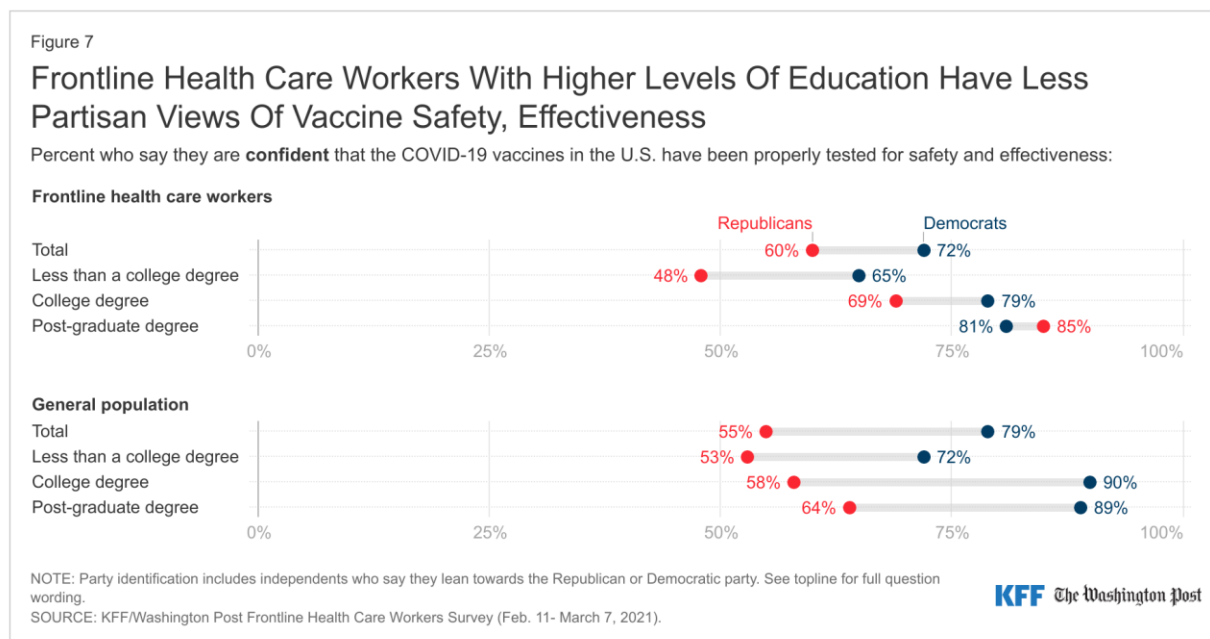


Majorities of frontline health care workers and the general public are confident that the COVID-19 vaccines available in the U.S. have been tested for safety and effectiveness. More than six in ten are confident vaccines being used in the U.S. have been properly tested for safety and effectiveness (64% and 65%, respectively), but still more than one-third of frontline health care workers say they are not confident (36%). Among health care workers, views on the safety and effectiveness of the vaccines are largely connected to vaccine intent with seven in ten (71%) of those who are confident in the vaccines' safety and effectiveness reporting receiving at least one dose of a vaccine, compared to 17% of those who are less confident.

Overall confidence in the U.S.'s testing of the vaccines differs among race and ethnic groups, education levels, and partisanship, both among health care workers and the public overall. Large shares of Black adults, adults without a college degree, and Republican and Republican-leaning adults say they are *not confident* the COVID-19 vaccines have been properly tested for safety and effectiveness. Among frontline health care workers, these groups are also the groups in which one in five say they will definitely not receive a COVID-19 vaccine.



Views of the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine are different among Republican health care workers and total Republican adults at higher levels of education. Seven in ten Republican health care workers with a college degree (69%) and more than eight in ten (85%) Republican health care workers with a post-graduate degree are confident that the vaccines have been properly tested and approved. This is compared to around six in ten of total Republican adults with higher levels of education who are confident.



These differing views of the safety and efficacy of the vaccines may also be related to vaccine intent with majorities of Republican health care workers with a college degree (57%) and a post-graduate degree (69%) say they have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, compared to 37% of Republican health care workers with less than a college degree.

# The Toll Of The Coronavirus Pandemic On Health Care Workers

The report, based on findings from the KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey, explores the coronavirus pandemic through the lens of a frontline health care worker in the U.S.. This survey is the 35th in a series of surveys dating back to 1995 that have been conducted as a part of The Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey Project and includes interviews with a nationally representative sample of 1,327 frontline health care workers (those with direct contact with patients and their bodily fluids), representing people working in hospitals, doctors' offices, outpatient clinics, nursing homes and assisted care facilities, and those working in home health care. The sample includes workers who work in many, and multiple, aspects of patient care. The survey also included a comparison survey of 971 U.S. adults not working in health care. See Appendix A for the demographic profile of the frontline health care workers included in this project.

More than one year after COVID-19 overwhelmed the U.S. health care system, the Frontline Health Care Workers Survey finds that some health care workers are now seeing the light at the end of the tunnel as the vaccine roll-out continues. But with less than half of health care workers reporting receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and majorities of frontline health care workers saying they have experienced adverse mental health impacts from the pandemic, this analysis also finds that there may be some longer term impacts on those who were at the forefront during this global pandemic.

- The coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on the mental health of frontline health care workers. A majority of frontline health care workers (62%) say worry or stress related to COVID-19 has a negative impact on their mental health. In addition, more than half (56%) of all frontline health care workers say that worry or stress related to COVID-19 has caused them to experience trouble with sleeping or sleeping too much (47%), frequent headaches or stomachaches (31%), or increased alcohol or drug use (16%). In addition, 13% of health care workers say they have received mental health services or medication specifically due to worry or stress related to COVID-19 and an additional one in five (18%) say they thought they might need such services, but did not get them.
- The youngest health care workers (18-29 years old) seem to have been hit hardest by working during a global pandemic. Three-fourths of younger frontline health care workers report worry or stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health and seven in ten say they feel “burned out” about work. These feelings may be directly tied to their work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic as four in ten of these youngest workers are working in a hospital setting and nearly half (45%) report assisting with patient care such as bathing, cleaning, and housekeeping. And, almost one in eight (13%) of 18-29 year old frontline health care workers say they had at least 10 patients in their direct care who died as a result of COVID-19.
- Throughout the past year, news reports have told of hospitals running low on personal protective equipment (PPE) and at over-capacity for the intensive care units. This experience seems

relatively common among the hardest hit frontline health care workers. Over half (56%) of health care workers in hospitals say that their workplace reached over-capacity of ICU beds to treat critical patients, and one third (34%) of health care workers working in either hospitals or nursing homes say that at some point during the pandemic, their workplace ran out of PPE for its employees. And while most health care workers say their employer is “doing about the right amount” or “going above and beyond” when it comes to providing sick leave to employees who had COVID-19 or ensuring employees have the ability to get vaccinated, more than half of health care workers – including a majority of health care workers across different types of health care settings including hospitals (59%), office or clinic (52%), nursing home or assisted care facility (58%), and those who work in patient homes (56%) – say their employer is “falling short” when it comes to providing additional pay for employees who are working in the most high-risk situations.

- The survey also finds some optimism among frontline health care workers with most health care workers across workplaces and across race and ethnicity saying that the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. is at least “somewhat under control” including one fourth who say it is “mostly under control” or “completely under control.” Nearly six in ten frontline health care workers also say they anticipate the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. to be controlled enough so that people can resume normal life by early 2022 or later, while 47% say normal life can resume by mid-fall or sooner—including 5% who say life can safely resume in the U.S. now.

## **MAJORITIES OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS REPORT FEELING HOPEFUL, BUT SIGNIFICANT SHARES ALSO REPORT NEGATIVE FEELINGS**

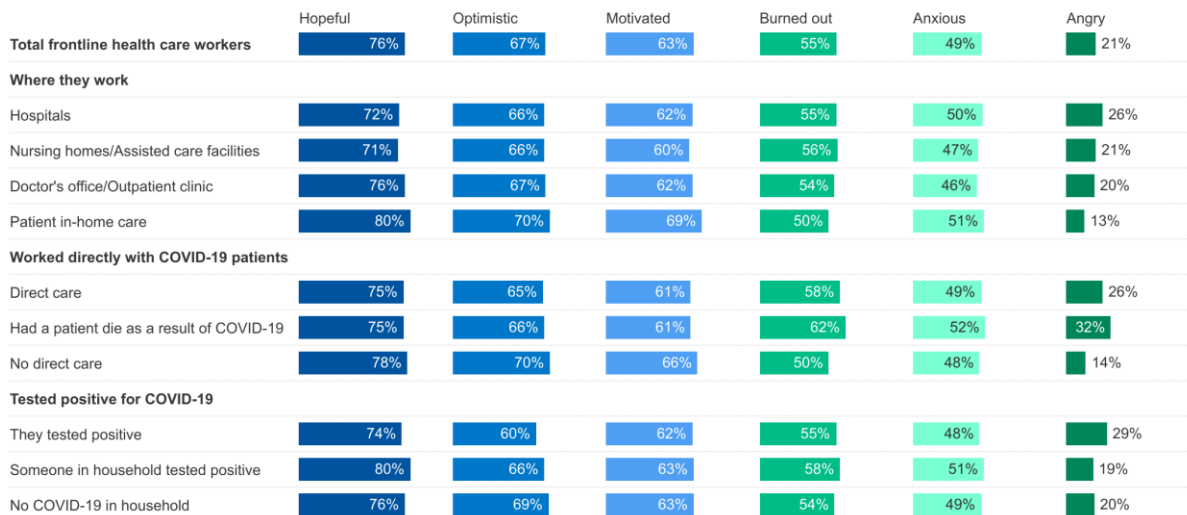
More than one year into a global pandemic, the KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey finds three-fourths (76%) of frontline health care workers saying they feel “hopeful” when going to work these days. Majorities also say they feel “optimistic” (67%) and motivated (63%). Yet, about half also say they feel “burned out” (55%) or “anxious” (49%). About one in five (21%) say they feel “angry” when they go to work these days.

The share of frontline health care workers who report feeling these emotions does not vary drastically across places where they work (hospital, nursing home, office or clinic, or providing in-home care), but there are some differences depending on their direct experience with the coronavirus. Nearly one-third of frontline health care workers who had a patient die as a result of COVID-19 (32%) or they themselves tested positive for COVID-19 (29%) report feeling “angry.”

Figure 1

### Most Frontline Health Care Workers Across Workplaces And Various Experience With COVID-19 Report Feeling *Hopeful, Optimistic, And Motivated* About Work; Significant Shares With Direct COVID-19 Experience Report Feeling *Angry*

Percent of frontline health care workers who say they feel the following about going to work these days:



NOTE: See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11- March 7, 2021).

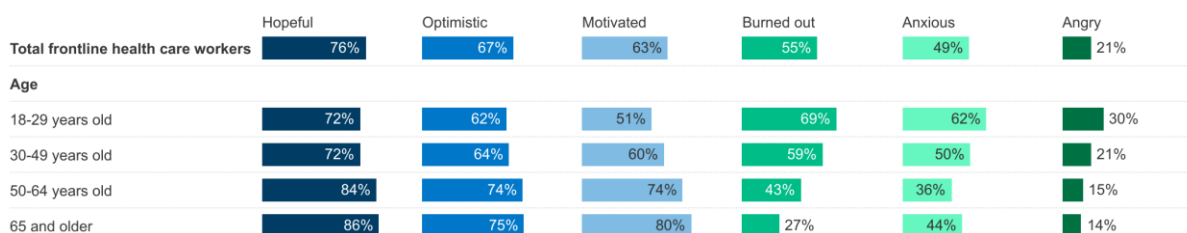
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Younger health care workers are more likely to report negative emotions than their older counterparts. Seven in ten (69%) frontline health care workers between the ages of 18 and 29 say they feel “burned out” compared to 59% of health care workers between the ages of 30 and 49, 43% of those ages 50 to 64 years, and 27% of health care workers who are ages 65 and older. Three in ten frontline health care workers ages 18-29 also report feeling “angry” about going into work these days. A smaller share of younger health care workers (49 years and younger) also report feeling positive emotions, such as hopeful, optimistic or motivated about going to work than their older counterparts (50 and older).

Figure 2

### Majorities Of Frontline Health Care Workers Have Positive Emotions About Work These Days But Significant Shares - Including Many Younger Health Care Workers - Express Negative Emotions

Percent of frontline health care workers who say they feel the following about going to work these days:



NOTE: See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11- March 7, 2021).

KFF The Washington Post

### **Young Health Care Workers Report Feeling COVID-19 Burden The Hardest**

The youngest group of frontline health care workers are more likely to report feeling negative emotions about their work, but this may be directly tied to their work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Four in ten 18-29 year old adults (41%) report working in a hospital setting (which saw the most severe COVID-19 cases) and nearly half (45%) worked directly assisting with patient care such as bathing, cleaning, and housekeeping, while a smaller share reporting being responsible for patient diagnosis (37%) or administrative tasks (27%).

Seven in ten 18-29 year old frontline health care workers say they have had to work more hours or work harder as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to 59% of 50-64 year olds, and half of those ages 65 and older (49%). A larger share of 18 to 29 year olds also report directly caring for the sickest patients suffering from COVID-19. Six in ten 18-29 year old frontline health care workers (61%) say they worked directly with COVID-19 patients during the past year, including three in ten who treated patients who died as a result of COVID-19. Thirteen percent of 18-29 year old frontline health care workers say they had at least 10 patients in their direct care who died as a result of COVID-19.

#### **How would you describe the work that you do?**

*(% of 18-29 year old frontline health care workers)*

Responsible for administrative duties like a nursing home manager/front desk clerk: 27%

Responsible for patient diagnosis and treatment like a doctor or a nurse: 37%

Responsible for assisting with patient care like bathing, eating, housekeeping: 45%

## **THE MENTAL HEALTH BURDEN**

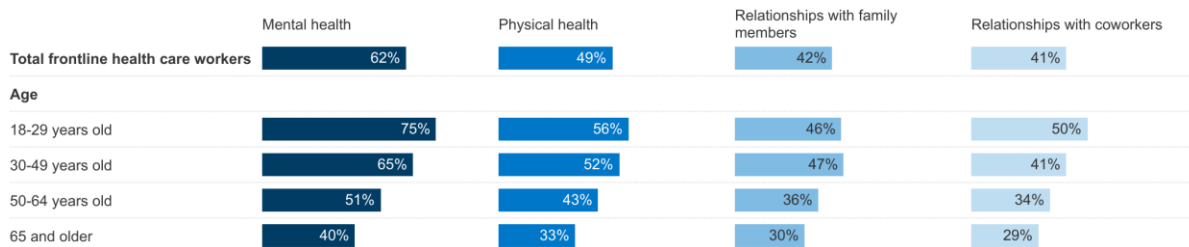
A majority of frontline health care workers (62%) say worry or stress related to COVID-19 has a negative impact on their mental health. A smaller share, but still at least four in ten say the same about their physical health (49%), relationships with family members (42%), and relationships with coworkers (41%). While the share of frontline health care workers who say their mental health has been negatively impacted is similar to the share of the public overall, there are some key groups that report disproportionate impacts.

Once again, the burden seems to be hardest hit on the youngest group of frontline health care workers. Four in ten 65 and older frontline health care workers report that worry or stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health, as do a majority of 50-64 year olds (51%) and 30-49 year olds (65%); yet an even larger share of 18-29 year olds report the same (75%).

Figure 3

### Larger Shares Of Younger Frontline Health Care Workers Report Negative Impacts From Worry Or Stress Related To COVID-19

Percent of frontline health care workers who say worry or stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on each of the following:



NOTE: See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11- March 7, 2021).

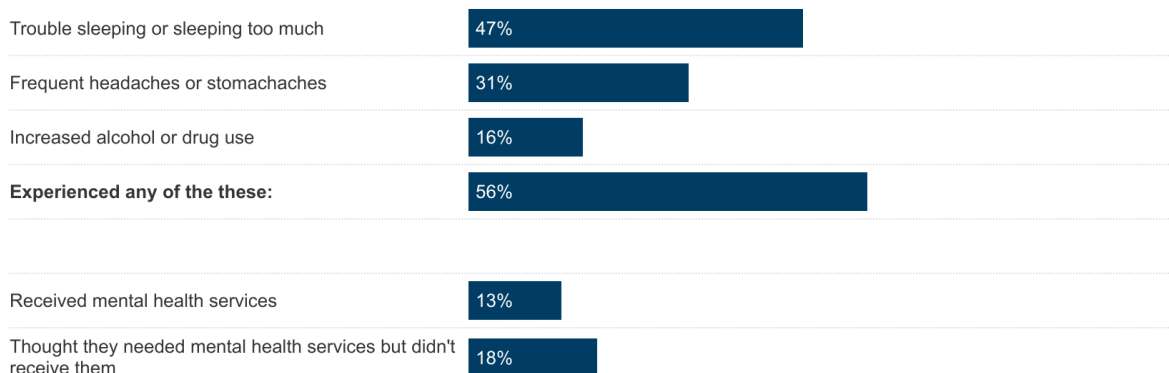
KFF The Washington Post

More than half (56%) of all frontline health care workers say that worry or stress related to COVID-19 has caused them to experience trouble with sleeping or sleeping too much (47%), frequent headaches or stomachaches (31%), or increased alcohol or drug use (16%). In addition, 13% of health care workers say they have received mental health services or medication due to worry or stress related to COVID-19 and an additional one in five (20%) say they thought they might need such services but did not get them. Among those who felt they needed but didn't get mental health care, the most commonly cited reasons are because they were too busy (27%), they were afraid or embarrassed about seeking care (17%), they couldn't afford it (16%), or they couldn't get time off work (14%).

Figure 4

### More Than Half Of Frontline Health Care Workers Say Worry And Stress Related to COVID-19 Has Led To Adverse Health Impacts, Three In Ten Have Needed Mental Health Care

Percent of frontline health care workers who say worry or stress related to COVID-19 has led to each of the following:



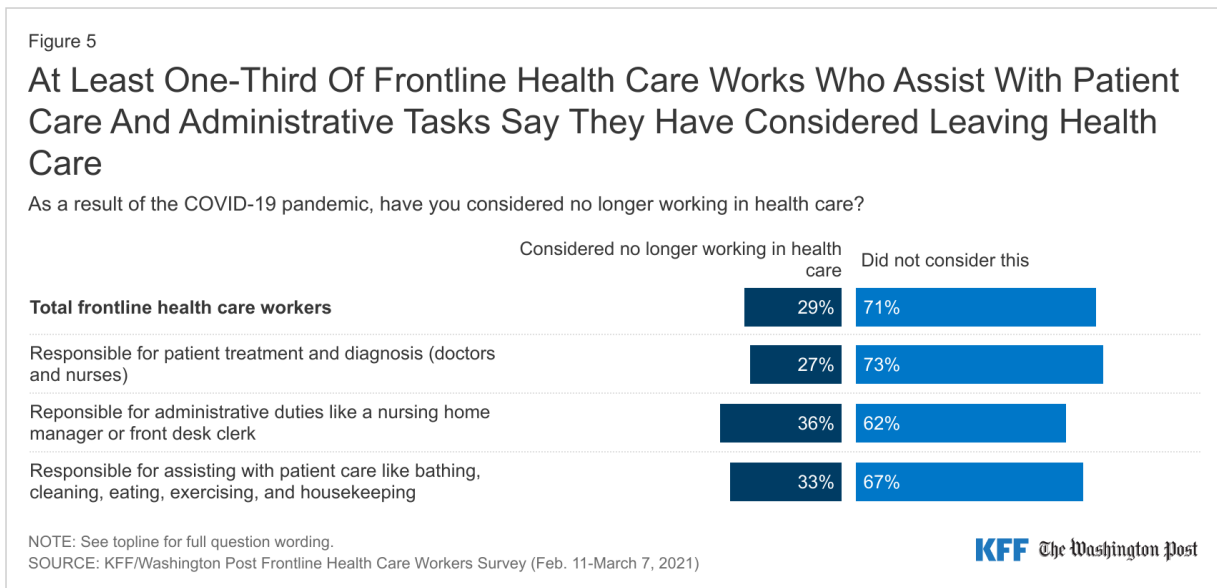
NOTE: See topline for full question wording

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

KFF The Washington Post



Three in ten frontline health care workers say that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, they have considered no longer working in health care. This includes at least one-third of those working in administrative tasks or assisting with patient care like bathing and cleaning. One-fourth of those responsible for patient treatment and diagnosis like doctors and nurses say they considered leaving health care as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.



One group that disproportionately reports higher rates of considering leaving health care (48%) are those who worked in places like hospitals and nursing homes during the pandemic and their facilities ran out of PPE and where the ICU was over capacity.

## The Hardest Part Of The Pandemic? Concerns Over Safety For Both Themselves And Their Family Members

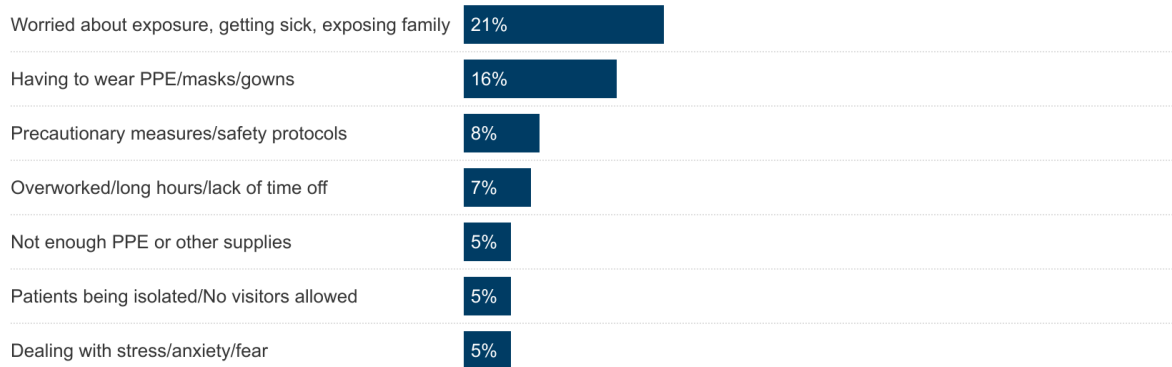
When asked to say in their own words, one in five frontline health care workers say the hardest part of working during the COVID-19 pandemic was their worry about getting exposed to the coronavirus or getting sick from the virus themselves or exposing their family members (21%). This is closely followed by 16% who say having to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) was the hardest part of work. Fewer offer responses like precautionary measures/safety protocols (8%), long hours and lack of time off (7%), not enough PPE or other supplies (5%), patients being isolated (5%), or dealing with stress, anxiety, or fear (5%) as the hardest part of working during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Figure 6

## In Their Own Words: Frontline Health Care Workers Offer Worries About COVID-19 Exposure, Wearing Personal Protective Equipment As Hardest Parts Of Working During Pandemic

Thinking about your work in health care delivery settings, **in your own words**, what has been the **hardest part of working during the COVID-19 pandemic?**



NOTE: Among frontline health care workers. See topline for full question wording  
SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

**KFF** The Washington Post

### IN THEIR OWN WORDS: Thinking about your work in health care delivery settings, what has been the hardest part of working during the COVID-19 pandemic?

“Dealing with people that are positive or suspected positive and wearing all the PPE layers can take a burden on your mind.” –59 year old man, responsible for assisting with patient care in a nursing home or assisted living facility, Wisconsin

“Coming in contact with it and not knowing who came into contact with it so we weren't protected.” –59 year old woman, responsible for assisting with patient care in a nursing home or assisted living facility, Michigan

“I work in the Emergency Department and at the height of the pandemic - December, January - we couldn't keep up with the capacity of patients, both Covid and not, that were coming into the hospital. The staff was overwhelmed, the resources were running out, and our exposure to Covid was extremely high. It was terrible, honestly, and scary.” –38 year old woman, responsible for administrative duties in a hospital, Pennsylvania

“Trying not to get infected [and] covid 19 skeptics. It's very irritating to have people come in and downplay the importance of masks.” –65 year old woman, responsible for patient treatment and diagnosis at a doctor's office and outpatient clinic, Montana

“Entering covid positive rooms. My patients aren't in the hospital for covid but are tested for it. It's difficult to do my job effectively with all the PPE on though I am thankful for it. It

is also stressful to have to enter a Covid positive room.” –53 year old woman, responsible for patient treatment and diagnosis in a hospital, Ohio

“The extra steps needed when I come home from working with Covid patients. [I] have to undress in the garage and straight to the shower. Sometimes making my son sleep overnight at his grandmas when I have seen Covid patients that day.” –33 year old woman, responsible for patient treatment and diagnosis, in-home patient care, Missouri

“Stress and anxiety levels to do work and help keep patients calm. Extra workload.” –59 year old woman, responsible for patient treatment and diagnosis in an outpatient clinic, Minnesota

“Trying to stay protected and protect patients without supportive management.” –31 year old woman, responsible for patient treatment and diagnosis in a doctor’s office, Texas

Many health care workers report that they did get sick from coronavirus in the past year, but few experienced major symptoms. One in six frontline health care workers say they tested positive for COVID-19, including 8% who say both they and someone else in their household tested positive. An additional 11% say someone in their household tested positive but they did not. One-fourth of frontline health care workers working in nursing homes or assisted care facilities say they tested positive for COVID-19 (24%) compared to less than one in five working in hospitals (18%), doctor’s offices or clinics (14%), or providing in-home care (8%).

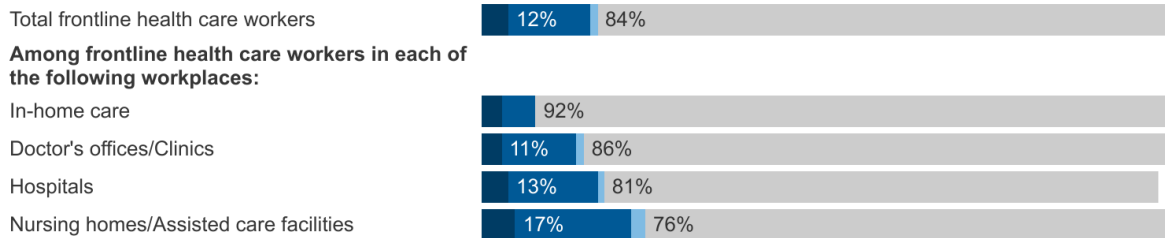
Among health care workers who tested positive, one-fourth (4% of all health care workers) say they experienced “major symptoms” while most say they experienced “minor symptoms” (72% of those who tested positive and 12% of all health care workers). One in twenty say they tested positive but didn’t experience any symptoms (1% of all health care workers).

Figure 7

## Some Frontline Health Care Workers Tested Positive For COVID-19, Very Few Experienced Major Symptoms

Among health care workers in each of the following workplaces, percent who say they:

■ Tested positive and experienced major symptoms ■ Tested positive and experienced minor symptoms ■ Tested positive but didn't experience any symptoms ■ Did not test positive for COVID-19



NOTE: See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

KFF The Washington Post

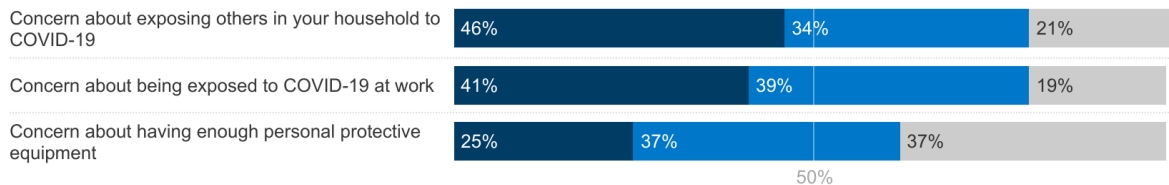
About eight in ten frontline health care workers say that concern about being exposed to COVID-19 at work and exposing others in their household has been sources of stress during the past year, including at least four in ten who say these concerns were a “major source of stress.” A smaller share, but still a majority (63%), say concern about having enough personal protective equipment (PPE) has been a source of stress.

Figure 8

## Eight In Ten Frontline Health Care Workers Say Concern About Being Exposed Or Exposing Their Households To COVID-19 Has Been A Source Of Stress

Thinking about your work during the COVID-19 pandemic, has each of the following been a major source of stress, a minor source of stress, or not a source of stress?

■ Major source of stress ■ Minor source of stress ■ Not a source of stress



NOTE: Among frontline health care workers. See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

KFF The Washington Post

While there are no differences in sources of stress across the different types of work or places they work with majorities all saying these were all at least minor sources of stress, there is a connection between

mental health and sources of stress. Among frontline health care workers who reported experiencing adverse mental health impacts from the pandemic (six in ten of total frontline health care workers), about nine in ten say concerns about being exposed to COVID-19 at work or concern about exposing others in their household to COVID-19 were sources of stress.

## VIEWS OF THEIR EMPLOYERS

Throughout the past year, news reports have told of hospitals running low on personal protective equipment (PPE) and surpassing their capacity in intensive care units. This experience is common among the hardest hit frontline health care workers. Over half (56%) of health care workers in hospitals say that their workplace reached over-capacity of ICU beds or places to treat critical patients, and one third (34%) of health care workers in either hospitals or nursing homes say that at some point during the pandemic, their workplace ran out of PPE for its employees.

Figure 9

### One Third Of Frontline Hospital And Nursing Home Health Care Workers Say Their Workplace Ran Out of PPE; Six In Ten Hospital Workers Say Their ICUs Reached Over-Capacity

Percent of frontline health care workers who say that, at any point during the pandemic, their workplace...

...ran out of personal protection equipment (PPE) for its employees

34%

...reached over-capacity of ICU beds or places to treat critical patients

56%

NOTE: First item: Among those working in hospitals or nursing homes; Second item: Among those working in hospitals. See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

**KFF** The Washington Post

And while most health care workers say their employer is “doing about the right amount” or “going above and beyond” when it comes to providing sick leave to employees who had COVID-19 (66%) or ensuring employees have the ability to get vaccinated (88%), more than half of health care workers who are not self-employed say their employer is “falling short” when it comes to providing additional pay for employees who are working in the most high-risk situations (56%).

Figure 10

## Half Of Frontline Health Care Workers Say Their Employer Has Fallen Short On Providing Hazard Pay, But Majorities Say They Are Doing Better At Providing Sick Leave And Ensuring Vaccinations For Employees

Thinking about the way your employer is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, for each of the following do you think your employer is going above and beyond, doing about the right amount, or falling short?

■ Going above and beyond ■ Doing about the right amount ■ Falling short

Providing additional pay for employees who are working in the most high-risk situations



Providing paid sick leave for employees who have COVID-19



Ensuring employees have the ability to get vaccinated



NOTE: Among frontline health care workers who are not self-employed. See topline for full question wording.  
SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

KFF The Washington Post

A majority of health care workers across different types of health care settings including hospitals (59%), office or clinic (53%), nursing home or assisted care facility (58%), and those who work in patient homes (56%) say their employer is “falling short” in providing additional pay for employees working in high-risk situations.

Despite these issues, eight in ten health care workers say that they think the general public has shown a great deal (28%) or a fair amount (52%) of respect for health care workers like them throughout this time. Nine in ten say that the patients they interact with have a great deal (35%) or a fair amount (52%) of respect for them.

Figure 11

## Eight In Ten Frontline Health Care Workers Say The General Public And Patients They Interact With Have Respect For Them During The Pandemic

Percent of frontline health care workers who say that, these days, they think each of the following has a **great deal** or a **fair amount** of respect for health care workers like them:

■ A great deal ■ A fair amount

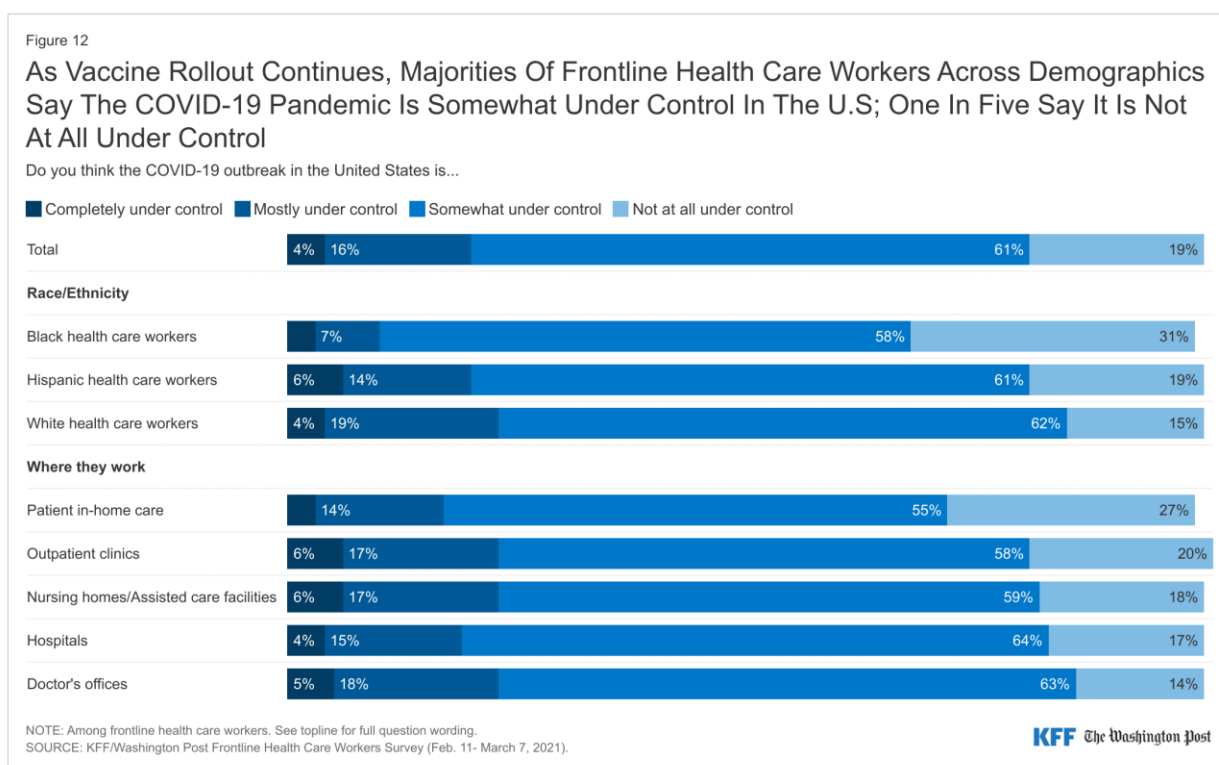


NOTE: See topline for full question wording.  
SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

KFF The Washington Post

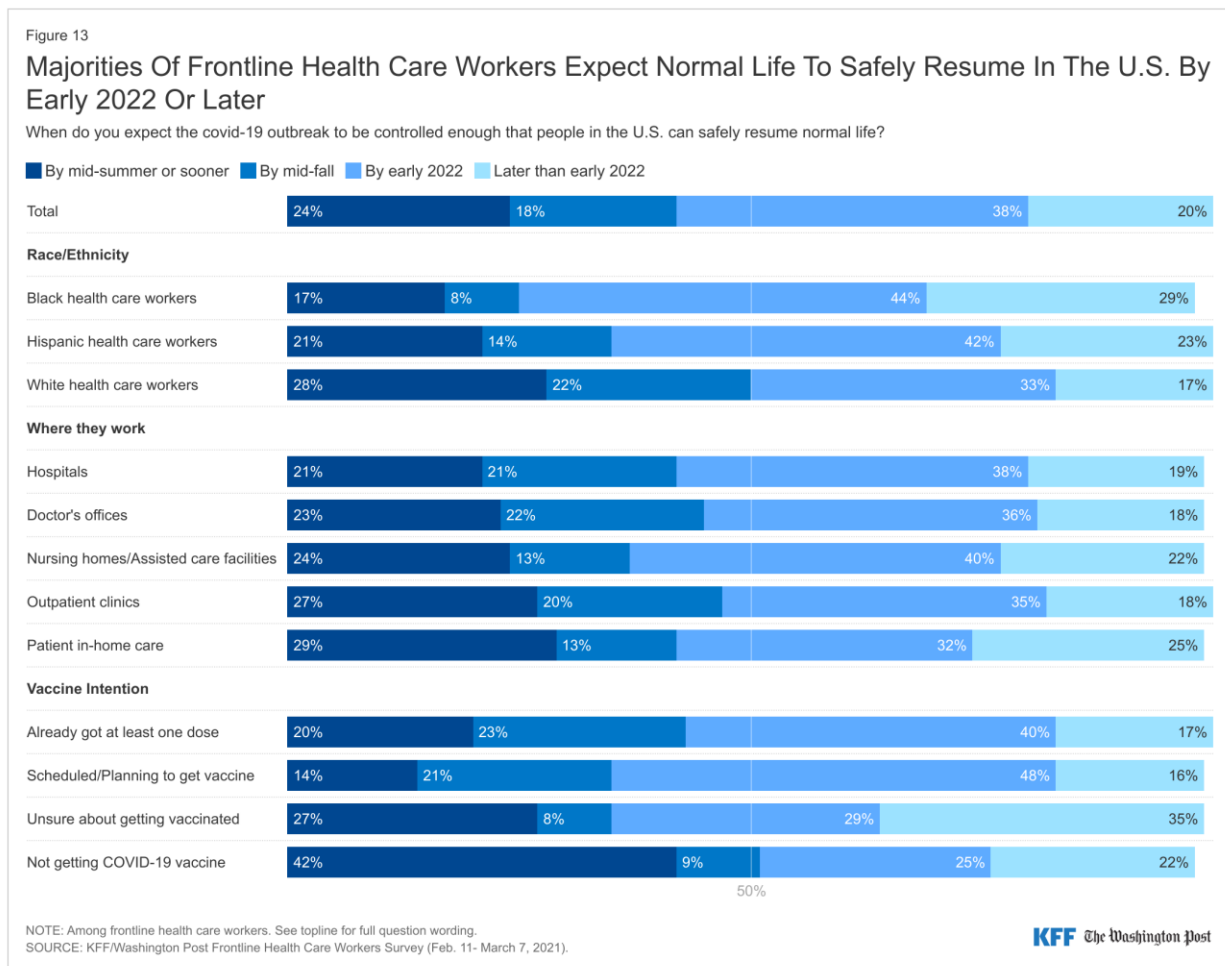
## FRONTLINE HEALTH CARE WORKERS ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE CURRENT STATUS OF THE VACCINE, SAY LIFE WILL RETURN TO NORMAL RELATIVELY SOON

Majorities of health care workers across workplaces and race and ethnicity say that the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. is at least "somewhat under control" including one fourth who say it is "mostly under control" or "completely under control." The view of the status of the pandemic is similar across demographic groups but notably, while about one-fourth of White health care workers say that the outbreak is either "completely" (4%) or "mostly under control" (19%), only about one in ten Black health care workers say the same. Three in ten (31%) of Black health care workers say the COVID-19 outbreak is "not at all under control." While majorities across workplaces say that the COVID-19 is at least somewhat under control, one-fourth of those working in in-home patient care (27%) say that it is "not at all under control."



About four in ten frontline health care workers say they anticipate the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. to be controlled enough so that people can resume normal life by mid-fall or sooner – including 6% who say life can safely resume in the U.S. now. However, most frontline health care workers think the pandemic will only be under control enough for normal life to resume in early 2022 or later (58%). The general public has similar expectations about when they expect normal life to resume, with one quarter (27%) saying by mid-summer or sooner, 17% saying mid-fall, four in ten (38%) saying by early 2022 and an additional 17% saying later than that.

About one in four in-home health care workers saying they expect a return to normal later than early 2022. This is similar to the share of those working in nursing homes and assisted care facilities. These groups are also less likely to say they have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, due to both [concerns about getting it and a lack of access](#).

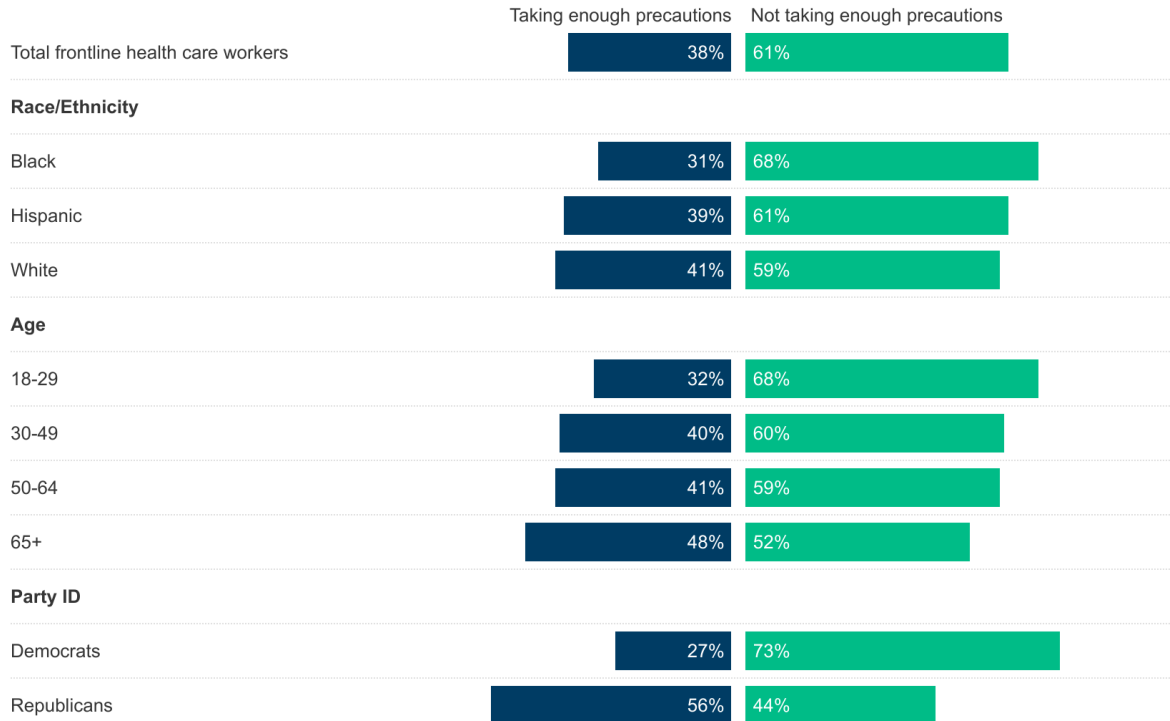


Six in ten (61%) frontline health care workers say that most Americans are not taking enough precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, similar to the share of the general population who say the same about their peers. Seven in ten (68%) Black health care workers, younger health care workers ages 18-29 (68%) and health care workers who are Democrats and Democratic leaning independents (73%) say Americans *are not taking enough* precautions, while a majority of health care workers who are Republicans or Republican leaning independents (56%) say Americans *are taking enough* precautions to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Figure 14

## Six In Ten Health Care Workers Say Most Americans Are Not Taking Enough Precautions To Prevent The Spread Of COVID-19

Percent of frontline health care workers who say most Americans are ... to prevent the spread of COVID-19:



NOTE: Party identification includes those who are independent and say they lean towards the Democratic or Republican party. See topline for full question wording.

SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

**KFF** The Washington Post



# Appendix

## Appendix A

Percent of frontline health care workers who are...	
<b>Gender</b>	
Women	71%
Men	29%
<b>Party ID</b>	
Democrats/Dem. leaning independents	48%
Republicans/Rep. leaning independents	35%
<b>Age</b>	
18-29	26%
30-49	39%
50-64	29%
65+	7%
<b>Education</b>	
Associates degree or less	55%
Bachelor's degree	26%
Post-graduate degree	19%
<b>Community Type</b>	
Urban	34%
Suburban	47%
Rural	19%
<b>Household Income</b>	
Less than \$40K	24%
\$40K-\$89.9K	41%
\$90K+	33%
<b>Where they work</b>	
Hospitals	33%
Patients' homes	22%
Outpatient clinics	18%
Nursing homes/Assisted living facilities	16%
Doctor's offices	16%
<b>Type of work responsibilities</b>	
Assisting with patient care	41%
Patient treatment or diagnosis	40%
Administrative duties	20%

NOTE: Among frontline health care workers. See topline for full question wording  
 SOURCE: KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey (Feb. 11-March 7, 2021)

**KFF** The Washington Post

## Methodology

The KFF/Washington Post is a partnership combining survey research and reporting to better inform the public. The *KFF/Washington Post Frontline Health Care Workers Survey* is the 35<sup>th</sup> in the series and focuses on the toll of the coronavirus pandemic on frontline health care workers. These individuals, who work across many different health care fields including doctors and nurses, nursing home managers, front desk clerks, and those who assist patients with daily tasks like bathing, eating, cleaning, exercising, or housekeeping, have been on the front lines of an industry providing care for the sickest adults during the past year.

Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish with a nationally representative sample of 1,327 frontline health care workers, defined as those who work in a health care delivery setting in direct contact with patients or bodily fluids. The survey also included a comparison survey allowing researchers to compare the group of frontline health care workers to the general population, that included 971 U.S. adults not working as frontline health care workers using the SSRS Online Panel. The survey was conducted online and via telephone from February 11- March 7, 2021. Sampling, data collection, weighting, and tabulation were managed by SSRS of Glenn Mills, Pennsylvania. Teams from KFF and *The Washington Post* worked together to develop the questionnaire and analyze the data, and both organizations contributed financing for the survey.

### Sampling and Recruitment

Frontline health care workers are defined for the purpose of this project as individuals who work in a health care delivery setting and have direct contact with patients or their bodily fluids. This definition is based on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) category of [essential health care workers](#).

The frontline health care worker sample includes a hybrid sample from two online probability-based panels and telephone samples recruited from random digit dialing (RDD). The online panels were the SSRS Opinion Panel, a representative probability-based panel of U.S. adults age 18 and older, recruited using the SSRS Omnibus poll (a weekly dual-frame RDD telephone survey) and through address-based sampling (ABS) (n=398), and the IPSOS KnowledgePanel, a probability-based online panel of U.S. adults age 18 and older recruited through ABS (n=628), targeting panelists who previously indicated they were employed. The telephone sample of frontline health care workers include computer-assisted telephone interviews conducted with respondents reached by cell phone and landline. To efficiently maximize the sample of health care workers, the sample included 124 respondents who previously completed an interview on KFF's monthly tracking poll (n=85) or the SSRS Omnibus Poll (n=39) and said they worked in a health care delivery setting. An additional 94 respondents who previously completed an interview on the SSRS Omnibus and indicated that they were employed were also reached.

## Weighting and Data Processing

The combined landline, cell phone, and web sample was weighted to match the sample demographics to estimates for the national population, and specifically to the adult health care worker population. A multi-stage weighting process was used to adjust for the fact that not all survey respondents were selected with the same probabilities and to account for systematic non-response. In the first weighting stage, adjustments were made regarding the probabilities of selection to the two web panels, and for probability of selection and non-response to the telephone callback samples. In the second stage, weighting was conducted separately for those who qualified as health care workers and all other adults. Demographic benchmarks for health care workers were derived from analysis of a sample of all respondents interviewed on the SSRS Omnibus survey between December 21, 2020 and February 28, 2021 (N=10,075), and the December 2020 KFF Health Care Tracking Poll and January 2021 KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor Survey (combined N=3,239). Each of these surveys were probability samples of the U.S. adult population that were weighted to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey and included questions to identify front-line health care workers. While there are no known administrative data available for frontline health care workers, the survey-derived benchmarks for front-line health care workers estimates were validated by comparison to the 2019 ACS demographic estimates within matching occupation and industry code. In the final weighting stage, each group (health care workers and all others) was weighted to reflect its actual share in the U.S. adult population.

All sampling error margins and tests of statistical significance have been adjusted to account for the sample design and weighting. The margin of sampling error for the total frontline health care worker sample is plus or minus 3 percentage points. The margin of sampling error for the comparison sample (U.S. adults) is 4 percentage points. The margin of sampling error may be higher for subgroups. Note that sampling error is only one of many potential sources of error in this or any other public opinion poll. Kaiser Family Foundation public opinion and survey research and *The Washington Post* are charter members of the Transparency Initiative of the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

Each organization bears the sole responsibility for the work that appears under its name. The project team from the Kaiser Family Foundation included: Mollyann Brodie, Ph.D., Ashley Kirzinger, Ph.D., Audrey Kearney and Liz Hamel. The project team from *The Washington Post* included: Scott Clement and Emily Guskin.

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