The Impact of COVID-19 on the Health of Montanans

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Summary of Survey Results

Since COVID-19 Began...

- Food insecurity substantially increased. Policy and programmatic support should be leveraged to promote food security.
- Food availability declined, especially in more remote communities. Food systems should reorient to ensure adequate food supplies for all.
- To ensure others had enough food, communities shared resources and federal food assistance became more flexible. These strategies should be formalized to ensure resiliency during any public health emergency.
- Many more Montanans exhibited feelings of mental distress since COVID-19 began. Mental health improvement resources should be made readily available.
- COVID-19 has resulted in both positive and negative behavior changes across the domains of food, physical activity, financial, social, mental health, internet, and media access. Supports should be put in place to encourage individuals to continue with new positive habits and change negative habits.

Who Completed the Survey?

- 88% FEMALE
- 93% White
- 3% American Indian or Alaska Native
- 2% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish
- 1% Asian
- 5% Black or African American
- 1% Multi-race or Ethnicity
- 1% Other
- 1% Prefer Not to Answer

Experience with COVID-19

- 50% of respondents identified having a pre-existing condition, which could increase risk for severe COVID
- 56% identified that COVID-19 or its surrounding circumstances impacted the health of a family member or friend
- 9% were diagnosed with COVID-19

Nutrition Resource Support

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): 3%
- Free or Reduced Lunch: 5%
- Food Banks or Pantries: 4%
- Women, Infants, & Children Program (WIC): 2%
- CSA or Farmers Market: 4%
- Food Gifts from Friends or Relatives: 7%
- Alternative Sources of Food (your own food production, wild food harvesting): 9%

When Supporting Others...

- 42% picked up and delivered groceries or supplies
- 20% donated food to a family member or friend
- 19% donated to a food bank

Food Availability

- 77% of respondents indicated that some of the foods they needed were unavailable when they shopped
- 255 dairy
- 163 combination foods or meals
- 119 fruits
- 256 vegetables
- 422 protein (animal)
- 721 dry ingredients

Food Insecurity

Food security is defined as having consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.

Before COVID-19 11% of respondents were food insecure.

Since COVID-19 18% of respondents were food insecure.

- Individuals identifying as food insecure before and/or since COVID-19 were more likely to report a higher prevalence of underlying health conditions (such as obesity, diabetes and/or asthma), which increased risk of developing severe complications from COVID-19.
- Food insecure individuals experienced more economic hardship and were more likely to enroll in SNAP, WIC, and the school lunch program or rely on food banks pantries or food gifts from friends or family to feed their household.
- When asked about source of stress or anxiety, participants stated:
  - "Having enough food & money for bills."
  - "Working full time, teaching school to 3 children, keeping food made, housework the financial stress of having enough money for food, shelter and necessities plus trying to keep our family safe. Not to mention if I would still have a job when I arrive to work."

Food Habits

- 24% decreased eating fresh fruits or vegetables
- 30% increased eating frozen fruits or vegetables
- 30% decreased food waste
- 30% increased alcohol consumption
- 47% increased buying food out of fear or anxiety
- 52% increased snacking
- 74% increased cooking at home
- 86% decreased leaving the house for groceries
- 90% decreased eating out
Financial Hardship

Financial hardship impacts food security and other health outcomes.

Of the 34% of people that experienced financial hardship due to COVID-19:
- 2% defaulted on a loan or mortgage payment
- 2% laid off employees
- 2% experienced a change in housing
- 3% had to close a business
- 4% were furloughed
- 4% left work to care for a family member
- 5% were laid off
- 5% had to temporarily close a business
- 13% had other hardships

"Due to sheltering in place, two members have been either laid off or temporarily furloughed. It has impacted finances, which in turn increases stress."

COVID-19 and Its Impact on Montanans’ Mental Health

Percentage of respondents that answered either ‘all of the time’ or ‘most of the time’ to the following mental-health related questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Before the COVID-19 pandemic</th>
<th>Since the COVID-19 pandemic began</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often did you feel nervous?</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you feel hopeless?</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you feel restless or fidgety?</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you feel that everything was an effort?</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you feel worthless?</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These questions are taken from the validated K6 screening scale for psychological distress.

Health Behaviors

Respondents indicated that it was more challenging than usual to:
- 57% get the same amount of physical activity as before COVID-19
- 39% maintain healthy relationships with family in the same household
- 78% maintain relationships with family, friends, co-workers and community outside of the household

Respondents indicated:
- 43% indicated weight gain
- A majority of respondents increased frequency of online use
- Misinformation in media was cited as a common stressor

Examples of Positive and Negative Behavior Change due to COVID-19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Positive Change</th>
<th>Examples of Negative Change</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Increased home cooked meals of unprocessed foods...[I’m] eating out much less”</td>
<td>“Drinking more alcohol since the stay at home orders”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Not wasting food/leftovers”</td>
<td>“More fast food...easier than preparing a trip to the grocery store”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“COVID-19 has re-upped my feeling for the need of LOCAL everything, especially food”</td>
<td>“Stress eating...constantly snacking since I am stuck at home”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Going on more walks with my family”</td>
<td>“More screen time on my phone”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have started exercising everyday”</td>
<td>“Been a lot more lazy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I am budgeting my money better”</td>
<td>“[Unhealthy habits] until I have more secure finances and childcare”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The stay at home directive has shown me the importance of family engagement and togetherness”</td>
<td>“Less patience with my children”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I have started meditating, which is a great strategy for managing stress!”</td>
<td>“Isolation has increased depressive behaviors”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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