Risk Perception, Information Seeking, and Protective Actions During COVID-19 among New Yorkers
MAY-JULY, 2020

Background
Since its emergence in late 2019, COVID-19 has caused profound disruption to daily life, both within the U.S. and abroad. The scale and duration of the pandemic is directly related to human behavior and social interactions that take place within communities. To understand how individuals access information about COVID-19, perceive their risk of becoming infected, and the types of protective actions they took, a web survey was conducted in New York State. Survey data collection took place from May 21 to July 14, 2020, during the phased reopening of NY State from stay at home orders. A total of 523 New Yorkers completed the survey. This research brief provides a summary of the information sources, risk perceptions, and behaviors related to reducing COVID-19 transmission among New Yorkers.

Key Findings
1) The most frequently used information sources reported by New Yorkers were the news media and the Governor or state level government.

2) The most frequently used channels for getting information reported by New Yorkers were television and online news media sites.

3) The information sources ranked as most trusted by New Yorkers were most trusted information sources were the news media and the Governor or state level government.

4) The most frequently adopted protective actions reported by New Yorkers were frequent hand washing and hand sanitizer use followed by staying home more often.

Information Seeking
Television was the most reported channel for getting information with over three-quarters of respondents reporting that they got information about COVID-19 from television in the past month. Online news media websites and social media were also reported as being used in the past month for COVID-19 information by more than half of respondents. Radio and print news were less commonly used in the past month for COVID-19 information.

Figure 1. COVID-19 information channels

The news media was the most commonly reported source of information about COVID-19 in the past month for New Yorkers, followed closely by the Governor or state level government. 65% of New York respondents reported using news media sources of information of COVID-19 in the past month and 59% reported getting information from the Governor or state level government.

Figure 2. COVID-19 information sources
Trust in Information Sources

Respondents were asked to rank the information sources they have used in the last month from the most to the least trustworthy. The most trusted sources of information were news media and the Governor or state government. 17% of study participants reported news media sources as the most trusted and 15% of participants reported the Governor or state government as most trusted. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was reported as the most trusted source by another 12% of study participants. The sources of information least often ranked as most trusted were local public health and local emergency management agencies. On average, local public health was ranked 4th in trustworthiness and local emergency management was ranked 5th.

Risk Perception

Overall, the risk of COVID-19 was perceived to be relatively low among study respondents. Participants were asked to rate the likelihood of COVID-19 infection in: (a) the next month and (b) before the pandemic ends. This question was ranked on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = not at all likely, 5 = equally likely and unlikely, 10 = certain). New Yorkers had a mean response of 3.1 for likelihood of infection in the next month and a mean of 3.6 for likelihood of infection before the pandemic ends. When asked about the likelihood of being able to cope with the health effects of COVID-19, respondents were more certain with a mean of 5.6. Finally, respondents thought it was equally likely and unlikely that they would suffer serious health effects from getting COVID-19.

Protective Actions

The most common protective action behaviors reported by study participants in the past month were staying home more often (80%), staying 6 feet apart in public spaces (75%), avoiding shaking hands (66%), and avoiding gathering with people outside of their household (65%). Mask wearing was reported by 69% of respondents, with 60% reporting wearing a cloth or other non-medical mask and 34% reporting wearing a medical mask. 44% of study participants reported purchasing extra supplies of food and one-third of respondents reported canceling or delaying a routine healthcare appointment.

Most participants reported engaging in hygiene behaviors to protect against COVID-19. 88% of respondents reported washing their hands for at least 20 seconds and 81% reported using hand sanitizer. Nearly three-quarters of respondents reported disinfecting surfaces that are touched frequently.

“The hardest thing has been uncertainty - What is available at the store? What is open? What is the truth about masks? What criteria is the governor using to make decisions? Will he change his mind again?”

- Survey respondent
Study Participant Characteristics

The sample was 65% white, 17% Hispanic, 16% Black or African American, and 9% Asian or Pacific Islander and 52% of respondents were female. Nearly one-quarter of respondents report an annual income in 2019 of less than $25,000 and one-quarter of respondents report an income of greater than $100,000. 60% of respondents reported some college education.

![Figure 7. Study participant characteristics](image_url)

About the Research Team

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Study website: [http://go.dyc.edu/RAPID](http://go.dyc.edu/RAPID)

Study Methodology

A non-probability proportional quota sample in three states are in recruitment: Washington (WA), New York (NY), and Louisiana (LA), states in three different geographic regions of the U.S. offering an opportunity to examine regional differences over time. Quotas were set to mirror population demographics for age, race, ethnicity, gender, and income. Study enrollment in New York state was n=300. Recruitment and web survey administration was conducted by Qualtrics through their Panels Project.

Before commencing the survey, respondents were provided with information about the study, risks, benefits, and contact information for the research team and Institutional Review Board and were asked to confirm they were 18 years of age or older and consented to participate in the study. The median time for completing the survey was 10 minutes. Respondents completing the survey faster than five minutes were eliminated from the sample due to poor quality.

The Institutional Review Boards at the State University at Albany and D’Youville College reviewed and approved this study before data collection began.

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