

Background

The Understanding America Study (UAS) is a probability-based online panel of adult US residents that began in 2014. Respondents are drawn from the universe of US Postal addresses and are provided with a tablet and broadband internet if needed. The survey includes the Health and Retirement Study (HRS) questionnaire, which respondents answer in portions on a rolling basis over two years. The UAS also provides a platform for incorporating additional modules and questions. Over six years, the UAS has developed an extensive catalogue of questions and responses on a variety of topics related to social science, demography and health. The number of panel respondents has also increased over time. The provided sample weights make the UAS nationally representative. A subsample is also representative of adult residents of Los Angeles County. Survey waves are numbered sequentially, and the researcher can create a longitudinal dataset by appending these waves together and identifying respondents by their unique identifier (“*usid*”).

COVID-19 Longitudinal Survey

Beginning in March 2020, the UAS started a high-frequency longitudinal data collection related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This project began with the UAS230 round, which was fielded from March 10 to March 31, 2020, with most responses happening during the period of March 10-14.¹ UAS 230 is the first round that includes questions that were specifically tailored to COVID-19 and which were repeated in subsequent longitudinal waves.

We formalized the longitudinal survey in the subsequent round, which began on April 1 (UAS 235: “Wave 2”). From here, the panel repeats on a fourteen-day cycle. Respondents were randomized to fourteen survey invitation days within each period. From the invitation date, respondents outside of LA County had fourteen days to complete the survey. Therefore, surveys remained open for 28 days so that even respondents on the fourteenth day would have two weeks to respond. We refer to this survey as the “long survey” throughout this document. Additional information about the long survey is available [here](#).

Surveys were handled slightly differently for the Los Angeles County subsample. These respondents participated in the main longitudinal survey as above. In addition, they received another survey (the “short survey”) every fourteen days that was spaced so that it occurred in the “off weeks” when respondents did not have the long survey. For instance, someone from LA County who was assigned to take the long survey on Day 1 would be assigned to take the short survey on Day 8, however someone who was assigned to take the Long Survey on Day 8 would be assigned to take the short survey on Day 1. Because LA County respondents had a shorter interval between surveys, they were given 7 days to complete each short or long survey. For the most part, the short survey contains a subset of the questions found in the long survey. However, the short survey contains trust and information questions that are tailored to LA County. Additional information about the LA County data collection is available [here](#).

The table below illustrates the schedule of survey invitation dates. Non-LA County were randomized across groups N1-N14 while LA County respondents were randomized across groups L1-L14. In addition to LA County resident status, the randomization was stratified by age, sex, and employment (whether working). The

¹ Unlike in subsequent rounds, respondents were all invited to take the survey at the same time, so that the differences between early and late responses within the survey period should not be considered random.

variable “covidday” indicates the respondent’s randomized invitation day (1-14).² Kapteyn et al. (2020) provide more detail about the study design. Note that respondents maintain the same invitation day throughout the panel, so that survey invitations arrive on consistent two-week intervals (one-week intervals for LA County) throughout the panel.

The UAS panel is constantly expanding through new recruitment batches. New members who consent to participate in the COVID tracking survey are added to the sample on a weekly basis following the scheme described above.

Day	Full UAS Sample (not LA County)														LA County Sample													
	N1	N2	N3	N4	N5	N6	N7	N8	N9	N10	N11	N12	N13	N14	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9	L10	L11	L12	L13	L14
1	L														L							S						
2		L														L						S						
3			L														L						S					
4				L													L							S				
5					L													L							S			
6						L													L							S		
7							L													L							S	
8								L							S						L							
9									L							S						L						
10										L							S						L					
11											L							S						L				
12												L							S						L			
13													L							S						L		
14														L							S							L

The longitudinal surveys include a core of questions about attitudes, perceptions, experiences, and behaviors in relation to COVID-19. Additional questions or modules were added by the CESR team or by outside researchers in individual waves or in series of waves.

Core COVID-19 Survey Module

Most panel survey waves include a core of questions related to COVID-19 that are repeated and maintain consistency over time. The core includes:

- Personal experiences with COVID-19, including diagnoses, interactions with the health care system, and respiratory symptoms.
- Subjective COVID-19 risk perceptions, including the risk of contracting the disease, being hospitalized, and dying.
- Participation in protective behaviors such as social distancing and wearing a mask.
- Perceived effectiveness of several protective behaviors and perceived safety of several potentially risky activities.
- The number of family or close friends who have contracted COVID-19, been hospitalized, or died.
- Perceived safety and effectiveness of childhood vaccines.
- Interest in receiving a COVID-19 vaccine once it becomes available.
- Stigma related to COVID-19.
- Coping behaviors, including substance use and self-care activities.
- Social interactions with family and friends, electronically and in person.

² There was a two-day delay in launching the initial wave of this longitudinal design, and so covidday = 3 on the first day of each survey wave. It cycles through to 14, begins again at 1, and takes the value of 2 for the group that is invited to participate on the 14th day.

- Binge drinking.
- PHQ-4 Depression and Anxiety Scale.
- PSS-4 Short Form Perceived Stress Scale.
- Resilience.
- Loneliness.
- Utilization of mental health care.
- Experiences of discrimination.
- Current employment status for self and spouse.
- Work time and earnings.
- Remote work.
- Subjective risk of job loss.
- Unemployment insurance utilization.
- Government limitations on travel and business operations.
- Economic insecurity.
- Receipt of government benefit and safety net programs.
- Delays or missed payments for mortgages, student loans, and rent.
- Eviction and foreclosure.
- Experiences of theft and neighborhood insecurity.
- Plans to claim social security benefits for respondents aged 50-70.
- K-12 education (core module added beginning with UAS 268).

There are two notable limitations on the availability of these core variables. First, some components of this core were incorporated after the initiation of the panel, so that early waves of the panel may not include some variables. Secondly, we adopted an “alternate wave” approach to some questions from Waves 7 to 9 in order to streamline the survey. Therefore, some questions are missing from Waves 7 and 9. We discontinued this approach after Wave 9.

The core survey also includes several “preload” questions that are asked once but appear in subsequent questionnaires. These questions are only subsequently asked if the respondent has not answered them previously.

Additional Modules and Questions

The survey includes several additional modules and questions that were incorporated in individual waves. Some of these questions are repeated longitudinally and others are not. Researchers should consult the codebooks and questionnaire documents for these waves for more detail.

- **Post-Secondary Education** (Waves 3, 8, 15): enrollment and participation in higher education for all members of the household.
- **K-12 Education** (Waves 2, 3, 8, 15): experiences and perceptions of K-12 schooling in general and for a randomly selected child from the household. Using these modules longitudinally may be difficult because many question constructions vary from wave to wave.
- **Payments** (Waves 3, 11): this module covers the types of payments people respondents have made recently and how their payment behavior may have shifted due to COVID-19.
- **Trust and information** (Waves 1, 7): whether the respondent received information about COVID-19 from several sources and whether he or she trusts these information sources. An LA County version of these questions is available in most waves of the short survey, however trust and information is only asked of the national sample in these particular waves.

- **Trust and information supplement** (Wave 16): trust and information questions about additional information sources within LA County.
- **Cannabis use** (Wave 4-5). Additional questions about cannabis use.
- **Self-reported health** (Wave 4): activities of daily living, perceived health status.
- **Entrepreneurship** (Wave 5): a module targeted at business owners and people who are self-employed. Questions are about the impact of COVID-19 on business operations.
- **Consumer confidence** (Wave 8): standard questions about expected economic conditions.
- **Child care** (Wave 14): questions about who is responsible for child care within the household.
- **Vaccine priorities** (Wave 15): a series of questions about how society should allocate an eventual vaccine.
- **Vaccine attitudes** (Wave 16): questions about the perceptions of an eventual COVID-19 and seasonal influenza vaccines (distinct from the vaccine priorities questions in Wave 15).
- **Food insecurity** (Waves 4, 9, 15): Questions about access to food and food purchases within the past 30 days for LA County residents.

Survey Waves

The table below summarizes the survey dates and additional survey content.

Wave	Long Survey Name	Short Survey Name	Start Date	Last Invitation Date	End Date	Additional Long Survey Content	Additional Short Survey Content
1	UAS 230		3/10	--	3/31	Trust and information	
2	UAS 235	UAS 236	4/1	4/14	4/28	K-12 education	
3	UAS 240	UAS 241	4/15	4/28	5/12	Payments, higher education, K-12 education	
4	UAS 242	UAS 243	4/29	5/12	4/29	Cannabis, activities of daily living	Food insecurity
5	UAS 244	UAS 245	5/13	5/26	5/13	Cannabis, entrepreneurship	
6	UAS 246	UAS 247	5/27	6/9	5/27		
7	UAS 248	UAS 249	6/10	6/23	7/7	<i>Some missing core questions due to "alternate wave" approach.</i> Trust and information	<i>Some missing core questions due to "alternate wave" approach.</i>
8	UAS 250	UAS 251	6/24	7/7	7/21	K-12 education, post-secondary education, consumer confidence	
9	UAS 252	UAS 253	7/8	7/21	8/4	<i>Some missing core questions due to "alternate wave" approach.</i>	<i>Some missing core questions due to "alternate wave" approach.</i> Food insecurity
10	UAS 254	UAS 255	7/22	8/4	8/18		
11	UAS 256	UAS 257	8/5	8/18	9/1	Payments	
12	UAS 258	UAS 259	8/19	9/1	9/15		

13	UAS 260	UAS 261	9/2	9/15	9/29		
14	UAS 262	UAS 263	9/16	9/29	10/13	Child care	
15	UAS 264	UAS 265	9/30	10/13	10/27	K-12 education, post-secondary education, vaccine priorities	Food insecurity
16	UAS 266	UAS 267	10/14	10/27	11/10	Vaccine attitudes	Trust and information supplement
17	UAS 268	UAS 269	10/28	11/10	11/24		
18	UAS 270	UAS 271	11/11	11/24	12/8		
19	UAS 272	UAS 273	11/25	12/8	12/13	CESD (depression)	
20			12/9	12/23	1/5/2021		

CESR staff have compiled a longitudinal file that assembles these survey waves into a panel and renames variables for consistency. More information about the longitudinal file is available [here](#).

Utilizing Additional UAS Data Resources

The websites for the national sample and the LA County sample referenced above provide additional details about these surveys, including the precise question wording and survey programming. In addition, researchers should utilize the ["search" function](#) on the UAS website to find specific variables that may be relevant to their work. The UAS includes an extensive library of questions and responses from before COVID-19 that supplement analyses using these data. The [UAS comprehensive file](#) and individual surveys from the past provide these variables and can be merged in. Respondents also complete the [My Household](#) survey every quarter. This module includes basic demographic and economic information (e.g. employment) that may provide a historical benchmark about UAS respondent households.

The size of the UAS panel has expanded steadily since the inception of the panel in 2014. In addition, some surveys have been targeted toward specific subpopulations. As a result, some questions that were asked in the past may not have full coverage for the current COVID-19 panel. Researchers should refer to the question database on the UAS website to see whether particular questions were asked of the full panel or a subpopulation.

Reference

Kapteyn A, Angrisani M, Bennett D, de Bruin WB, Darling J, Gutsche T, Liu Y, Meijer E, Perez-Arce F, Schaner S, Thomas K. Tracking the Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Lives of American Households. [Survey Research Methods](#), 2020 Jun 2 (Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 179-186).