



Public Policy and Public Panic – The Corona Virus

Lone Star Analysis conducted a survey of Americans on March 16, 2020 to assess public impressions about the Corona Virus, or Covid-19. We conducted a web survey consisting of five questions. These were compiled into an overall score related to the level of concern among Americans.

SUMMARY

Overall, Americans are genuinely concerned. A composite score of the five questions shows diversity among respondents, but the concern level can probably be deemed “panic” by nearly 40% responding.

- Americans are more concerned about the economic impact than health impacts, though they are concerned about both.
- Business and political leaders should be prepared to help address concerns with information that speaks to mitigation of both health and financial impacts at *the personal level*.
- Income level is a better predictor of economic concern than other variables we tested. The most economically vulnerable are the most concerned they will be severely impacted economically.

Question 1 asks respondents how contagious they think Covid-19 is. While this question does not ask for a comparison to other diseases, it does seem Americans may overestimate the risk of transmission.

Without interventions, Covid-19 seems to be less contagious than the 1918 Spanish Flu, SARS, and many other common viruses (Chickenpox, Measles). It is probably somewhat more contagious (without interventions) than common flu or H1N1.

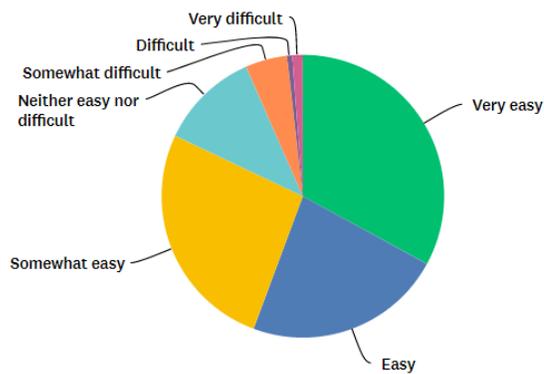
The Lancet reports, with interventions Covid-19 may be less contagious than all these other diseases.

About three quarters of respondents chose some form of response that Covid-19 is “easy” to contract.

Leaders and policy makers should consider making comparisons to familiar diseases to make aide understanding.

What is your impression about how easy or hard it is to catch Covid-19 from another person?

Answered: 167 Skipped: 0





Question 2 asks respondents how severe they think the disease is. They are prompted to compare to Flu and Measles. These are both viral diseases like Covid-19. Most Americans don't experience the severe impact of untreated Measles or Flu. In Africa, Measles is the leading cause of childhood blindness, and mortality rates have been reported as high as 25% in some populations. Meanwhile the measles mortality rate in the U.S. is about 0.2%, or 100 times less severe.

Most respondents rated Covid-19 as "Worse" or "Much Worse" than more familiar diseases.

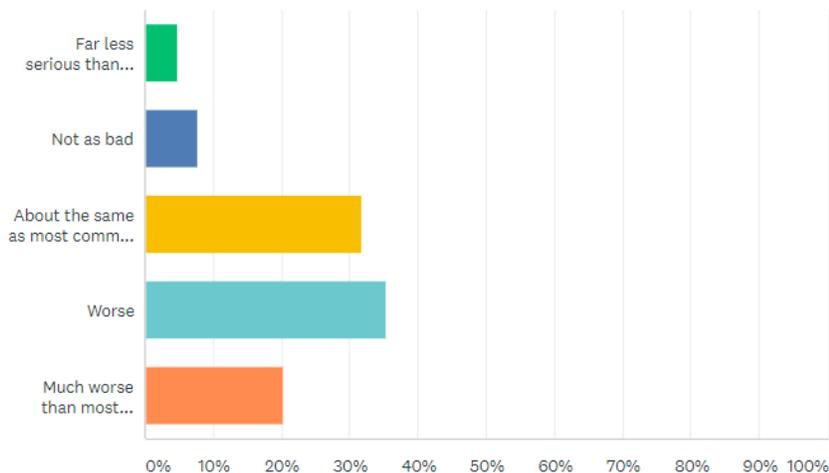
Here too, leaders and policy makers might consider making comparisons to familiar diseases.

Ensuring adequate treatment is available is critical to ensuring the death rates in Italy and Iran don't occur in the United States. Political leaders should ensure hospitals and doctors are supported.

Business leaders should help employees access their benefits.

Compared to other illnesses you have heard about like the Flu, or Measles, how would you rate Covid-19 in terms of being a severe illness?

Answered: 167 Skipped: 0



Question 3 asks respondents how close the disease is to them personally. It is interesting that one respondent of 167 reported they personally had the disease. And, seven respondents reported knowing someone who had Covid-19. At the time of this survey, fewer than 4,000 cases were confirmed in the United States. The odds that a survey of 167 would have even one respondent with a confirmed case is less than 2 in 1000.

Assuming each of the 4,000 confirmed cases has a cadre of 150 people who know them well enough to know about a diagnosis, we'd expect zero, or one respondent who report knowing someone with Covid-19. Instead there were 7. If we take a more likely estimate of 50 close acquaintances per person, we'd expect none of these responses.

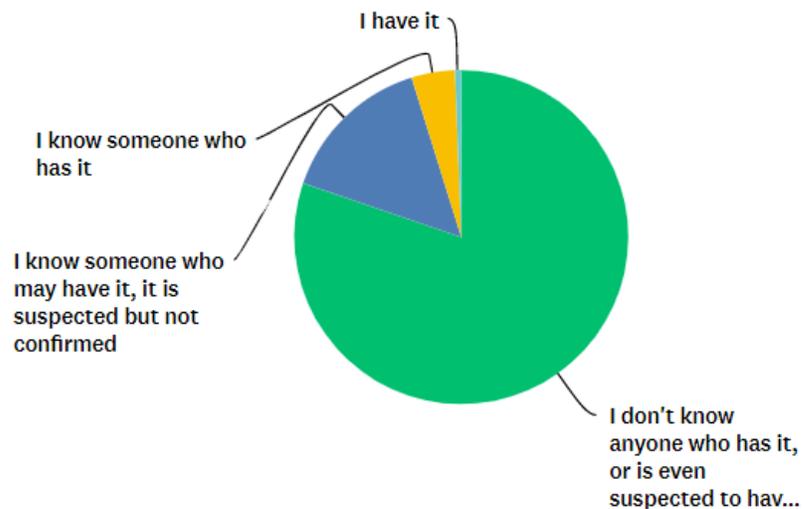
It seems people believe they have the disease or know someone at a higher rate than actual test confirmations would suggest.

It is difficult to explain these discrepancies without discussing hypochondria. The rate of hypochondria among Americans ranges from 1% to 7% of the population. Health care professionals are reported to be among those most prone to hypochondria.

It seems likely policy makers and leaders should expect constituents who believe they have the disease, whether there is an actual diagnosis or not. In the same manner, we should expect stakeholders to believe they know someone affected, even though there may be no confirmed diagnosis. These beliefs are likely to be sincere.

How close is Covid-19 to you personally?

Answered: 167 Skipped: 0



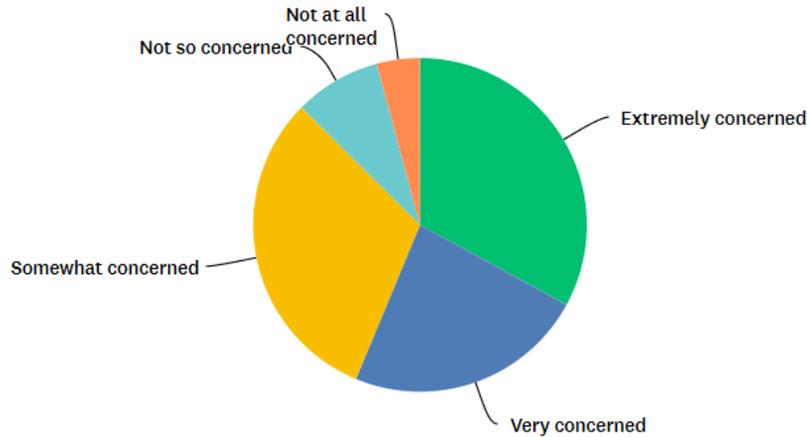
Questions 4 and 5 asks respondents their degree of health concerns and economic concerns.

About two thirds of Americans say they are “Concerned” or “Very Concerned” when asked about “the health and safety of yourself and your family...”

Although Covid-19 has been widely reported as a larger risk for older people, respondent age was not a significant factor. Respondents over the age of 45 were only slightly more likely to rate health concerns higher than financial concerns.

How concerned are you about the health and safety of yourself and your family when you think about Covid-19?

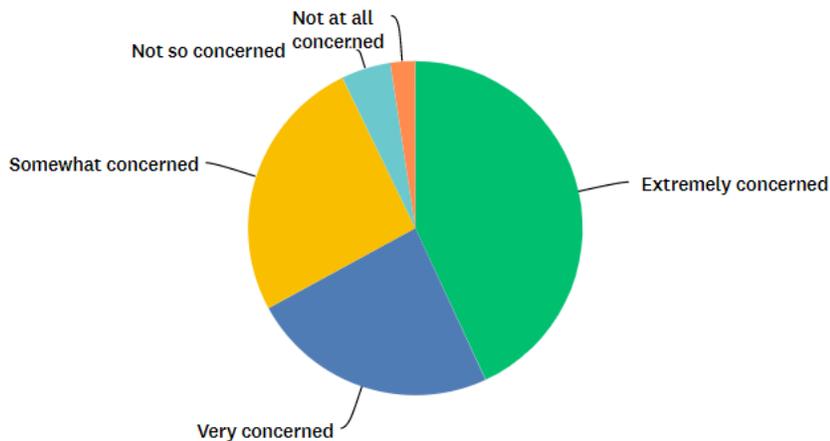
Answered: 167 Skipped: 0



Overall, Americans somewhat more concerned about the economic impact than health and safety.

How concerned are you about the economic impact to yourself and your family when you think about Covid-19?

Answered: 167 Skipped: 0



By income level, respondents reporting less than \$50,000 per year in household income were slightly more concerned about health and safety than economic impact. Respondents with more than \$50,000 per year in household income were slightly more concerned about economic impact.

Apparently, the specter of mass closings (restaurants, plays, schools) feeds the fear about being able to “make it” to the next paycheck. Respondents with the lowest household incomes (under \$25,000) expressed the greatest economic anxiety.

Even those who reported having the virus, knowing someone, suspecting someone were equally concerned about economic impacts as health impacts.

We found no cadre which expressed more concern about health risks over economic risks.

Policy makers and leaders should recognize the financial uncertainty caused by closings and changes in life patterns.

It is striking that economic concerns weigh so heavy, even though Americans seem to think Covid-19 is more contagious and more deadly that it is likely to be.

Containment is important but should not be allowed to damage the economy any more than absolutely necessary. For example, government contracts and payments should not be interrupted. America must remain “open for business” as much as possible. Business leaders should sustain their worker’s paychecks if at all possible.



Photo taken the afternoon of March 16, 2020.



About the survey

This survey was conducted as a pro bono effort to support our clients and leaders in business and public policy. The number of respondents was 167.

About Lone Star Analysis

Lone Star Analysis is a trusted provider of predictive and prescriptive analytics and analysis. We offer software solutions and analytic services. Lone Star provides powerful solutions serving industrial markets, aerospace & defense, oil & gas, transportation & logistics, and the public sector. Our reputation is built on creating lasting value for our clients. We are committed to generating improved operational and financial performance through accurate and actionable answers to our client's most critical business, economic and policy challenges.