

RESEARCH SUMMARY

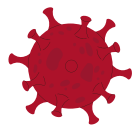
UFCW Essential Worker Health Survey during COVID-19



Key Findings Summary

From June 2021 to May 2022, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) International Union partnered with researchers at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) to conduct the largest longitudinal survey of union members who are essential workers on the job during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The results highlight the great sacrifice America's essential workers made during the course of this pandemic to keep their communities running, and informs future strategies to protect essential workers exposed to infectious diseases at work. A summary of key findings from 17,617 UFCW member respondents are provided below.



IMPACT OF COVID-19 INFECTION

- During surveys conducted July 2021 to May 2022, **new monthly COVID infection rates rose from 2% to 15% among UFCW member respondents.** These rates of infection were 10 times higher than U.S. incidence rates during the same period.
- UFCW members who reported having COVID infections before May 2021 were **twice as likely to get infected again in the past year.**
- **UFCW members were hit hard during the Omicron surge.** In February of 2022, 45% of those who said they had tested positive for COVID said they had contracted it recently.
- Of those UFCW members who contracted COVID, 59% said that they believed it was likely they **contracted the virus in their workplace.**

- During the first few months of the study, 90% of those infected with COVID reported missing work for an average of 20 days due to infection.
- Approximately 20% of those who contracted COVID visited an emergency room.
- 6% of respondents who contracted COVID needed to be hospitalized, which is a significantly higher rate than the nationwide 2% rate of hospitalization.
- Over 12% of those who contracted COVID said it took them more than four months to feel “back to normal.”
- 4% of workers reported being unable to return to work after contracting COVID.



COVID-19 VACCINATION

- In the Summer and early Fall of 2021, **88% of UFCW members who participated were at least partially vaccinated.** Respondents were much more likely to receive a vaccination and booster shot than the general population by a rate of 20% or more.
- By January of this year, **half of all respondents were fully vaccinated and boosted.**



ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS

- **Two thirds of respondents said COVID vaccines should be required.** However, only 13% of employers had a vaccination requirement in place at the end of summer 2021.
- In July 2021, **75% of respondents believed that their customers were not taking the COVID pandemic seriously enough.**
- In May of 2022, **half of respondents report that their lives were still deeply impacted by COVID.**

Background

Essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic included people who were required to consistently and physically be present at their workplace to perform jobs deemed critical to public safety, national security, and societal function. Remote work was simply not feasible for the 30 to 50 million essential workers at a time when personal interactions were deemed risky due to high virus transmission between people. Essential workers are a heterogeneous group, represented by a wide array of occupations. As the largest private-sector union, the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) International Union represents more than 1 million of these essential workers.

The UFCW has taken an active role to protect its members' health during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing them credible pandemic information and by encouraging employers to implement stronger workplace safety measures. To better understand members' workplace conditions, experiences, and attitudes during this critical period, UFCW leadership partnered with researchers at the University of Nebraska Medical Center Colleges of Medicine and Public Health in the spring of 2021 to create the UFCW Essential Worker Health Survey (EWHS). Monthly surveys were texted to participating UFCW members beginning June 2021 through May 2022.

The surveys aimed to determine:



The frequency, severity, and duration of COVID-19 illness and the impact on respondents' ability to work.



Find out what employer safety measures, mandates, and specific support measures in place to protect workers during the pandemic.



Attitudes toward and uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations.

Methods & Study Participants

- In April 2021, UFCW members were solicited by UFCW staff to participate in the surveys. Outreach included email, newsletters, social media, and texts from the Hustle software system.
- 17,617 UFCW members completed online sign-up forms, almost all of which were responding to a Hustle text, which went to 650,000+ members.
- COVID-19 infection occurrence and vaccination status were asked monthly. Questions about COVID-19 symptoms, workplace safety, attitudes about the pandemic, and vaccines were included variably each month, depending on COVID-19 prevalence, vaccine availability, and CDC recommendations for personal protective measures.
- All 17,617 registered participants received an EWHS survey each month beginning in June 2021. Participation rates varied by month. There were 10,293 participants who completed at least one of the monthly surveys with 3,238 completing only 1; only 140 completed all 12 surveys.
- Occupation representation: grocery 73%, healthcare (primarily nursing aides) 8%, meatpacking and processing 3%, other food 2%.

Recruitment & Participation



UFCW members solicited



17,617 members completed online sign-up



3,713 average monthly participation rate

- High of 5,764 in June 2021
- Low of 1,674 in March 2022

Occupation Representation

