

Key Findings from the 2020 Students' Well-being Survey

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 24 public and private colleges and universities in the state. The campuses in the coalition work to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies. These strategies include education, social norming campaigns, policy review and enforcement, and more. To understand the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic on college students, PIP created the Students' Well-being Survey, which was implemented at 13 institutions in September 2020. The survey assesses students' mental health, well-being, and substance use during the beginning of the fall semester as well as during the initial COVID-19 outbreak (March to May 2020) when campus operations were disrupted. The survey also asks about students' use of protective strategies related to COVID-19 control.

The following are key findings from the 2020 Students' Well-being Survey (n=5,446)

Mental Health and Well-being

One-third (33%) of Missouri college students reported that their stress in the past two weeks was overwhelming or unbearable. The most common source of stress was academics (85%). Thirty percent (30%) of students reported that their stress was overwhelming or unbearable during the March to May campus disruptions, with 71% of students reporting that they were more stressed during this time period than they were before. The most common source of stress during spring campus disruptions was academics (72%).

Missouri college students self-report experiencing issues related to mental health, the most common being anxiety (70%), chronic sleep issues (23%), panic attacks (21%), and major depression (18%). Of students who report experiencing a mental health concern in the past thirty days, 31% of them did not seek assistance. Of those who sought assistance, 41% went to friends and family not living in their household and 40% went to friends and family living in their household.

The most common mental health concerns that students experienced during spring campus disruptions were anxiety (64%), chronic sleep issues (21%), major depression (21%), and panic attacks (19%). Of those who experienced a mental health concern during this time, 35% did not seek assistance. Thirteen percent (13%) of students reported utilizing resources about health-and well-being during spring disruptions, including telehealth, online counseling, or other online resources provided by the university.

Alcohol Use

Forty-nine percent (49%) of Missouri college students report that they do not currently drink alcohol. The percentage of students who report binge-drinking (consuming 5 or more drinks in a two-hour period) at least once in the past two weeks is 19%. Of students who binge-drink, approximately 5.0% are frequent binge-drinkers, defined as binge-drinking 3 or more times in the past two weeks.

The COVID-19-related campus disruptions in the spring of 2020 had some effect on students' drinking behaviors. Most college students (64%) did not drink alcohol during that time frame. Among those who drank, 39% reported that they consumed alcohol

more during the spring outbreak than they did before, while one-third (33%) reported drinking the same amount as before.

Underage Alcohol Use

Fourteen percent (14%) of students under age 21 report binge-drinking at least once in the past two weeks. Underage students report that they obtain alcohol in a variety of ways, the most common being from an over-21 friend (38%), or from parents who bought alcohol for them (15%). Additionally, 19% of underage students report that alcohol was readily available at home in the past thirty days. Spring 2020 campus disruptions had an impact on the ways that underage students obtained alcohol, with more students reporting that alcohol was readily available at home (25%) or that their parents (21%), or other family members bought alcohol for them.

Cannabis Use

Thirteen percent (13%) of Missouri college students reported using cannabis at least once in the past thirty days. Additionally, 5.2% of students reported frequent cannabis use (using 3 or more times per week). The rates and frequency of cannabis use during spring campus disruptions were comparable to those from the fall semester. Fourteen percent (14%) of students reported cannabis use between March and May of 2020, and 5.3% of students reported frequent use. Among students who used cannabis during the spring campus disruptions, 48% reported using cannabis more than they did before, while 34% used the same amount as before.

Illegal and Prescription Drugs

Approximately 5.3% of students report using any prescription drug in the past thirty days without a doctor's prescription, with use at the following rates: pain medications (1.9%), sleep medications (1.7%), stimulants (1.5%), and benzodiazepines/sedatives (0.5%). During the spring 2020 campus disruptions, 3.6% of students reported using prescription drugs without a doctor's prescription.

Tobacco and Nicotine

Approximately one-fifth (21%) of Missouri college students reported using any tobacco/nicotine product in the past thirty days. Students reported slightly lower rates of tobacco/nicotine use in the spring, with 18% reporting use during the March to May period.

COVID-19 Strategies

Missouri college students report practicing a number of strategies to protect themselves and others from COVID-19. Students report that they are currently using the following strategies always or very often:

Strategy	Response (always or very often)
Wearing a face mask in public	92%
Monitoring own health	85%
Washing hands for 20 or more seconds after being out	81%
Following guidance from federal/state/local governments	77%
Keeping six-foot distance from others in public	75%
Limiting number of close contacts	73%

In the survey, 9.4% of Missouri college students report being diagnosed with COVID-19. Most students (72%) report that they know where to find the most up-to-date information about their college or university's COVID-19 policies, while 52% are confident in their campus' prevention efforts.

Conclusion

Partners in Prevention continues to monitor critical health behaviors of college students during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic including mental health, well-being, substance use, and personal protective strategies to prevent COVID-19. For more information about Partners in Prevention and to explore our research, visit pip.missouri.edu. For our resources related to COVID-19 visit pip.missouri.edu/COVID-19.html

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