

Virginia Commonwealth University

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A majority of Virginians are skeptical about the safety of reopening schools for in-person classes, VCU poll finds

The poll also found anxiety over a future COVID-19 vaccine, with four-in-ten Virginians saying they are not likely to get one.

RICHMOND, Va. (Sept. 17, 2020) — Fifty-five percent of Virginians think it is not too safe or not at all safe to send children in their community back to school for in-person classes, while 42% think it is very safe or somewhat safe, according to a new statewide poll conducted by the Center for Public Policy at the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Regionally, Tidewater and South Central are the most skeptical with 46% and 44% respectively saying it's not at all safe, the poll found. More than half of minorities (56%) think it's not at all safe to have in-person classes and Democrats also were more skeptical with 77% saying it's not too safe or not at all safe. Conversely, Republicans were more likely to see in-person classes as very or somewhat safe (60%). Fifty-three percent of parents of school-age children said the same.

"The concerns over premature school openings confirms that adequate plans vouchsafing safety have not been shown to the people, particularly the minority communities," said former Gov. L. Douglas Wilder.

The poll also provides additional insight into Virginians' opinions on COVID-19 vaccines.

The telephone survey of 804 adults living in Virginia was conducted between Aug. 28 and Sept. 7. It has an estimated margin of error of 5.17 percentage points for all adults sampled, and 6.22 percentage points for likely voters.

Among the poll's key findings:

- **Four in 10 Virginians say they are not likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine.** Forty percent of respondents said they are not too or not at all likely to get a Food and Drug Administration-approved, no-cost vaccine to prevent COVID-19, if one becomes available, while 58% say they are very or somewhat likely to do so. This is comparable to [a national level finding released in August](#) reporting that 35% of respondents would not get a vaccine. Women are more skeptical

of getting a COVID-19 vaccine than men. Women were evenly split with 48% being very or somewhat likely to get the vaccine and 48% saying not too or not at all likely. Conversely, 7 in 10 men (70%) are very or somewhat likely to get vaccinated, with 52% saying very likely.

Differences also fell along party lines with independents and Democrats being more likely to get the vaccine, with 63% and 59% being very or somewhat likely. Republicans are evenly split with 49% saying very or somewhat likely and 49% saying not too or not at all likely. More than a third (35%) say they are not at all likely to get the vaccine.

- **Two-thirds of Virginians are against requiring residents to get a COVID-19 vaccine.** Sixty-six percent say they are against having a requirement for vaccination if an FDA-approved, no-cost vaccine becomes available. Thirty-one percent would support a required vaccine.

For the full poll results and analysis, please visit: <https://oppo.vcu.edu/policy-poll/>.

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About VCU and VCU Health

Virginia Commonwealth University is a major, urban public research university with national and international rankings in sponsored research. Located in downtown Richmond, VCU enrolls more than 30,000 students in 233 degree and certificate programs in the arts, sciences and humanities. Twenty-two of the programs are unique in Virginia, many of them crossing the disciplines of VCU's 11 schools and three colleges. The VCU Health brand represents the VCU health sciences academic programs, the VCU Massey Cancer Center and the VCU Health System, which comprises VCU Medical Center (the only academic medical center in the region), Community Memorial Hospital, Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU, and MCV Physicians. The clinical enterprise includes a collaboration with Sheltering Arms Institute for physical rehabilitation services. For more, please visit www.vcu.edu and vcuhealth.org.

Methodology

The Commonwealth Poll September 2020, sponsored by Virginia Commonwealth University, obtained telephone interviews with a representative sample of 804 adults, age 18 or older, living in Virginia. Telephone interviews were conducted by landline (402) and cellphone (402, including 241 without a landline). The data collection was conducted by Responsive Management from Aug. 28- Sept. 7.

Statistical results are weighted to correct for known demographic discrepancies. A two-stage weighting procedure was used to weight this dual-frame sample by the demographic characteristics of sex, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and region using the geographic and demographic weighting parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 American Community Survey data. The margin of error for the complete set of weighted data is 5.17 percentage points. The estimated margin of error for likely voters (n=693) is 6.22 percentage points.

The sample consisted of a combination of listed landline and cellular random digit dial samples. The overall sample was representative of the adult general population of Virginia who have access to either a listed landline or cellular telephone. Both samples were provided by Marketing Systems Group, a leader in providing research-based statistical samples. The cellular sample was prescreened for disconnected numbers.

As many as seven attempts were made to contact each landline telephone number, and as many as five attempts were made to contact each cellphone number. Calls were made at different times of the day and on different days of the week to maximize the chance of contacting potential respondents. Response rates are computed according to American Association for Public Opinion Research standards.¹ The response rate for the landline sample was 8.0%. The response rate for the cellular sample was 8.1%.

¹ The American Association for Public Opinion Research. 2016. *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys, 9th Edition*. AAPOR.

Wilder School Commonwealth Poll September 2020

State-wide survey of Virginians¹

August 28- September 7, 2020

Number of Respondents: 804

QUESTIONS 1 THROUGH 5 RELEASED SEPARATELY

Q6. Given the coronavirus situation, how safe do you think it is to send children back to schools in your community for in-person classes this fall?

	2020
	%
Very safe	16
Somewhat safe	26
Not too safe	18
Not at all safe	37
Don't Know/Refused	3

Q7. If an FDA-approved vaccine to prevent coronavirus was available right now at no cost, how likely would you be to get vaccinated?

	2020
	%
Very likely	38
Somewhat likely	20
Not too likely	13
Not at all likely	27
Don't Know/Refused	2

Q8. If an FDA-approved vaccine to prevent coronavirus was available right now at no cost, do you think all Virginians should be required to be vaccinated?

	2020
	%
Yes	31
No	66
Don't Know/Refused	3

¹ Percentages may add to 99 or 101 due to rounding. Cells that are blank contain no cases. Cells with a zero percent entry contain cases, but the percentage is less than 0.5%.

Tables for subgroup analysis²

² Cells with 0% may have observations but are less than 1%. Cells may add to 99% o 101% due to rounding.

Q6: Given the coronavirus situation, how safe do you think it is to send children back to schools in your community for in-person classes this fall?

		Very safe	Somewhat safe	Not too safe	Not at all safe	Don't know/ Refused	Number of Cases
All Adults		16%	26%	18%	37%	3%	804
VA Region	Northwest	27%	27%	17%	24%	4%	115
	NOVA	18%	27%	17%	35%	3%	237
	West	20%	33%	13%	32%	2%	148
	South Central	11%	19%	23%	44%	2%	143
	Tidewater	7%	25%	18%	46%	3%	161
Gender	Male	15%	27%	17%	40%	2%	370
	Female	17%	26%	18%	34%	4%	434
Age	18-34	12%	19%	12%	58%	0%	57
	35-44	30%	31%	13%	27%	0%	88
	45-64	20%	29%	19%	29%	3%	314
	65 and over	9%	28%	25%	32%	7%	345
Education	High school grad or less	21%	31%	10%	34%	4%	161
	Some college	13%	26%	15%	43%	3%	212
	College graduate or more	14%	23%	27%	35%	2%	431
Family Income	Under \$50,000	14%	21%	18%	46%	2%	169
	50K to under \$100,000	14%	34%	18%	34%	1%	192
	\$100,000 or more	17%	26%	20%	36%	1%	281
Race	White	18%	31%	20%	28%	2%	621
	Minority	11%	15%	13%	56%	4%	183
Parent	Yes	27%	26%	15%	32%	0%	156
	No	12%	26%	19%	39%	4%	630
Party ID	Democrat	7%	14%	28%	49%	2%	250
	Republican	30%	30%	10%	26%	5%	201
	Independent	14%	30%	17%	36%	2%	337

Q7: If an FDA-approved vaccine to prevent coronavirus was available right now at no cost, how likely would you be to get vaccinated?

		Very likely	Somewhat likely	Not too likely	Not at all likely	Don't know/ Refused	Number of Cases
All Adults		38%	20%	13%	27%	2%	804
VA Region	Northwest	37%	11%	12%	37%	4%	115
	NOVA	41%	17%	16%	24%	2%	237
	West	25%	24%	19%	30%	2%	148
	South Central	38%	26%	10%	25%	1%	143
	Tidewater	46%	22%	7%	24%	1%	161
Gender	Male	52%	18%	8%	23%	1%	370
	Female	26%	22%	17%	31%	3%	434
Age	18-34	51%	20%	10%	20%	0%	57
	35-44	23%	16%	13%	45%	3%	88
	45-64	32%	18%	16%	31%	3%	314
	65 and over	41%	25%	11%	20%	3%	345
Education	High school grad or less	35%	19%	12%	31%	2%	161
	Some college	34%	22%	18%	25%	1%	212
	College graduate or more	43%	19%	10%	25%	2%	431
Family Income	Under \$50,000	31%	22%	16%	30%	1%	169
	50K to under \$100,000	38%	24%	12%	25%	1%	192
	\$100,000 or more	41%	18%	13%	26%	2%	281
Race	White	37%	20%	13%	28%	2%	621
	Minority	42%	20%	13%	24%	1%	183
Party ID	Democrat	35%	24%	18%	19%	4%	250
	Republican	31%	18%	14%	35%	2%	201
	Independent	45%	18%	8%	29%	1%	337

Q8: If an FDA-approved vaccine to prevent coronavirus was available right now at no cost, do you think all Virginians should be required to be vaccinated?

		Yes	No	Don't know/ Refused	Number of Cases
All Adults		31%	66%	3%	804
VA Region	Northwest	23%	74%	3%	115
	NOVA	34%	63%	3%	237
	West	24%	74%	2%	148
	South Central	37%	58%	4%	143
	Tidewater	31%	67%	3%	161
Gender	Male	36%	62%	2%	370
	Female	25%	70%	4%	434
Age	18-34	44%	56%	0%	57
	35-44	20%	80%	1%	88
	45-64	21%	74%	5%	314
	65 and over	34%	61%	5%	345
Education	High school grad or less	30%	69%	1%	161
	Some college	28%	68%	4%	212
	College graduate or more	33%	64%	4%	431
Family Income	Under \$50,000	33%	65%	2%	169
	50K to under \$100,000	30%	68%	2%	192
	\$100,000 or more	31%	65%	4%	281
Race	White	28%	69%	3%	621
	Minority	36%	61%	3%	183
Party ID	Democrat	43%	52%	4%	250
	Republican	18%	80%	2%	201
	Independent	30%	67%	3%	337