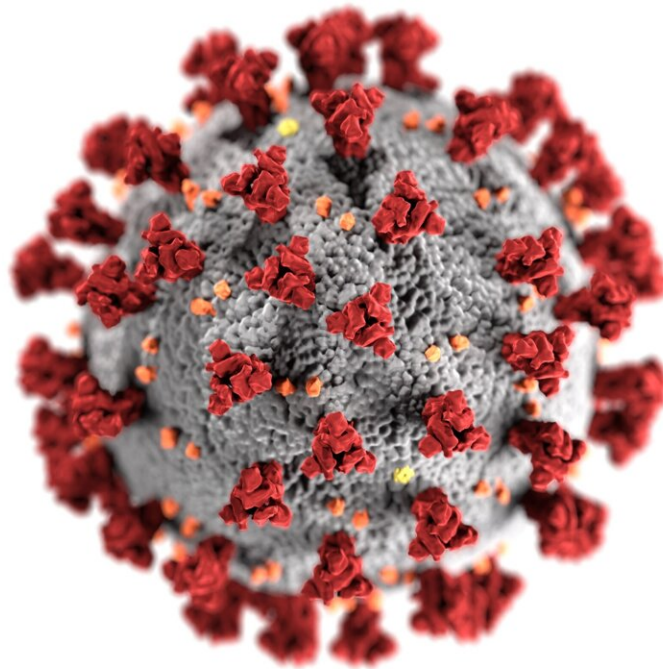


# Australia: Fear of COVID-19 infection at all-time high

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

More Australians than ever think they will be infected with COVID-19, new analysis from The Australian National University (ANU) has found.

The survey of almost 3,500 adults found two-in-five Australians think they are likely or very likely to contract COVID-19 in the next six months. This is marginally higher than in April 2020 and the early

months of the [pandemic](#) when 39.5 percent of Australians were worried about being infected.

Study co-author, Professor Nicholas Biddle, said fears of infection were four times higher than they were in April 2021.

"In April 2021 around one-in-10 Australians, 10.7 percent, were worried they would get infected by COVID-19," Professor Biddle said. "Now, 40 percent of us think the same.

"This is a huge jump and shows that even though the vast majority of adult Australians are getting vaccinated against COVID-19, many of us think it is inevitable we will get the disease at some point in time, especially as the country opens up more and more."

The study also found the demographics of those who were fearful of infection have significantly changed from the early stages of the pandemic.

In April 2020, women were significantly more likely to think they would get infected than men. However, in October 2021 there was no differences by gender.

The age group who most think they will be infected are Australians aged 35 to 44, with more than half, 53.8 percent, saying they are likely or very likely to contract COVID-19. The next largest age cohort are Australians aged 45 to 54 years, with 43.1 percent saying they are likely or very likely to get sick.

Professor Biddle said another "worrying" trend found in the study was the dramatic increase since August 2021 in the number of Australians saying they were experiencing "severe" psychological distress, despite life satisfaction being on the up.

"We've been tracking the impact of COVID-19 across Australian society for almost two years now," Professor Biddle said. "This is the highest level of severe psychological distress we've seen yet.

"In October 12.5 percent of Australians said they are experiencing severe mental stress. This is compared to a previous high of 10.6 percent in April 2020."

Study co-author Professor Matthew Gray said there was also "good news" from the latest survey with fewer Australians saying they felt they were facing major financial stress.

"We found that in October 2021, 21.4 percent of Australians didn't think they could get by on their current income, compared to 22.6 percent in August 2021 and 23.2 percent in April 2021," Professor Gray said.

"We also found that household incomes continue to increase. In February 2020, we estimated average income to be \$1,795 per week. By April 2020 this had fallen to \$1,632, a fall of 9.1 percent.

"By October 2021, average household income was \$1,701 per week. So while not quite at their pre-pandemic levels, it would appear that how much Australians are earning each week is less of a pressure than what it was in the middle of the pandemic and lockdowns.

Professor Biddle said October appears to have been a bit of a transition point in Australia's recovery from the pandemic.

"Australians are more or less evenly split on whether they think the worst aspects of the pandemic are over, with 54.6 percent thinking that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, with the remaining 45.4 percent thinking that the worst is still to come."

Australians are more optimistic than Americans, with 45 percent of Americans saying the worst of the pandemic is behind them and 54 percent saying the worst is still to come.

The analysis forms part of Australia's largest and longest running [longitudinal study](#) on the impact of the pandemic across the nation, led by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods. Data for the study was collected by the Social Research Centre and is available through the [Australia Data Archive](#).

**More information:** The study is available online:  
[csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/ ... october-2021-putting](https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/...-october-2021-putting)

Provided by Australian National University

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