

Experiences and Attitudes of College Students towards Exercise during COVID-19 - Preliminary Results

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ABSTRACT

Physical activity and exercise is known to help combat chronic diseases that can affect mental and physical health by boosting the human's immune system (Jimenez-Pavon et al., 2020; Siordia, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced individuals to quarantine, isolate, social distance, and change their lifestyle, causing a decrease in physical activity by 32% in individuals who had regularly performed exercise before (Meyer et al., 2020). College students are a unique population of study, because most universities converted to virtual format and students were advised to stay away from campus.

PURPOSE: To determine the impact COVID-19 has had on college students' experiences and attitudes towards exercise and the vaccine. **METHODS:** An invitation email with a link to a Qualtrics survey was sent to all students who were/are enrolled in the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters, excluding student-athletes. The survey included questions regarding the amount of exercise they performed before and during COVID-19, how comfortable they feel exercising in indoor/outdoor spaces (0-10 scale, with 0 being extremely uncomfortable and 10 being extremely comfortable), and if they would get vaccinated when available. The survey will close at the end of the Spring 2021 semester. **RESULTS:** 458 students (327F/122M, 9 other gender, 28.8 ± 11.2 yrs) completed the survey during the first two weeks of the Spring semester. 79.7% reported that COVID-19 affected their exercise habits. 80% of students stated that COVID-19 had changed their exercise habits. 66% reported a decrease of exercise during the Fall 2020 semester compared to before March 2020, 27% reported an increase, and 7% reported no change of exercise. For the beginning of the Spring semester, 48% recorded a decrease of exercise, 37% recorded an increase and 15% recorded no change compared to before March 2020. Many students felt apprehensive to exercise in indoor public spaces and the campus recreation center (4.2 ± 3.3 and 4.0 ± 3.4 , respectively) and more comfortable in outdoor public spaces (7.3 ± 2.7). Nevertheless, 92% claimed that they do some form of exercise on a weekly basis (aerobic, resistance, flexibility, and/or neuromotor exercise). In regards to the COVID-19 vaccination, 38% were extremely likely to get the vaccine, 17% were somewhat likely, 14% were neither likely nor unlikely, 11% were somewhat unlikely, and 21% were extremely unlikely to get the vaccine. **CONCLUSION:** The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the exercise habits of the majority of college students, some for the better, but more for the worse. It has caused a sense of anxiety in using indoor recreational facilities. However, a third of students currently state that they do not want to get vaccinated.