

# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

**REPORT BRIEF 1**  
APRIL 8, 2020

RESEARCH BY



POWERED BY



## Introduction

On December 31, 2019, a “pneumonia of unknown cause,” first detected in the city of Wuhan in Hubei province, China, was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO).<sup>1</sup>

Fast forward three months, and the words “coronavirus” and “COVID-19” have become a regular part of household conversations in nearly every country around the globe.

At the time of this report, the global number of confirmed coronavirus cases surpassed 1.3 million, with more than 80,000 deaths worldwide.<sup>2</sup> In the last week of March, the United States topped the list of confirmed cases, totaling nearly 400,000 as of early April – a number that could potentially be much higher, due to the lack of widespread available testing.

The impact of this pandemic on Americans is only beginning to be felt:

- Nearly 10 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits in the last two weeks of March.<sup>3</sup>
- In March alone, the stock market saw the three worst point drops in U.S. history (March 9, March 12, March 16).<sup>4</sup>
- “Stay at home” orders have been rolled out statewide in 42 states, as well as in specific cities and counties of three additional states.<sup>5</sup>

As the outbreak has escalated, efforts from the Ad Council, in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the White House, have been focused around a single message: **Slow the Spread**. Now that significant impacts of the virus are arising around the country, it’s time to address the urgent, varied needs of Americans triggered by this crisis.

## Purpose

COVID-19 conversations across all social platforms are growing every hour as changes and disruptions challenge the norms of American life. In one week alone (March 27 - April 2), there were over 101 million mentions of COVID-19 on social platforms.<sup>6</sup>

**Leaders from federal and local governments, issues experts and lead scientists are making daily appeals to the American public. But are the resources and reassurances they’re providing really meeting the nation’s needs?**

This research study is an ongoing exploration into the ever-changing conversations, questions, and fears around the pandemic. Through social listening analysis and a weekly survey (quantitative inquiry), this study seeks to discover what Americans really need—by directly asking them about those needs as well as identifying where they are getting information about COVID-19 to address their own mental, social and economic challenges.

1. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>

2. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html>

3. <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/04/02/825383525/6-6-million-file-for-unemployment-another-dismal-record>

4. <https://www.thebalance.com/fundamentals-of-the-2020-market-crash-4799950>

5. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/coronavirus-stay-at-home-order.html>

6. <https://www.talkwalker.com/resource/covid-19-dashboard-april-3rd.pdf>

# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Purpose (continued)

The goals of this research are to:

- Identify areas of greatest need as expressed in social media conversations/posts and as reported by a survey sample representing the American public;
- Clarify the correlation and connection between social media conversations and the real needs of the American public;
- Provide weekly guidance to issue experts, brands, foundations, the media and causes about the American public's greatest needs;
- Identify outlets, entities and influencers where the American public is getting their information regarding COVID-19; and
- Provide insights to stakeholders in order to make strategic decisions regarding how and where to reach Americans with messages that address their needs and concerns.

April marks the beginning of a particularly difficult time for the American public. A record number of people are starting to deal with the hardships of unemployment and are struggling to make rent/mortgage payments, afford meals, and more. And as isolation orders continue, many more are struggling with mental health issues. Ultimately, the goal of this research is to identify the greatest needs of Americans, and to help those with the most resources—brands, foundations, the media and causes—make strategic decisions in their efforts to address the impact of COVID-19 on the American public.

Over the coming weeks, the Ad Council will release report briefs that highlight the top conversations/findings as they evolve during this time.

## Methodology

The findings in this report are based on a mixed-method research approach: 1) social listening; and 2) quantitative online survey.

### Method 1: Social Listening

*Objective:* This research method will uncover the ongoing COVID-19 conversations taking place online across the nation in order to identify the areas of greatest need and hone in on shifting social trends.

*Details:* Online conversations are captured on a weekly basis, starting on January 1, 2020, by way of Talkwalker, a leading social listening and analytics platform. Through a weekly review of query topics, defined social conversations observed within the areas of focus, the ongoing quantitative analysis seeks to uncover the sentiment and expressions behind American needs and interests.

### Method 2: Quantitative Online Survey

*Objective:* This research method is designed to identify the areas of greatest need as expressed by a panel representing the American public. The survey also sought to uncover how Americans are feeling amid the pandemic, what they're specifically worried about, what information they need, where they're getting COVID-19 information, and more.

This phase was also designed to validate findings from the social listening phase by clarifying the correlation and connection between the social conversation and the real needs of the American public.

*Details:* In partnership with C+R Research, a leading independent full-service marketing insights agency, the Ad Council surveyed a nationally representative population of 1,000 English-speaking adults ages 18+ across the United States online between April 3 and April 5, 2020. This study was conducted to measure Americans' perceptions and needs as it relates to the outbreak of COVID-19.

The 10-minute survey was administered online, and the age, gender, ethnicity, region, household composition and income of respondents were matched to U.S. Census statistics. (Note: The margin of error for a sample of 1,000 respondents is +/- 3.1 percentage points at 95% confidence).

---

### Demographic Profile

N= 1,000 respondents

Find details of the subgroups targeted at:  
<http://covidresearch.adcouncilkit.org/>

# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Finding 1:

### Four in five Americans are financially impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

The vast majority (79%) of Americans say they already have been financially impacted at least a little by COVID-19 as of early April 2020, and nearly one in four have experienced a very large financial impact. So far, the impact seems to decrease with age, as the majority of all respondents ages 18-34 report they've already been impacted (86%) – compared to 65% of those aged 65 and up.

Differences can also be seen by geography, and by race/ethnicity. Almost a quarter (23%) of Midwesterners report no financial impact from COVID-19 so far, compared to just 17 percent of respondents in the Northeast. And people of color report a greater financial impact than those who are white/Caucasian: Nearly a fourth (23%) of white/Caucasian respondents report no financial impact to date, compared to 15 percent of non-white/non-Caucasian respondents.

Beyond demographics, a strong correlation is already emerging between emotional state and financial impact. Ninety percent of respondents who are emotionally struggling (e.g., feeling sad, isolated, anxious, depressed and/or lonely most or all of the time) or angry/upset (e.g., feeling aggressive, angry and/or irritable most or all of the time) report at least a little financial impact so far, compared to 76 percent of emotionally content/stable respondents (e.g., respondents who said they feel content, optimistic, relaxed, cheerful, confident, hopeful and/or grateful most or all of the time).

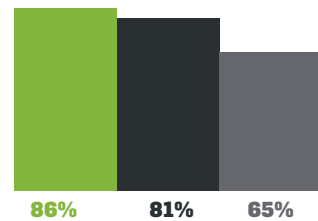
## PERSONAL IMPACT OF COVID-19

Those age 65+ significantly more likely to say COVID-19 has had no financial impact on them. The younger the respondent, the more likely to be impacted financially.



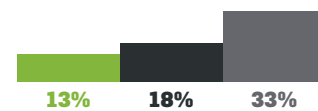
### Net Impact

(Large Financial Impact, Some Financial Impact, A Little Financial Impact)



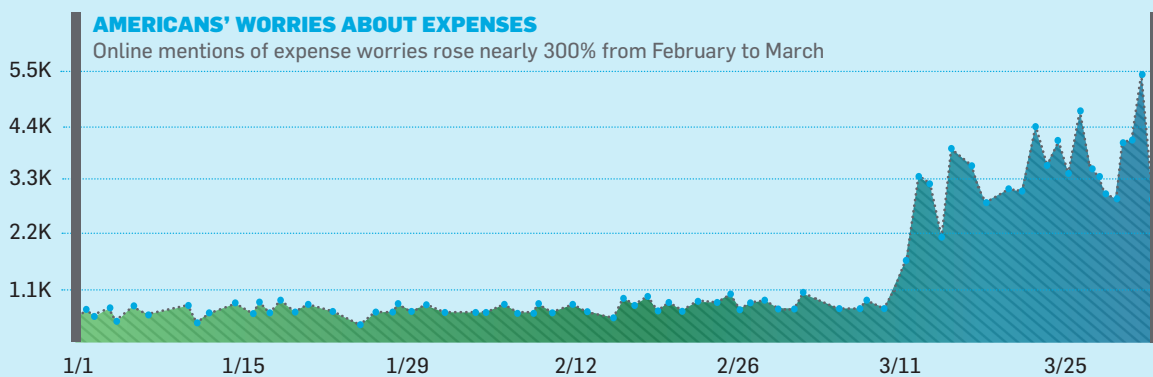
### No Financial Impact

(No Financial Impact, Not Sure)



## Social Insights

Online mentions of expense worries surged in mid-March, following President Trump's declaration of a National State of Emergency on March 13, 2020. Mentions continued to climb as U.S. cities began imposing social distancing restrictions, and the stock market continued to suffer. An all-time high in mentions emerged on April 1st – the rent deadline for many Americans.



Similar to survey findings, younger generations appear to be experiencing the greatest impact, as 85% of all mentions stemmed from those ages 18-34. In line with the survey findings, a correlation emerged between emotional state and financial impact, with online expense worries having a strong relationship with negative personal expressions.

# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Finding 2:

### Three in four Americans don't know anyone who has been infected.

Despite the rate COVID-19 is spreading throughout the United States, as of the survey for this report (fielded April 3-5, 2020), only a quarter (24%) of Americans know someone who has or has had COVID-19, or has/had it themselves. This figure greatly differs by location: Half as many respondents in the West (18%) compared to the Northeast (38%) know someone who has/had the virus. (Respondents in the Midwest and South are similar to general data, as 23% and 22% respectively report knowing someone who has/had COVID-19.)

## Finding 3:

### Americans most need personal protective equipment (PPE) and peace of mind.

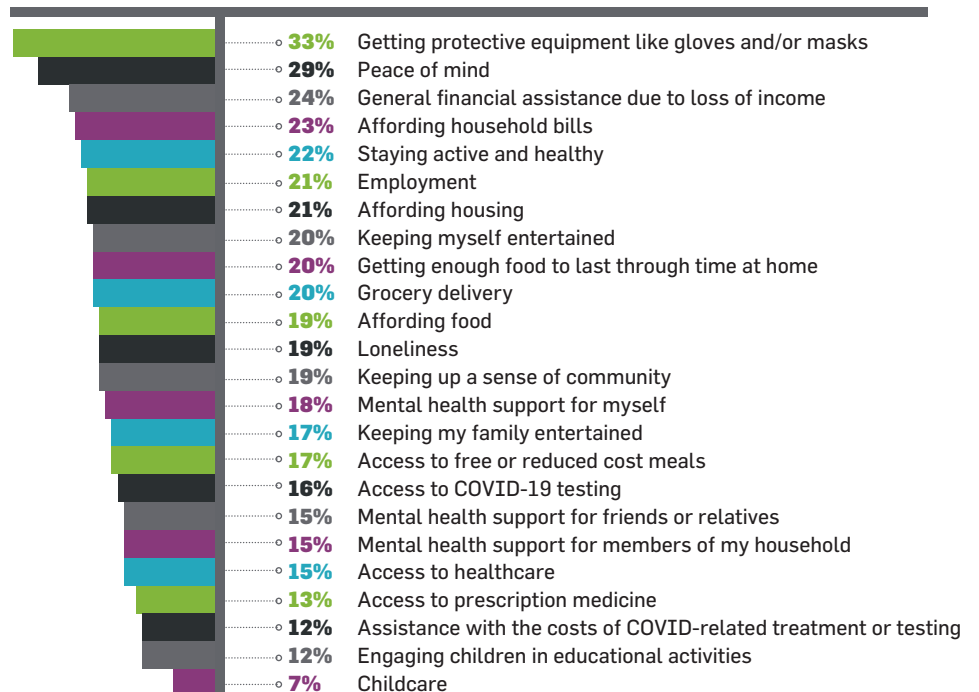
When asked to rate how much they need immediate assistance with various categories, two items stood out the most among respondents:

- Getting protective equipment (PPE) like gloves/masks (33%)
- Peace of mind (i.e., knowing or feeling comfortable and/or stable) (29%)

#### HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED ASSISTANCE WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING?

Coming in third (though slightly lower on the list) is general financial assistance due to loss of income (24%), followed by affording household bills (23%) and staying active and healthy (22%). On the lower end of the spectrum? Mental health support (15%) and access to healthcare or prescription medicine (15%) and 13%), assistance with COVID-related treatment or testing (12%), engaging children in educational activities (12%) and childcare (7%).

Across the board, people of color report needing immediate assistance more than white/Caucasian respondents. For example, while getting PPE tops the list for all respondents as their most immediate need, nearly half (45%) of non-white/non-Caucasian respondents report needing immediate assistance, compared to a quarter (27%) of those who are white/Caucasian. A third (34%) of non-white/non-Caucasian respondents report the immediate need of peace of mind, compared to 26 percent of white/Caucasian respondents. Similar disparities can be seen throughout each category.



# COPING WITH COVID-19

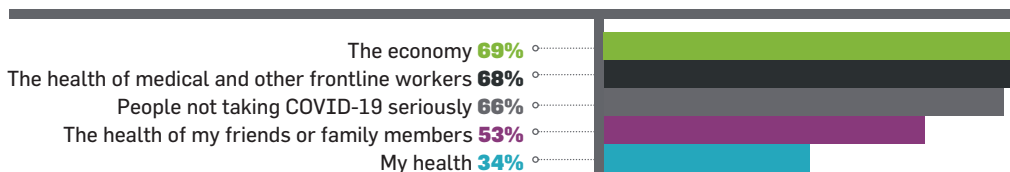
WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Finding 4:

**Americans are most worried about the economy, the health of frontline workers, and people not taking the pandemic seriously.**

Three categories top the list for what Americans are currently most worried about: the economy (69%), the health of medical and other frontline workers (68%), and people not taking COVID-19 seriously (66%). Coming in fourth on the list is the health of friends or family members (53%), and after that – with a substantial drop – is respondents' own health (34%).

**HOW MUCH, IF AT ALL, ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORRIED ABOUT EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK?** Top five results

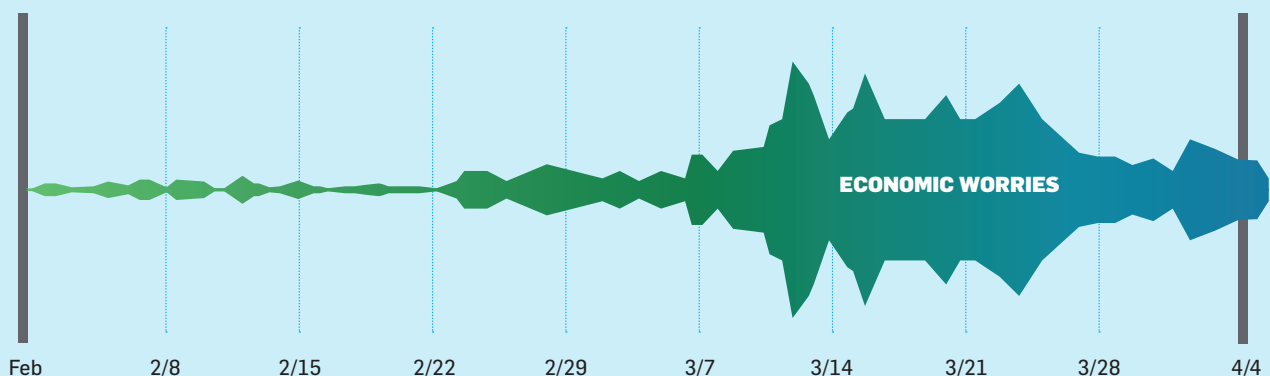


As the region most affected by the pandemic thus far, Northeasterners are most worried about people taking the crisis seriously and the health of medical and other frontline workers (71% each). On the opposite side of the country, respondents in the West are most worried about the economy (73%).

Even further, those who know someone who has/had COVID-19 are significantly more worried than Americans overall, across all categories. In the top three categories, eight in 10 of those who know someone who has/had COVID-19 are worried about the health of medical and other frontline workers (80%) and people taking COVID-19 seriously (75%), compared to two-thirds (64% each) of those who don't know someone with the virus.

## Social Insights

Economic concerns were reinforced on social media, as online worries over the economy soared in mid-March alongside significant drops in the Dow Jones.



# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

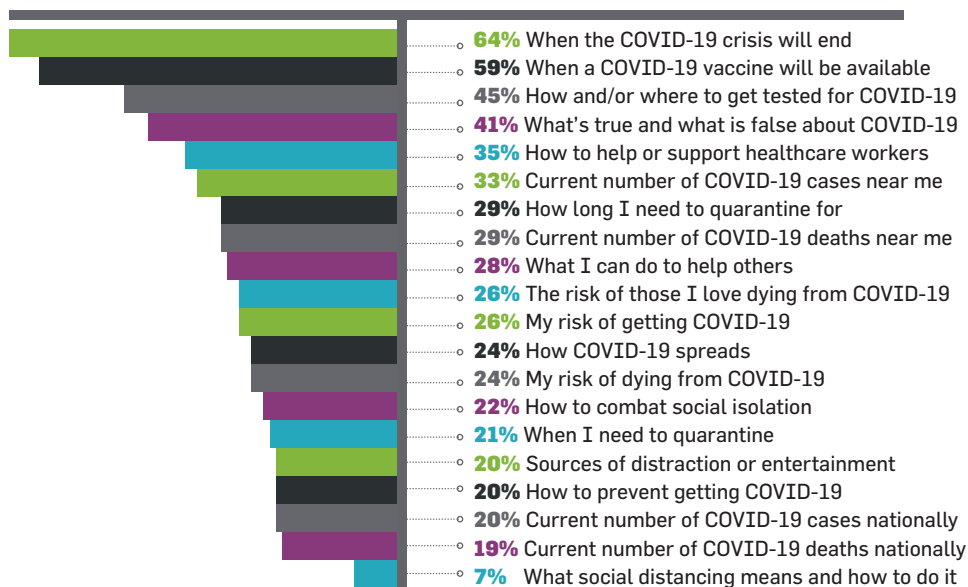
## Finding 5:

### Americans want to know when the crisis will end, and when a vaccine will be available.

Respondents mostly feel that they have the right amount of information about COVID-19-related topics, except two important factors: when the pandemic will end, and when a vaccine will be available. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans say they need more information on when the COVID-19 crisis will end, and 59 percent want to know when a vaccine will be available. Other notable findings:

- Four in 10 respondents (41%) want more clarity on what's true and what's false about COVID-19.
- A third of respondents (35%) want more information on how to help or support healthcare workers.

#### WHAT AMERICANS WANT TO KNOW



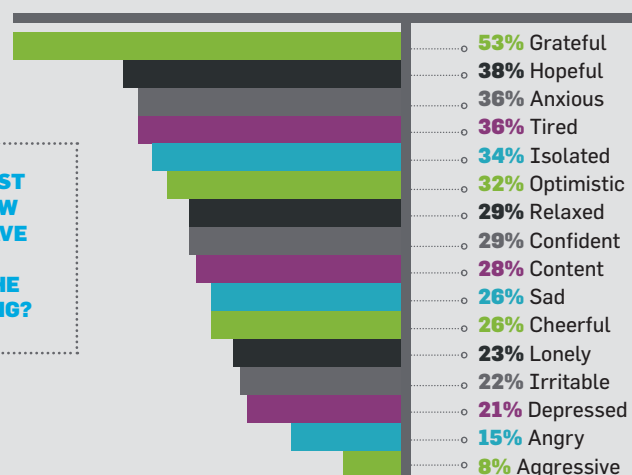
Three in four Americans say they have sought out information about COVID-19 in the past week. The top news source for nearly half of respondents (47%) was TV news. The next popular news sources were the CDC (37%), online news sources (36%), NIAID Director Dr. Anthony Fauci (32%) and local government sources (28%).

## Finding 6:

### Americans are grateful and hopeful (yet anxious and tired).

Respondents most report feeling grateful (53%) and hopeful (38%) – though more than a third are also anxious and tired (36% each). Aggressive and angry feelings are at the bottom of the list.

IN THE PAST WEEK, HOW OFTEN HAVE YOU FELT ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?



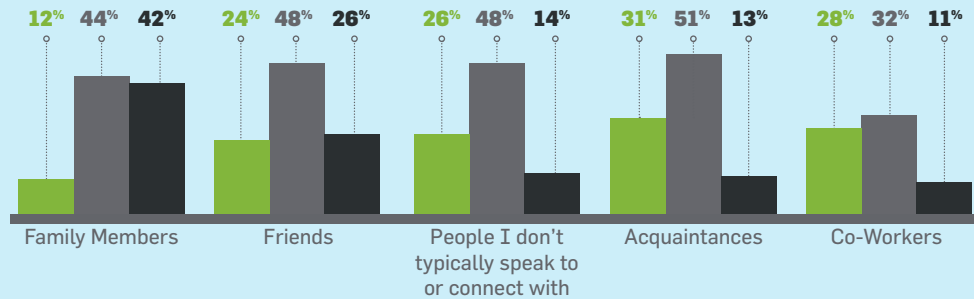
# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

## Finding 7:

### Americans are connecting more.

Despite “stay at home” orders, people are staying connected more often than usual. In the past week, 87 percent of respondents reported being about the same or more “in touch” (in person, via phone/text or other means) with family members compared to the week before. This spans beyond family, too: 74 percent report being the same or more in touch with friends, 64 percent with acquaintances, 62 percent with people they don’t typically speak to or connect with, and 43 percent with coworkers.



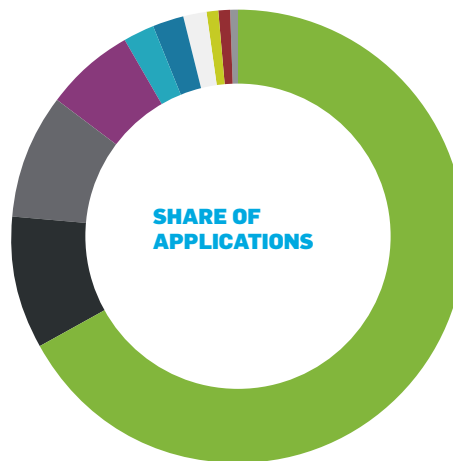
#### WHO AMERICANS HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH WITH

Being “in touch with” someone can include being in touch in person, by phone, by text, or any other way. Thinking about the past week, compared to the week before it, have you been in touch with...?

- Less Often
- About the Same
- More Often

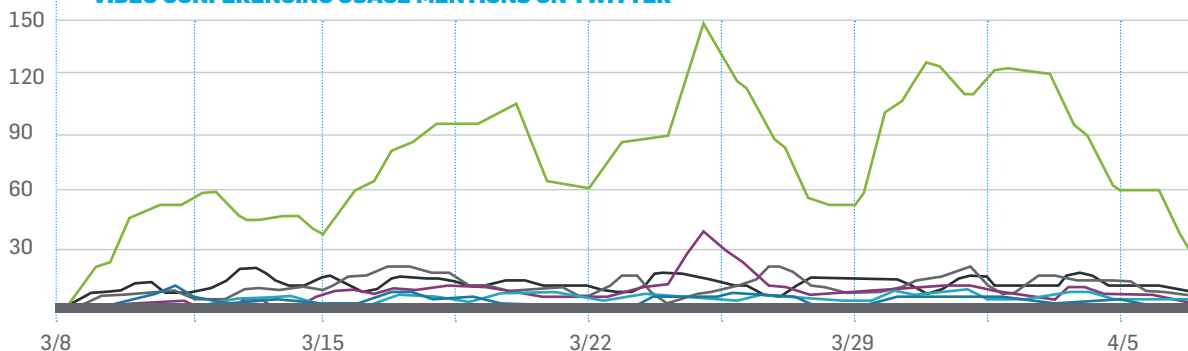
## Social Insights

In light of the nation’s social distancing efforts, video conferencing and “virtual happy hours” have become the new normal for connecting with family, friends and co-workers. Zoom, a popular video conferencing platform, experienced substantial lifts in usage mentions, up until privacy concerns emerged over the past few days.



- Zoom
- Whatsapp
- Skype
- Facetime
- Google Hangouts
- Microsoft Teams
- HouseParty
- Facebook Messenger
- WeChat
- Other

#### VIDEO CONFERENCING USAGE MENTIONS ON TWITTER



# COPING WITH COVID-19

WHAT AMERICANS NEED, FEEL AND FEAR ABOUT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

---

## Conclusion

Going into what U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams has called “the hardest and saddest week” of many people’s lives<sup>7</sup>, Americans are worried. The United States has yet to reach the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and already nearly 80 percent of Americans have been impacted financially in some way. And the financial landscape, like the spread of the virus itself, will likely follow Dr. Fauci’s grim prediction<sup>8</sup>: It will get worse before it gets better. With some experts reporting that 20 million more people could be unemployed by the end of April<sup>9</sup>, the financial impact felt around the country isn’t likely to decrease any time soon.

But amidst these worries, Americans aren’t frozen with fear. Even greater than needing financial assistance, they want to be prepared, and they want peace of mind. They’re worried about the health and well-being of others – particularly those in healthcare, those on the front lines and friends/family – more than that of themselves. They’re connecting more with loved ones, and they want people to take this crisis seriously. They want real information and answers to uncertainties – and they want to know how they can help or support others (again, particularly those in healthcare).

And while they’re feeling anxious and tired and isolated, they’re also optimistic. And hopeful. And above all, they’re grateful.

For now.

So as the worst comes upon us, will Americans’ needs and worries change? How? Do those who are the most vocal online truly represent the needs of Americans who may not be finding their voices in social conversations? Are the resources and reassurances provided to the American public by leaders (like federal and local governments, issues experts and lead scientists) really meeting the nation’s needs? How can brands, the media, causes and foundations adequately address these needs and support Americans when they need it most?

Over the coming weeks, the Ad Council will continue to release new research briefs that highlight the top conversations/findings as they evolve during this time. Find additional information and news on forthcoming reports at <http://covidresearch.adcouncilkit.org>.

---

7. <https://apnews.com/f166145fec83e88bd62e1ff06284c2a9>

8. <https://www.today.com/video/dr-anthony-fauci-coronavirus-outbreak-is-going-to-get-worse-before-it-gets-better-81532997619>

9. <https://www.barrons.com/articles/fridays-jobs-report-will-be-ugly-the-ugliest-is-yet-to-come-51585749148>





### **About The Ad Council**

The Ad Council has a long history of creating life-saving public service communications in times of national crisis, starting in the organization's earliest days during World War II to September 11th and natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. Its deep relationships with media outlets, the creative community, issue experts and government leaders make the organization uniquely poised to quickly distribute life-saving information to millions of Americans.

The Ad Council is where creativity and causes converge. The non-profit organization brings together the most creative minds in advertising, media, technology and marketing to address many of the nation's most important causes. The Ad Council has created many of the most iconic campaigns in advertising history. Friends Don't Let Friends Drive Drunk. Smokey Bear. Love Has No Labels.

The Ad Council's innovative social good campaigns raise awareness, inspire action and save lives. To learn more, visit [AdCouncil.org](http://AdCouncil.org), follow the Ad Council's communities on Facebook and Twitter, and view the creative on YouTube.



### **About C+R Research**

C+R Research is an independent full-service marketing insights agency with 60 years of experience delivering great research, deep perspective and committed client service. C+R is nationally recognized for its best-in-class quantitative and qualitative research methodologies and expertise with specific populations, including shoppers, youth & family, multicultural consumers, business professionals, and global communities. C+R is privately held and headquartered in Chicago, IL. For additional information, please visit [www.crresearch.com](http://www.crresearch.com).