

2021 HRS PERSPECTIVES ON THE PANDEMIC
COMBINED SPRING & FALL MAIL SURVEY SAMPLES

Data Release, Version 1.0

January, 2026

Data Description and Usage

Conditions of Use

By registering for access to HRS Public Release data, the User agrees to all of the following:

- Make no attempts to identify study participants.
- Not to transfer HRS Public Release data to any third party other than staff or students for whom you are directly responsible except as indicated below.
- Not to allow others to use your username and password to access this site.
- To certify the destruction of any downloaded Public Release data file as well as any data files derived from the downloaded file when requested to do so by the Health and Retirement Study.
- To include the following citation in any research reports, papers, or publications based on Public Release data:

In text:

"The HRS (Health and Retirement Study) is sponsored by the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740) and is conducted by the University of Michigan."

In references:

"Health and Retirement Study, ([insert Product Name]) public use dataset. Produced and distributed by the University of Michigan with funding from the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740). Ann Arbor, MI, (year)."

- To include the following citation in any research reports, papers, or publications based on any Public Release data file tagged as "Early" or "Preliminary":

"This analysis uses Early Release data from the Health and Retirement Study, ([insert Product Name]), sponsored by the National Institute on Aging (grant number NIA U01AG009740) and conducted by the University of Michigan. These data have not been cleaned and may contain errors that will be corrected in the Final Public Release version of the dataset."

- Please note that although it is necessary to include the above

- citations to the HRS in any publications, it is not necessary to associate your publications with the HRS grant in [PubMed](#).
- Provide information regarding any research product (dissertation, thesis, journal article, book, book chapter, report, etc.) based on data obtained from the Health and Retirement Study by sending an electronic copy to hrrpublications@umich.edu.
 - Report immediately to the Health and Retirement Study at hrrquestions@umich.edu any disclosure of study participant identity as well as any discovery of flaws or errors in the data or documentation files.

Notify the Health and Retirement Study through use of the update function provided at this site or by electronic mail directed to hrrquestions@umich.edu of changes in your electronic mail address, postal address, telephone number, organizational affiliation or organizational status.

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2021 HRS Perspectives on the Pandemic Combined Spring & Fall Mail Survey Samples

1. Overview

The 2021 Perspectives on the Pandemic mail-in survey was designed to assess the experiences of Health and Retirement (HRS) respondents during the first year of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The HRS is funded under a cooperative agreement between the National Institute on Aging (NIA) and the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. The HRS is designed to study labor force, health, and family transitions of the U.S. population aged 51 and older, and the impact of those transitions on economic resources, claims on structured programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid, and informal assistance and transfers to and from family members. Two versions of the questionnaire were fielded; the first in Spring 2021 and the second in Fall 2021.

The National Institute on Aging (NIA) provided funding (U01 AG009740) for the survey and it was conducted by the Survey Research Center (SRC), at the Institute for Social Research (ISR), at the University of Michigan. By receiving the dataset, you agree to use it for research and statistical purposes only and to make no effort to identify respondents. In addition, you agree to send us a copy of publications you produce based on the data. (See Registration and Downloading the Data at the end of this document for additional details).

1A. Sample Interviewed

Mail-in questionnaires were sent to a subsample of 20,333 HRS respondents divided into three separate groups. Groups 1 and 2 received the spring version of the questionnaire. The first group consisted of 10,421 respondents who were not scheduled to participate in an enhanced face-to-face (EFTF) interview during the 2020 HRS core survey wave, and had completed their assigned mode of interview that wave without complication. The second group included 3735 respondents who were scheduled to participate both in the 2020 EFTF and in the 2021 CAMS survey, as well. The field period for the Spring 2021 Perspectives on the Pandemic Mail Survey was May 2021 to June 2022. The remaining 6177 respondents were assigned to Group 3 and received the fall version of the questionnaire. Group 3 respondents were defined as those who were scheduled for EFTF in the 2020 HRS core survey wave and who were not part of the 2021 CAMS sample. The field period for the Fall 2021 Perspectives on the Pandemic Mail Survey was October 2021 to June 2022. Note that for Groups 2 and 3, EFTF interviewing was cancelled for 2020 HRS core respondents due to the pandemic and interviews were conducted by telephone or web.

The 2021 HRS Perspectives on the Pandemic Combined Spring & Fall Mail Survey Samples data

release contains 8360 respondents from the Spring data collection and 3211 respondents from the Fall survey, for a total of 11,571 records.

The variable SEASON allows the user to differentiate between the two surveys. The combined data also contains a weight variable named CMWGTR.

Group	Spring or Fall COVID Mailer	Total	English	Spanish
1=Not Scheduled for EFTF in HRS '20	Spring	10421	9423	998
2=Scheduled for EFTF in HRS '20 and in CAMS21	Spring	3735	3404	331
3=Scheduled for EFTF in HRS '20 and not in CAMS21	Fall	6177	5495	682
	Total	20333	18322	2011

1B. Questionnaire Content

Section A. COVID-19 Diagnosis and Testing: This section measures individual experiences with COVID-19 including whether the respondent has or has had the virus, diagnostic testing, and if applicable, date of most recent positive test, whether the respondent knows of anyone who has had or died from COVID-19, beliefs concerning vaccine efficacy, evaluations of reasons people might give for choosing to get a vaccine along with reasons for choosing not to get one, personal experiences with making an appointment to get and/or receive the vaccine, date of most recent received, and for those reporting they have not taken steps to be inoculated, reasons why they haven't done so, and the likelihood they will take the vaccine in the future.

Section B. Coronavirus Emergency Room/Hospital Visits: Covid-19 related emergency/hospital visits are documented in this section including most recent hospital admittance date, number of nights spent there, whether oxygen or ventilator use was required, and whether the respondent continues to experience health problems related to the virus.

Section C. Health Care: The section collects information concerning new prescriptions obtained by the respondent during the first year of the pandemic, an inventory of the types of medical care that were delayed during this time, telephone and/or video visits with a doctor, and an overall summary of general health.

Section D. Economic Impact Payments: Whether received any payments and if so how much all together, plans for how to use monies received.

Section E. Work: Work history during the first year of the pandemic, physical work environment, changes to characteristics of the job during the first year, and impacts of the pandemic on the respondent's employer.

Section F. Income and Spending: This section asks questions about income, spending, and financial well-being. Included are measures of types of income changes, and experiences with financial hardship since March 2020.

Section G. Living Arrangements and Caregiving: Measurements of change in living arrangements since March 2020 by the respondent and/or by others moving in with a respondent, help received from others including financial help, grocery shopping, chores, and emotional support, along with respondent help to others in these same domains.

Section H. Everyday Life during the Pandemic: Questions were asked about COVID-19 effects on a wide variety of topics including, worries about and control over aspects of everyday life during the pandemic's first year, the types of emotions felt by respondents during this time, periods of depression, means of contact and quality of relationships with family and friends not living with the respondent, changes to and availability of normal everyday activities, reactions to state and local government attempts to slow the spread of COVID-19, and pet ownership.

1C. File Structure

The 2021 HRS Perspectives on the Pandemic Combined Spring & Fall Survey Samples (Version 1.0) data are at the respondent level. Respondent-level files contain questions that were asked of all respondents about themselves or their household (or were answered by a proxy if the respondent was not able to fill out the questionnaire). The release data file contains one record for each respondent/proxy who filled out and returned a 2021 Perspectives on the Pandemic Spring or Fall questionnaire. The file contains 11,571 records and 428 variables.

The primary Identification variables (IDS) are:

HHID (HOUSEHOLD IDENTIFIER) AND PN (PERSON NUMBER)

Data are sorted in order by HHID and PN. The variable PN refers to the respondent to whom the questionnaire was mailed. Identification variables in the 2021 HRS Perspectives on the Pandemic Combined Spring & Fall Survey Samples (Version 1.0) are stored in character format. For further information about HRS identification variables and merging data, see the [Data Description for the HRS 2020 Core](#).

1D. Differences between Spring '21 and Fall '21 Variables in the Combined Datafile

Variables appearing in the original data releases had either an "S" for Spring or an "F" for Fall appended to each of their respective variable names. In this combined data release, questions that were repeated in both surveys have had the S/F designation dropped from their variable name suffixes. For example A1, which is a question that was repeated across both surveys was named A1_21S in the Spring data and A1_21F in the Fall. In this combined data file, the singular version of these two variables is named A1_21. Questions NOT appearing in both Spring and Fall have kept their original names in the combined data release file and are documented in the following table.

Spring '21 Variable Name	Fall '21 Variable Name	Difference between Spring '21 and Fall '21
A20_21S		Spring '21 question dropped from Fall '21 questionnaire
A21_21S		Spring '21 question dropped from Fall '21 questionnaire
A22_21S		Spring '21 question dropped from Fall '21 questionnaire
A23_21S		Spring '21 question dropped from Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_21S series (Mark [X] all that apply)	A24_FALL_21F series (Mark [X] all that apply)	Spring '21 question: Why haven't you tried to get the vaccine? Fall '21 question: Why haven't you gotten the vaccine?
A24_1_21S	A20_FALL_1_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_2_21S	A20_FALL_2_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_3_21S	A20_FALL_3_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_4_21S	A20_FALL_4_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_5_21S	A20_FALL_5_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_6_21S	A20_FALL_6_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_7_21S	A20_FALL_7_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_8_21S	A20_FALL_8_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_9_21S	A20_FALL_9_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire

A24_10_21S	A20_FALL_10_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_11_21S	A20_FALL_11_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
	A20_FALL_12_21F	Added as a NEW answer category in Fall '21 questionnaire
	A20_FALL_13_21F	Added as a NEW answer category in Fall '21 questionnaire
A24_97_21S	A20_FALL_97_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
A25_21S	A21_FALL_21F	Variable renamed in Fall '21 questionnaire
	A22_FALL_21F	A22_FALL_21F added as a NEW question in Fall. Replaces A22_21S that was dropped from Spring questionnaire
	A23_FALL_21F	A23_FALL_21F added as a NEW question in Fall. Replaces A23_21S that was dropped from Spring questionnaire
	A24_FALL_21F	A24_FALL_21F added as a NEW question in Fall questionnaire
	E15_21F	E15_21F added as a NEW question in Fall questionnaire

1E. Data Quality

This data was collected with a self-administered respondent questionnaire. Many of these questions instructed the respondent to choose just one response. Despite that instruction, sometimes respondents chose more than one answer. Respondent answers have been coded “-8” in variables where this occurred. In addition, throughout the questionnaire follow-up questions were asked based upon the answer given by the respondent at the root question, thereby requiring the respondent to follow skip pattern instructions within that section.

While every effort was made to ensure the respondent would navigate through the questionnaire properly, in practice many respondents did not always do this. Consequently, many questions contain responses from respondents who, according to skip pattern instructions, should not have answered them. Such inconsistencies have been left unresolved in the data. Users are strongly encouraged to identify and adjust for responses made in error prior to performing analyses and reporting results.

2. Distribution Files

One set of distribution files are released for each individual section of the questionnaire. All prefixes begin with COVID21, are followed by the section letter (as in COVID21A) and end with _R to indicate that the data is at the respondent level (COVID21A_R). Then the following extensions are used for the different types of distribution files:

- .da for data files
- .sas for SAS program statements
- .sas7bdat for "ready-to-use" SAS files
- .sps for SPSS program statements
- .sav for "ready-to-use" SPSS files
- .do for Stata DO statements
- .dct for Stata dictionary statements,
- .dta for "ready-to-use" Stata files
- .txt for codebook files.

3. Linking Respondents across Time

Respondent records in the 2021 HRS Perspectives on the Pandemic Combined Spring & Fall (Version 1.0) can be linked to respondent records from HRS 2020 and prior waves by HHID and PN

4. Registration and Downloading

4A. Registration

HRS data are available for free to researchers and analysts at the HRS Web site. In order to obtain public release data, you must first register at our Web site. Once you have completed the registration process, your username and password will be sent to you via e-mail. Your username and password are required to download any data files.

By registering all users, we are able to document for our sponsors the size and diversity of our user community allowing us to continue to collect these important data. Registered users receive user support, information related to errors in the data, future releases, workshops, and publication lists. The information you provide will not be used for any commercial use, and will not be redistributed to third parties.

4B. Conditions of Use

By registering, you agree to the [Conditions of Use](#) governing access to Health and Retirement public release data.

4C. Publications Based on Data

As part of the data registration process, you agree to include specified citations and to inform HRS of any papers, publications, or presentations based on HRS data. Please send a copy of any publications you produce based on HRS data, with a bibliographical reference, if appropriate, to the following address:

**Health and
Retirement Study
Attn: Papers and
Publications
The Institute for Social Research, Room 3410
P.O. Box 1248
Ann Arbor, MI (USA) 48106-1248**

Alternately, you may contact us by e-mail at hqsquestions@umich.edu with "Attn: Papers and Publications" in the subject line.

5. If You Need to Know More

This document is intended to serve as a brief overview and to provide guidelines for using the 2021 HRS Perspectives on the Pandemic Combined Spring & Fall (Version 1.0) data. If you have questions or concerns that are not adequately covered here or on our Web site, please contact us. We will do our best to provide answers.

5A. HRS Internet Site

Health and Retirement Study public release data and additional information about the study are available on the Internet. To access the data and other relevant information, point your Web browser to the HRS Web site. <http://hrsonline.isr.umich.edu/>

5B. Contact Information

If you need to contact us, you may do so by one of the methods listed below.

Internet: Help Desk at our

Web site E-mail:

hrsquestions@umich.edu

Postal service:

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