BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS ON COVID-19 IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

Monitoring knowledge, risk perceptions, preventive behaviours and trust to inform pandemic outbreak response
### Summary: General Findings

For discussion and further analysis and interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge and Perceptions</th>
<th>Individual Behaviours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Knowledge regarding COVID-19, protective measures, and government policy is high among the majority, but the number of those struggling with knowledge is significant</td>
<td>• The uptake of protective behaviours is below desirable levels and risky behaviours such as not adhering to physical distancing or avoiding social events are common</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Risk perceptions are relatively low, particularly for the perceived severity of infections</td>
<td>• Vaccinations enjoy support among the majority of the population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ability to avoid infections is substantially lower than the knowledge of protective behaviours</td>
<td>• The ability to return to normal life is the biggest driver for vaccine support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support for Policies</th>
<th>Economy and Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The acceptance of policies and restrictive measures varies strongly with highest support for mask mandates and increased testing</td>
<td>• Worries about future economic impacts from the pandemic are very common among the respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lifting/reducing restrictions on restaurants and educational facilities are supported by the majority</td>
<td>• The pandemic has had a detrimental impact on healthy lifestyles, particularly exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strict restrictions on travel or reintroducing the state of emergency are highly unpopular</td>
<td>• Avoiding health-care is significant and can have long-term public health consequences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoidance of people by ethnicity is common</td>
<td>• Avoidance of people by ethnicity is common</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Методология**
Данные собирались посредством компьютерного телефонного интервью (Computer-assisted telephone interviewing, CATI), в ходе которого было опрошено 1000 человек из всех семи областей Кыргызстана и двух основных городов - Бишкека и Оша. Сбор данных осуществлялся под руководством Министерства здравоохранения и социального развития КР и все данные, собранные в рамках этого проекта, принадлежат данному министерству.
SECTION 1: Knowledge and Perceptions
**Knowledge**

**Findings**
- The **majority** of the respondents **express strong health literacy**
- However, around a **third** report difficulties in finding information related to COVID-19 as well as recommendations
- **Following recommendations** on engaging in **social activities** is considered more **difficult** than understanding them
- **Judging media reliability** is **difficult** for close to half (45%)

Although most of the respondents express strong health literacy, a large minority struggles with informing themselves as well as understanding and following recommendations. Consistent messaging and actionable recommendations can help increase these figures.

**Predictors**
- Respondents who are **female** and **highly educated** have **higher health literacy**
- Higher health literacy correlates with **lower perceptions of infection severity**, higher trust in government, and higher perceptions that the virus is spreading fast
- Perceptions of **media hype** around COVID-19 correlate with **lower health literacy**

**FEELINGS SURE ABOUT PROTECTIVE MEASURE TO AVOID AN INFECTION**
Rated on scales ranging from 1 (very sure). Mean values und 95% confidence intervals

**HEALTH LITERACY**

- (Rather) easy
- somewhat difficult
- (Rather) difficult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...to follow recommendations about when to stay at home</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...find the information you need</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...understand information about what to do if you think have COVID-19</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...to understand recommendations about when to stay at home</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...to understand recommendations about when to engage in social activities</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...to follow recommendations about when to engage in social activities</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...judge if the information in the media is reliable?</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Risk perceptions

Findings
• Risk perceptions are relatively low with only 15% of respondents expressing high risk whereas 22% consider COVID-19 to pose low risk
• The majority of respondents (63%) see COVID-19 as somewhat risky
• The lowest risk perceptions among respondents relate to the severity of a potential infection with only 26% thinking it is highly severe
• Larger portions consider themselves highly susceptible (41%) and highly likely to get infected (36%)

Risk perceptions overall are quite small driven particularly by low perceptions of infection severity among respondents. The higher levels of severity perceptions among people who are older and members of risk groups suggests understanding of main risk factors. However, the overall low perceptions of severity may contribute to reluctance in adhering to personal protective behaviours.

Predictors
• Risk perceptions are higher among respondents who are older, female, and parts of risk groups
• Those who have higher risk perceptions tend to consume more media and have higher perceptions of the virus being close and spreading fast
• Respondents who think COVID-19 has been media hyped have lower risk perceptions

PERCEIVED RISK OF AN INFECTION
Mean score including susceptibility, probability an severity perceptions, each originally rated on scales ranging from 1 (low) to 5 (high)
- high risk (>5)
- medium risk
- low risk (<3)

PERCEIVED SUSCEPTIBILITY
Grouped results, originally rated on scales ranging from 1 (not susceptible) to 5 (very susceptible)

PERCEIVED PROBABILITY OF AN INFECTION
Grouped results, originally rated on scales ranging from 1 (extremely unlikely) to 5 (extremely likely)

PERCEIVED SEVERITY OF AN INFECTION
Grouped results, originally rated on scales ranging from 1 (not severe) to 5 (very severe)
Perceptions and emotions

Findings
• The level of certainty expressed by respondents on their ability to avoid an infection is 3.23 (scale 1-5)
• Around a third of respondents perceive the virus as close and express high levels of stress
• Up to 46% consider the virus as very fear-inducing

Predictors
• Negative emotions are reported more by respondents who are older, female, dwelling in urban areas, living with children, and working in healthcare
• Those who know infected peers and consume media frequently have higher negative emotions and perceive the virus as being closer
• Healthcare workers and members of risk groups feel the virus as being closer

The level of certainty among respondents that they can avoid an infection is substantially lower than their level of certainty in their knowledge of protective behaviours. Feelings of helplessness may be growing and can contribute to complacency in protective behaviours in the future.
SECTION 2:
Individual Behaviours
**Protective Behaviours**

**Findings**
- The adoption of protective behaviours is **below desirable levels**
- Highest levels of compliance were measured with **wearing masks (80%)** and **hand sanitation (77%)**
- Lowest compliance relate to **staying home while sick (48%)** and the **avoidance of social events (34%)**

The uptake of protective behaviours leaves room for improvement as risky behaviours such as not adhering to physical distancing combined with not avoiding social events create large potential for viral transmission. Further improvements should also be possible in the wearing of masks and hand sanitation despite their relatively high levels. The lower levels in these measures for those who have high infection probability perceptions suggests fatigue and fatalism are affecting behaviour.

**Predictors**
- Compliance is higher among respondents who are **older, female, live in rural areas, and consume media frequently**
- Uptake of protective measures correlates positively with **trust in government** and **higher perceptions of viral spread**
- Having **infected peers** correlates negatively with the uptake of measures
- Higher perceptions of **infection probability** correlate **negatively** with handwashing and physical distancing

---

**UPTAKE OF PROTECTIVE MEASURES**

- **Wearing face mask**
  - No or less uptake: 80%
  - Medium uptake: 9%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 11%

- **Using disinfectants**
  - No or less uptake: 13%
  - Medium uptake: 77%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 10%

- **Physical distancing of at least 1,5 meters**
  - No or less uptake: 15%
  - Medium uptake: 62%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 20%

- **Avoiding to touch eyes, nose, mouth**
  - No or less uptake: 18%
  - Medium uptake: 61%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 24%

- **Staying home when sick**
  - No or less uptake: 48%
  - Medium uptake: 15%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 37%

- **Washing hands for 20 seconds**
  - No or less uptake: 10%
  - Medium uptake: 12%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 77%

- **Disinfecting surfaces**
  - No or less uptake: 18%
  - Medium uptake: 54%
  - Strong or very strong uptake: 27%
Vaccinations

Findings
• The majority of respondents (59%) would be willing to get vaccinated if a vaccine was available whereas only 29% are strongly against doing so
• Around two thirds of respondents believe that a vaccine would be effective in controlling the spread of COVID-19
• A half of the respondents think that if they had been infected before, they would not take a vaccine
• 43% believe they would not need a vaccine if others have taken one

Overall, the majority of respondents are positive towards vaccinations and willing to get vaccinated. More efforts are needed to alleviate concerns or increases perceptions of utility for groups that are more critical, particularly younger and female respondents.

Predictors
• Respondents more critical towards vaccines tend to be younger, female, infrequent media consumers, and have higher education
• Higher perceptions of viral closeness and spread, worry about economic consequences, as well as the risk it poses correlate with higher willingness to get vaccinated
• Trust in the government and medical sector are linked with more positive views on vaccinations

PLEASE SHARE YOUR POSITION ON A POTENTIAL FUTURE COVID-19 VACCINE:

- I believe a vaccine can help control the spread of COVID-19
- The majority of respondents (59%) would be willing to get vaccinated if a vaccine was available whereas only 29% are strongly against doing so
- Around two thirds of respondents believe that a vaccine would be effective in controlling the spread of COVID-19
- A half of the respondents think that if they had been infected before, they would not take a vaccine
- 43% believe they would not need a vaccine if others have taken one

Overall, the majority of respondents are positive towards vaccinations and willing to get vaccinated. More efforts are needed to alleviate concerns or increases perceptions of utility for groups that are more critical, particularly younger and female respondents.

Predictors
• Respondents more critical towards vaccines tend to be younger, female, infrequent media consumers, and have higher education
• Higher perceptions of viral closeness and spread, worry about economic consequences, as well as the risk it poses correlate with higher willingness to get vaccinated
• Trust in the government and medical sector are linked with more positive views on vaccinations

PLEASE SHARE YOUR POSITION ON A POTENTIAL FUTURE COVID-19 VACCINE:

- I believe a vaccine can help control the spread of COVID-19
- The majority of respondents (59%) would be willing to get vaccinated if a vaccine was available whereas only 29% are strongly against doing so
- Around two thirds of respondents believe that a vaccine would be effective in controlling the spread of COVID-19
- A half of the respondents think that if they had been infected before, they would not take a vaccine
- 43% believe they would not need a vaccine if others have taken one

Overall, the majority of respondents are positive towards vaccinations and willing to get vaccinated. More efforts are needed to alleviate concerns or increases perceptions of utility for groups that are more critical, particularly younger and female respondents.

Please share your position on a potential future COVID-19 vaccine:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Would get vaccine if available

If I knew I had been infected with COVID-19 before, I would not get the vaccine even if it were available

When everyone is vaccinated against COVID-19, I don’t have to get vaccinated too

Strongly disagree
Somewhat disagree
Somewhat agree
Strongly agree
**Vaccination concerns**

**Findings**
- No measured concerns receive high levels of responses in the survey with the origin of the vaccine being the highest concern (31%)
- The ability to lift restrictions due to the vaccine being the most commonly cited reason for getting it (25%)
- 18% are worried about side-effects
- Recommendations are not cited as a large supporting factor, but family doctors are more important than central institutions such as the MoH (19% vs 10%)

**Predictors**
- Recommendations from either family doctors or the MoH are more important to older and urban respondents
- The ease of access to vaccines is more important to female respondents and those who worry about future economic consequences

**REASONS FOR FUTURE COVID-19 VACCINE ACCEPTANCE**

- Country in which the vaccine is produced: 31% YES, 69% NO
- Whether a high vaccination uptake would lift restrictions on movement and gathering in groups: 26% YES, 74% NO
- Recommendation from my family doctor: 19% YES, 81% NO
- Whether the vaccine has been in use for a long time with no serious side-effects: 18% YES, 82% NO
- How easy it is to get the vaccine (e.g. available out-of-hours or in pharmacies): 14% YES, 86% NO
- Whether the vaccine is free of change: 13% YES, 87% NO
- Recommendation of the Ministry of Health; labour and Social Protection/National Agency for Public Health: 10% YES, 90% NO
- Risk of getting infected with COVID-19 at the time when the vaccine is available: 8% YES, 92% NO
- Whether the vaccine is used in other countries: 6% YES, 94% NO
SECTION 3: Support for policies
General policy perspectives

Findings
- Strong support was measured for enforced isolations for infected individuals (79%) and for increased testing in the population (76%)
- However, up to 46% of respondents think that the current restrictions are greatly exaggerated
- 62% of respondents accept avoidance of people based on ethnicity
- Up to 77% would continue to follow restrictions after the peak of infection even after they are no longer formal requirements

The strong support for isolating infected individual and increased testing shows a good level of acceptance for targeted and preventative measures against COVID-19. However, the view that current restrictions are exaggerated is common. The level of avoidance based on ethnicity is high and should be better understood so it can be addressed.

Predictors
- Enforced isolations are supported more among older respondents who have high trust in government
- Following restrictions beyond formal requirements is more common among older who have higher risk perceptions and trust in government
- Having infected peers correlates negatively with continuing to follow restrictions

VOLUNTARY COMPLIANCE

ACCEPTANCE OF MEASURES

More tests for corona virus should be carried out in population

Accept of avoiding people based on their ethnicity

Government should be allowed to force infected into isolation

Believe current restrictions are greatly exaggerated

(Strongly) disagree

somewhat agree

(Strongly) agree

79%

62%

37%

17%

46%

9%

12%

9%

29%

12%

12%

76%
Support for specific policies

Findings
• Mask mandates in closed public places enjoy overwhelming support with 91% expressing strong agreement
• The majority support reopening restaurants/cafés (62%) and education facilities (55%)
• Mandatory testing for teachers is supported by 76%
• Bans on interregional public transport and the reintroduction of the state of emergency are resisted by the majority and only 32% and 26% respectively strongly support them
• Reopening borders has no clear outcome as neither side has an absolute majority (46% for and 33% against)

Support varies greatly by different policies with strong support for masks and testing to continue or be introduced, but little appetite for the continued restrictions on restaurants and the education sector, and strong resistance towards strict restrictions of movement or state of emergency.

Predictors
• Those who disagree with mask mandates are more likely to be male, have lower trust in the medical sector, lower perceptions of viral spread, and consume media less
• Support for reopening schools is more common among those with high trust in government, frequent media consumption, and higher perceptions of infection probability

AGREEMENT WITH DECISIONS TAKEN

ACCEPTANCE FOR FUTURE RESTRICTIONS
**Fairness**

**Findings**
- The majority of respondents consider the decisions made on COVID-19 to be fair (61%) and would convince others of the fairness (62%)
- Only 17%/18% of respondents disagree strongly with the fairness of decisions

*The perceptions on fairness are positive in the majority. However, there are issues with these perceptions especially among the youth, likely due to the lower perceived personal risks and strong perceived impacts from restrictions.*

**Predictors**
- Fairness perceptions are lower among younger respondents living without children who know peers who have been infected
- Views on fairness correlate positively with trust in government, media consumption, and perceptions of fast viral spread

**FAIRNESS**

**I would convince others that the decisions are right**
- 62% Strong or very strong uptake
- 17% No or less uptake
- 21% Medium uptake

**I think the decisions are fair**
- 61% Strong or very strong uptake
- 18% No or less uptake
- 20% Medium uptake
Findings
• Trust is highest towards the medical sector, including hospitals (3.87), the Ministry of Health (3.61), and family doctors (3.47)
• Lowest levels of trust were measured towards city administrations (2.96), churches (3.01), and schools (3.18)

Predictors
• Trust in institutions is stronger among older respondents, healthcare workers, and those who consume media frequently
• Higher education, knowing infected peers, and belonging to risk groups correlate negatively with trust
• Female respondents have higher trust in the government

CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS
Rated on scales ranging from 1 (very low confidence) to 5 (very high confidence). Mean values and 95% confidence intervals

- Hospitals: 3.87
- Ministry of health: 3.61
- Family doctor: 3.47
- Employer: 3.47
- National Agency for PH: 3.41
- Schools: 3.18
- Church: 3.01
- City administration: 2.96

The higher trust enjoyed by the medical sector is a positive supporting factor in its ability to tackle the pandemic and engage in credible messaging.
SECTION 4: Economy and wellbeing
Economic impacts

Findings

• The worries about the future economic consequences is very common among respondents with up to 69% expressing strong worry

• Only 17% of respondents are not worried about future economic consequences

Worries about the future economic situation are extremely common and likely contributing to stress and fear related to the virus. Data from other countries suggests that suffering financial hardship can negatively impact uptake of protective behaviours and support for policies, so it is important to understand and address impacts as much as possible not only to protect livelihoods but also to tackle the pandemic.

Predictors

• Respondents who are older, live in rural areas, and frequently consume media are more likely to worry about the economic situation

WORRIES

Worries about future economic consequences

- Much or Very Much Worry: 69%
- Medium Worry: 14%
- No or Less Worry: 17%
Resilience

Findings
- The majority of the respondents express good resilience against stressful events (3.5), but significant minorities struggle with recovering from or coping with bad events (2.93/2.88)

Maintaining good levels of resilience is important for people to cope with the stress of COVID-19 and the impacts of restrictions, especially for those who have had direct negative medical or economic impacts.

Predictors
- Resilience is higher among rural respondents
- Higher resilience correlates with low trust in the medical sector and low media consumption

RESILIENCE
Rated on scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Mean values and 95% confidence intervals

- It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event (3.5)
- It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens (2.93)
- I have a hard time making it through stressful events (2.88)
Negative pandemic behaviours

Findings
- The levels of negative pandemic behaviours are quite high
- Issues with less healthy lifestyles are present, especially for exercising less than normal (45%) and eating a worse diet (22%)
- The avoidance of people based on ethnicity is also very common (42%)
- Postponing or avoiding vaccinations (28%) and doctors visits (25%) are engaged in by significant minorities

Negative pandemic behaviours are high both in relation to less healthy lifestyles and health-seeking. These may have negative impacts on public health in the long term.

Predictors
- Drinking and smoking more than usual is more common among male respondents
- Unhealthier diets are more common in urban areas
- Frequent media consumptions correlates with less exercise

PANDEMIC BEHAVIOR
Results from recent survey

- Exercise less than usual: 55%
- Postponed vaccination for myself or my child: 72%
- Avoid going doctor: 75%
- Buy drugs I heard helping against COVID-19: 75%
- Eat more unhealthy food than usual: 78%
- Smoke more: 22%
- Drink more alcohol than usual: 94%
SECTION 5:
Media use and trust
Information sources

Findings

- **Searching for information** about COVID-19 is **not common** as 46% report doing so never or rarely.
- Up to **40%** of respondents think that COVID-19 is **very media hyped**.
- The most trusted sources of information include **healthcare workers** (4.07), the **WHO** (3.91), and **official reports and press releases** (3.77/3.79).
- The **least trusted** sources are **social media** (2.99), **newspapers** (3.12), and **celebrities/influences** (3.23).

**TRUST IN INFORMATION SOURCES**
Rated on scales ranging from 1 (very little trust) to 5 (great deal of trust). Mean values and 95% confidence interval.

**FREQUENCY SEARCHING FOR INFORMATIONS ABOUT CORONAVIRUS /COVID-19**

**MEDIA HYPE**
For me the Corona virus is...