

INTRODUCTION

Medicare is the nation's health insurance program for persons 65 years and over and for persons younger than 65 years who have a qualifying disability. The Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey (MCBS) is a continuous, multi-purpose longitudinal survey covering a representative national sample of the Medicare population. Interviews are usually conducted in-person using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI); however, conducting interviews by phone is also permitted on the MCBS and has been since its origin. Sponsored by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), the MCBS primarily focuses on economic and beneficiary topics including health care use and health care access barriers, health care expenditures, and factors that affect health care utilization. As a part of this focus, the MCBS collects a variety of information about the beneficiary, including demographic characteristics, health status and functioning, access to care, insurance coverage and out of pocket expenses, financial resources, and potential family support. The MCBS collects this information in three data collection periods, or rounds, per year. Over the years, data from the MCBS have been used to inform many advancements, including the creation of new benefits such as Medicare's Part D prescription drug benefit.

On January 31, 2020, the Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary determined that a Public Health Emergency (PHE) existed for the United States to aid the nation's healthcare community in responding to the novel "severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2" ("SARS-CoV-2") virus and the disease it causes, "coronavirus disease 2019" ("COVID-19"); on April 21, 2020, the Secretary renewed, effective April 26, 2020, the determination that a PHE still existed. Older people and people of all ages with severe chronic medical conditions — like heart disease, lung disease and diabetes, for example — seem to be at higher risk of developing serious COVID-19 illness.¹ With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., CMS was uniquely positioned to collect timely and vital information on how the pandemic was impacting the Medicare population by utilizing the MCBS.

CMS took advantage of the MCBS panel design to assess and understand the COVID-19 pandemic by planning a series of rapid response surveys as a supplement to the main MCBS. The first supplement was administered in Summer 2020 to existing MCBS sampled beneficiaries who were continuously enrolled in Medicare from the beginning of 2020 and were still alive, eligible for and enrolled in Medicare at the time of the interview in Summer 2020. The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement was considered a test of the COVID-19 rapid response protocol. The test was conducted during the regular production cycle of Summer 2020 (Round 87). CMS also plans to administer a COVID-19 Fall 2020 Supplement during the regular production cycle of Fall 2020 (Round 88) and to continue asking these questions into 2021 as needed.

¹ Garg S, Kim L, Whitaker M, et al. Hospitalization Rates and Characteristics of Patients Hospitalized with Laboratory-Confirmed Coronavirus Disease 2019 — COVID-NET, 14 States, March 1–30, 2020. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2020; 69:458–464. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6915e3>.

Exhibit 1 shows the PDF specifications now available for the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement on the MCBS website at <https://www.cms.gov/research-statistics-data-and-systems/researchmcsquestionnaires/2020-supplemental-covid-19-questionnaires>.

The MCBS COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement Questionnaire User’s Guide is intended to accompany the questionnaire specifications. This document offers a publically available resource, which explains the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement. For resources about MCBS data products, including data from the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement, users can view documentation for each data year on the MCBS website at <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Research/MCBS/Codebooks>.

Exhibit 1: COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement Specifications

Component	Supplement Name	PDF Section File Name
Community	COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement	MCBS_COVID_Supp_Summer2020

MCBS Questionnaire specifications for the main MCBS Community and Facility instruments are publically available on the MCBS website at <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Research/MCBS/Questionnaires>.

QUESTIONNAIRES

CMS conducted the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement in June and July 2020 by telephone with existing MCBS respondents residing in the community. The 15-minute survey collected data on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Medicare beneficiaries' lives. The questions in the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement were adapted from a range of sources and were intended to align with other federal surveys on similar topics.

The sections that follow provides an overview of the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement, a beneficiary must have been continuously enrolled in Medicare from the beginning of 2020 and still be alive, living in the community, and eligible and enrolled in Medicare at the time of their COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement interview.

For more information on the main MCBS eligibility criteria, please see the *Survey File Data User's Guide* at: <https://www.cms.gov/Research-Statistics-Data-and-Systems/Research/MCBS/Codebooks>.

Questionnaire Content

The topics measured by the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement are:

- Availability and Use of Telemedicine
- Access to Computers and Internet
- Forgone Health Care as a Result of the Pandemic
- Autoimmune Disease Prevalence
- COVID-19 Symptoms and Diagnosis
- Access to and Utilization of COVID-19 Testing
- COVID-19 Care
- Preventive Measures
- Sources of COVID-19 Information
- Knowledge of COVID-19 Public Health Guidance
- Ability to Access Basic Needs During the Pandemic
- Impact to Financial and Mental Health

Availability and Use of Telemedicine

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicare temporarily expanded coverage of telemedicine to help beneficiaries access a wider range of services from providers without having to travel to a healthcare office.² To measure the impacts of this change in policy, the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes questions on availability of telemedicine services before and during the pandemic. These questions were adapted from items on the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) COVID-19 Research and Development Survey (RANDS).³

Access to Computers and Internet

To inform research questions pertaining to access to telemedicine services, the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement also contains a series of items on the use of computers, smartphones, tablets, videoconferencing, and access to the internet. These items were sourced from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS)⁴ and November 2019 Current Population Survey (CPS) Computer and Internet Use Supplement.⁵

Forgone Health Care as a Result of the Pandemic

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement contains a series of items about medical care that was needed for something other than COVID-19 but was not obtained because of the pandemic. The Supplement asks if any care was forgone, what type of care it was, and for each type of care forgone, the Supplement asks whether it was the beneficiary or provider who made the decision to forego care, and why the decision to forego care was made. These items were adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey.

Autoimmune Disease Prevalence

Early findings show that certain preexisting medical conditions and autoimmune diseases make a person more vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.⁶ The main MCBS questionnaire already collects information on prevalence of chronic conditions but does not ask about diagnosis of autoimmune diseases. Therefore, the COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement asks two questions

² "Medicare & Coronavirus" U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. Accessed on August 5, 2020. <https://www.medicare.gov/medicare-coronavirus>

³ "COVID-19 Research and Development Survey (RANDS)" National Center for Health Statistics. 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/covid19/rands.htm>

⁴ "2020 American Community Survey" U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed May, 2020. <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/methodology/questionnaires/2020/quest20.pdf>

⁵ "November 2019 Current Population Survey Computer and Internet Use Supplement" U.S. Census Bureau. Accessed May, 2020. <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsnov19.pdf>

⁶ "Certain Medical Conditions and Risk for Severe COVID-19 Illness" U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Last modified July 30, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fneed-extra-precautions%2Fgroups-at-higher-risk.html

about autoimmune diseases. These items were adapted from the CDC's National 2009 H1N1 Flu Survey (NHFS).⁷

COVID-19 Symptoms and Diagnosis

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes a number of items relating to beneficiaries who had a probable or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19. Topics include COVID-19 symptoms experienced since the start of the pandemic, suspected diagnosis of COVID-19, and confirmed diagnosis by a doctor or other health professional. These items were adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey.

Access to and Utilization of COVID-19 Testing

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes items relating to access to COVID-19 testing, utilization of testing, and test results (if applicable). The item on asking a doctor or medical professional for a COVID-19 test was adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey. The item on ever having been refused a test was sourced from the Washington Post-ABC News March 22-25, 2020 poll.⁸ The items on utilization of a test and results of the test were sourced from the NCHS RANDS survey and National Health Interview Survey.⁹

COVID-19 Care

For those who had a probable or confirmed diagnosis of COVID-19, the Summer 2020 Supplement includes items related to utilization of medical care and hospitalization for COVID-19. These items were adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey.

Preventive Measures

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes items on which preventive measures were taken to avoid exposure to the virus. The survey asks about 15 different measures that were recommended by the CDC and public health community during the pandemic, including washing hands, coughing or sneezing into a tissue, avoiding gatherings with groups of 10 or more people, and purchasing extra supplies such as food, cleaning supplies, and prescriptions. These items were adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey and other sources.¹⁰

⁷ "National 2009 H1N1 Flu Survey" U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Accessed May, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nis/data_files_h1n1.htm

⁸ "March 22-25, 2020 poll" Washington Post-ABC News. Accessed May, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/context/washington-post-abc-news-poll-march-22-25-2020/974c3312-5a40-4764-afb1-4bb6b86f1cf4/>

⁹ "National Health Interview Survey" U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis/data-questionnaires-documentation.htm>

¹⁰ "How to Protect Yourself & Others" U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Accessed May, 2020. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>

Sources of COVID-19 Information

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes items relating to the media or other types of sources the beneficiary relies on for information about the pandemic. These items were sourced from the March 2020 AP-NORC Center Poll.¹¹

Knowledge of COVID-19 Public Health Guidance

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes an item measuring knowledge of public health messaging about the virus. The survey asks about knowledge of guidance related to frequent hand washing, healthy people wearing facemasks in public, avoiding gatherings with large numbers of people, sheltering in place, and seeking medical attention for trouble breathing. This item was sourced from the March 2020 AP-NORC Center Poll.

Ability to Access Basic Needs During the Pandemic

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes a series of items measuring disruption to basic needs caused by the pandemic, including ability to pay rent or mortgage and access to medication, health care, food, and household supplies. These items were adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey.

Impact to Financial and Mental Health

The COVID-19 Summer 2020 Supplement includes a series on impacts of the outbreak, including financial security, and feelings of stress or anxiety, loneliness or sadness, and social connection. These items were adapted from the NCHS RANDS survey.

¹¹ "March 2020 Poll AP-NORC Center Poll" The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Accessed May, 2020. https://apnorc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/march2020_toplevel.pdf