

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S VIEWS ON THE DEBATE OVER COVID-19 VACCINATION MANDATES FOR PUBLIC-SCHOOL STUDENTS AGED 12 OR OLDER

October 2021

POLITICO



HARVARD
T.H. CHAN
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC’S VIEWS ON THE DEBATE OVER COVID-19 VACCINATION MANDATES FOR PUBLIC-SCHOOL STUDENTS AGED 12 OR OLDER

This report, based on a new POLITICO-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll, examines the American public’s views on the debate over mandating vaccination against Covid-19 for public-school students aged 12 or older.

The issue of mandating vaccination for school children is different from other debates over Covid-19 vaccination mandates because most school districts already require vaccination against multiple childhood illnesses. Vaccines against Covid-19 have not yet been approved for children under 12 years old, but they may be in the near future.

The new POLITICO-Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health poll finds that although 54% of the American public now favors requiring public-school students aged 12 or older to be vaccinated against Covid-19 before they can attend school in person, there is a sharp partisan divide (Table 1). Democrats and Republicans differ widely in their views – 72% of Democrats favor such a requirement, while 59% of Republicans are opposed. This suggests that in Republican states there is likely to be continuing resistance to this type of mandate.

Table 1. The Public’s Views on Requiring Public-School Students Aged 12 or Older to Be Vaccinated Against Covid-19 Before They Can Attend School in Person, in percent

	Favor	Oppose	Don’t know/ Refused
Total adults	54	45	1
By political party			
Democrat	72	28	*
Republican	40	59	1
Independent	47	52	1
Adults in households with children aged 12-17	49	51	*
By race/ethnicity			
White	51	48	1
Black	63	35	2
Latino	59	40	1

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The American Public’s Views on the Debate over Covid-19 Vaccination Mandates for Public-School Students Aged 12 or Older. September 28 – October 3, 2021. Base: U.S. adults.

Of note, previous polls have shown considerably higher support for already existing school vaccination mandates. In a 2019 poll, 84% of the public said that parents should be required to have their children vaccinated against preventable diseases such as measles, mumps and rubella in order to attend school.¹

Overall support for requiring public-school students aged 12 or older to be vaccinated against Covid-19 before they can attend school in person is nearly unchanged since June 2021, when 50% said they were in favor.

Adults in households with children aged 12-17 are closely divided, with 49% in favor of requiring public-school students aged 12 or older to be vaccinated against Covid-19 before they can attend school in person, 51% opposed. This also suggests that in many communities there will likely be continuing resistance to such a requirement.

Support for requiring public-school students aged 12 or older to be vaccinated against Covid-19 is 63% among Blacks, 59% among Latinos, and 51% among Whites.

A great deal of media coverage has shown meetings and demonstrations against mandatory Covid-19 vaccination of public-school students. As shown in Table 2, the poll finds that only 8% of the public overall has been involved in political activity about the issue, by going to a public meeting or demonstration, contacting any school official or other public official, or writing an op-ed or letter to the editor to express their views about schools requiring mandatory Covid-19 vaccinations. This degree of political activity does not differ significantly between those who favor and those who oppose such mandates: 9% of those who favor such a requirement and 8% of those who oppose it report being politically active on the issue. Of interest, despite the media coverage, only a small share of the public is involved in this debate.

Table 2. Political Activity by the U.S. Public to Express Views About Schools Requiring Mandatory Covid-19 Vaccinations, by Party Identification, in percent

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Have gone to a public meeting or demonstration, contacted any school official or other public official, or written an op-ed or letter to the editor to express your views about schools requiring mandatory Covid-19 vaccinations	8	10	10	6
Have not done any of those things	91	90	90	93
Don't know/Refused	1	-	-	1

POLITICO/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, The American Public's Views on the Debate over Covid-19 Vaccination Mandates for Public-School Students Aged 12 or Older. September 28 – October 3, 2021. Base: U.S. adults.

¹ Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health/SSRS Poll. Poll Finds Public Support for School-Based Vaccination, but Limited Trust in Vaccine Safety and Public Health Agencies, September 12, 2019, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/poll-finds-public-support-for-school-based-vaccination-but-limited-trust-in-vaccine-safety-and-public-health-agencies/>

METHODOLOGY

The results are based on polling conducted by *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Representatives of the two organizations worked closely to develop the survey questionnaires and analyze the results of the polls. *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health paid for the surveys and related expenses.

The project team was led by Robert J. Blendon, Sc.D., Professor of Public Health and Professor of Health Policy and Political Analysis Emeritus, at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Joanne Kenen, Executive Editor, Health Care at *Politico/Politico Pro*. The *Politico* research team also included Adriel Bettelheim; the Harvard research team also included John M. Benson and Chelsea Whitton Pearsall.

Interviews were conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1,008 randomly selected U.S. adults via telephone (including cell phones and landlines) by SSRS of Glen Mills, Pennsylvania. The interviewing period was September 28 – October 3, 2021. The interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

When interpreting these findings, one should recognize that all surveys are subject to sampling error. The margin of error for the full sample is ± 3.9 percentage points.

Possible sources of non-sampling error include non-response bias, as well as question wording and ordering effects. Non-response in telephone surveys produces some known biases in survey-derived estimates because participation tends to vary for different subgroups of the population. To compensate for these known biases and for variations in probability of selection within and across households, sample data are weighted by household size, cell phone/landline use, party identification, and demographics (sex, age, race/ethnicity, education, and region) to reflect the true population. Other techniques, including random-digit dialing, replicate subsamples, and systematic respondent selection within households, are used to ensure that the sample is representative.

Politico/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Poll

**THE AMERICAN PUBLIC’S VIEWS ON THE DEBATE
OVER COVID-19 VACCINATION MANDATES
FOR PUBLIC-SCHOOL STUDENTS AGED 12 OR OLDER**

This survey was conducted for *Politico* and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health via telephone by SSRS, an independent research company. Interviews were conducted via telephone (cell phone and landline) **September 28 – October 3, 2021**, among a nationally representative sample of **1,008 U.S. adults**. The margin of error for total respondents is ± 3.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. More information about SSRS can be obtained by visiting www.ssrs.com.

POLQ1. Recently, there have been discussions at both the national and the state level about whether various institutions and government should require people to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to participate in certain activities. Do you favor or oppose requiring public-school students aged 12 or older to be vaccinated against COVID-19 before they can attend school in person?

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind	Adults in households with children aged 12-17
Favor	54	72	40	47	49
Oppose	45	28	59	52	51
Don't know/Refused	1	*	1	1	*

POLQ4. In the past few months, have you gone to a public meeting or demonstration, contacted any school official or other public official, or written an op-ed or letter to the editor to express your views about schools requiring mandatory Covid-19 vaccinations, or haven't you done any of those things?

	Total	Dem	Rep	Ind
Have gone to a public meeting or demonstration, contacted any school official or other public official, or written an op-ed or letter to the editor to express your views about schools requiring mandatory Covid-19 vaccinations	8	10	10	6
Have not done any of those things	91	90	90	93
Don't know/Refused	1	-	-	1