

# Insure.com survey: Almost 40% delayed health care during COVID-19

By Les Masterson | [Posted on March 30, 2021](#)

Nearly 40% of Americans said they've delayed health care over the past year because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Insure.com conducted an online Google survey and asked 1,673 people whether they delayed health care and what type of care was postponed. We found people were more likely to postpone a [dentist](#) visit during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Here are the types of care delayed during the pandemic:

- Dentist – 21%
- Primary care – 18%
- Eye doctor – 14%
- Specialist – 12%
- Physical therapy – 10%
- Mental health – 8%

Gail Trauco, a patients rights advocate and founder of The PharmaKonLLC and Medical Bill 911, said delayed health care could lead to more health concerns when the patient resumes health care visits.

Many undiagnosed conditions may have gone untreated, such as early stage hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. For example, long-term undiagnosed hypertension may cause permanent kidney damage and require immediate hospitalization on diagnosis. It can lead to required dialysis and even kidney transplant," Trauco said.

A return to the dentist after 18 months may also require a deep cleaning, Trauco said.

Dr. Jason Hui at Paragon Dentistry in Allen, Texas, said healthy dental patients with no cavities or areas of concern who had regular six-month cleanings might be OK if they delayed care. However, Hui said that's only about 25-30% of his patients.

Many patients have pending dental treatment, such as fillings for holes and decay in teeth, crowns for teeth at high risk of fracturing, root canals for infected teeth, etc. Delaying treatment for a year could result in a dental emergency due to pain and/or worsening of their condition, leading to higher costs for treatment or even tooth loss," Hui said.

Patients with periodontal disease typically seen every three or four months may face more dentist visits and costs once they return for a visit.

Missing these interval visits could result in progression and reactivating of previous periodontal disease, which could lead to higher costs," Hui said.

Hui added that dentists might have limited appointments with so many patients going back to the dentist and needing care for pent-up dental issues.

Going a year or more without dental cleanings doesn't just affect your teeth. Dr. Joi M. Freemont at Freemont Dental in Hopeville, Georgia, said avoiding the dentist can be detrimental to a person's overall health, employment and well being – and lead to more health care costs.

The mouth is the gateway to the rest of the body. Small issues can become larger issues, and delaying treatment could have an impact on other teeth and cost more money in the future," Freemont said.

During the pandemic, dentists have implemented safety measures to help keep patients safe. Freemont said dental teams are dressed in personal protective equipment (PPE), screen all patients before they arrive, limit people in the office and extend appointment times to clean the treatment rooms properly. They've also installed barriers, removed toys and magazines from the waiting room and added air purifiers.

Fortunately, for years, most dentists have worn the PPE that is now mandated. Dentists have always set high standards for infection control. I believe that the additional requirements are here to stay," Fremont said. "As healthcare professions, we must respect each person's level of comfort when moving about during the pandemic."

## Care delays may lead to more costs, demand for appointments

Delayed care may result in a greater need for appointments over the next year. It could also lead to higher [health insurance](#) costs with more people using health care services. The higher costs could also come about if the delayed care leads to more health problems.

More than one-third (35%) of respondents said they expect to use more health care services over the next year. Twenty-three percent said they don't expect to need more health care and 42% said they weren't sure.

Nick Salinas, physical therapy and owner of Foundational Movement Therapy in Canandaigua, New York, said providers are having trouble catching up now that more patients are receiving care again.

There is simply not enough room in medical offices or personnel to get caught up at this point. This means more people being treated with pain mediation, which grows our already expansive opioid epidemic and will increase the long-term costs of care that might otherwise be avoided if people were treated early. It's a terrible situation," Salinas said.

Salinas said the delays in care can lead to greater pain levels and disability, resulting in more surgeries and even increased unemployment because of disability.

Our survey found that women are more likely to expect to use more health care services over the next year. Thirty-nine percent of women said they expect to need more health care. That's compared to 30% of men.

Senior citizens are expected to use more health care services. Here are percentages of people by age who expect to need more health care over the next year:

- 65-plus – 39%
- 18-24 – 33%
- 35-44 – 32%
- 45-54 – 32%
- 55-64 – 32%
- 25-34 – 30%

## Virtual care helped during COVID-19

Salinas said virtual care, also called telemedicine and telehealth, has helped get people the care they need during COVID-19. He hopes virtual care remains in place as an option for patients.

Moving forward, I hope that insurance will continue to pay for, approve and support the use of telehealth care. Even during the pandemic last year, several of the major companies were denying telehealth treatment, which was disheartening. My hope and prayer is that they would support medical providers in allowing treatment to be provided to the millions of Americans who need it in any way they can, Salinas said.

Trauco believes telemedicine is here to stay and should remain a part of day-to-day clinical medicine. Telemedicine may bring more revenue and decrease costs for hospitals.

Telemedicine is a major key in the future of healthcare. Major insurance companies, Medicare and Medicaid are on board with telemedicine. All major insurance companies provide a toll-free number to call to schedule telemedicine appointments. Deductible is paid at the time of the visit. If you schedule your telemedicine visit through the insurance company portal or toll-free number, you should always be in-network. This should minimize surprise medical bills and non-essential procedures required for your treatment," Trauco said.