



# THE MCBS COVID-19 DATA TOOL

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Timely access to pandemic data vital for  
Medicare beneficiaries, health care providers,  
and researchers

## Problem

The Medicare beneficiary population is uniquely vulnerable to life-threatening cases of COVID-19. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) utilized the Medicare Current Beneficiary Survey to gain a better understanding of Medicare beneficiaries' experiences with the pandemic and its impact on health and everyday life. Given the speed and evolving nature of the pandemic, CMS also knew the benefits of quickly disseminating findings to the research community and the public.

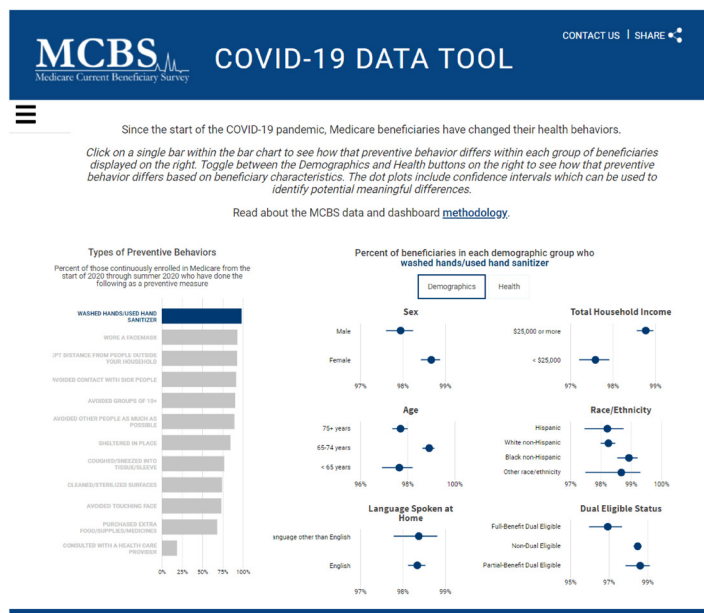
**“When it comes to helping people through public health emergencies such as COVID-19, time is of the essence. NORC has the capability to rapidly collect and disseminate urgently needed data to keep our clients and stakeholders informed.”**

—**Felicia LeClere**  
Senior Fellow, Health Sciences

## Solution

At CMS's request, NORC launched a series of rapid-response supplements to the MCBS, which we've conducted since 2014. The supplements collect a variety of COVID-19 related data, including beneficiaries' preventive behaviors, forgone health care, access to telemedicine, attitudes around vaccines, perceptions of the severity of COVID-19, and the pandemic's impact on both their health and their daily life. We fielded the first supplement in June of 2020, soon after CMS approved our recommended approach and methods, with the intention of continuing this collection periodically through at least 2021.

To make data from the supplements as accessible as possible to beneficiaries, providers, and health care researchers, we also created the [MCBS COVID-19 Data Tool](#), an evolving, interactive website that allows visitors to visualize the data according to a variety of demographic and health status filters. The tool makes it easy to explore how different subgroups of Medicare beneficiaries have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the tool demonstrates which subgroups of beneficiaries reported that they were less likely to wear a facemask or more likely to use social media as a source of information about COVID-19, providing important insights for the development of health communications and interventions.



## RESULTS

CMS released a public use file with data from the first supplement in October, along with a NORC-designed infographic to assist the public in easy access to study results. Data from the second supplement, fielded in October-November 2020, will be released in early 2021, again with an accompanying infographic. A final supplement is targeted for data collection in March 2021, after which a subset of the COVID-19 survey questions will be incorporated into the main MCBS questionnaire. Questions about access to and use of vaccines will be added to the 2021 supplement and future rounds of MCBS data collection. CMS will use these data to study the impact of COVID-19 on Medicare policy such as the expansion of telemedicine coverage. The interactive dashboards of the Data Tool will be a continued source of current information, making the survey's findings more accessible to the public, including important stakeholders, in a quick, easy-to-use fashion.

## START A CONVERSATION

Find out how you can tap into NORC's public health data collection and visualization expertise.

Contact Jeffrey Hackett at [Hackett-jeffrey@norc.org](mailto:Hackett-jeffrey@norc.org) or 312-759-4266.

Explore more of NORC's COVID-related work at [covid19.norc.org](https://covid19.norc.org).