# Global Analysis of COVID-19 Symptom Burden and Treatment Perceptions Among the Medically Vulnerable

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## BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

- Medically vulnerable populations include individuals with high-risk factors for severe COVID-19 infection.[1]
- Nearly six years after the pandemic began, evidence on COVID-19's ongoing impact in these populations remains limited.
- We conducted a survey among medically vulnerable individuals to understand how COVID-19 continues to affect them in the post-pandemic era.
- Understanding their current knowledge, attitudes, and practices—particularly regarding symptom burden and antiviral treatment—is essential to guide targeted support and interventions.

- The survey's primary aim was to better understand how COVID-19 continues to affect medically vulnerable individuals in the post-pandemic era.
- Secondary aims included identifying gaps in knowledge, attitudes, and practices after the Omicron wave, and generating insights to support equitable global health policy.

## METHODS

- Representatives from eight global medically vulnerable patient organizations convened the COVID Community Council and co-created the 'Attitudes about COVID and Community Engagement with Patients' (ACCEPt) global patient survey.
- ACCEPt surveyed 5,000 medically vulnerable* adults across 10 countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Spain, and the United States) who self-reported risk factors for severe disease and a COVID-19 diagnosis since January 2022.
- The one-time online survey included 41 questions exploring participant knowledge, attitudes and practice around COVID-19 risk, testing and treatment, symptom severity, and burden of illness.

**K** — **Knowledge**
Confidence & knowledge in COVID-19-related topics

**A** — **Attitudes**
Beliefs around COVID-19-related topics

**P** — **Practices**
COVID-19-related behaviors, strategies, or interventions

- Participants were recruited from the Opinion Health patient research community using quota sampling and were invited via email to complete the survey via a web link. All responses were self-reported and analyzed using descriptive summary statistics.

**Most medically vulnerable adults worldwide continue to experience moderate-to-severe COVID-19 symptoms, in many cases, without considering or taking antiviral treatment. Despite their high risk of progression to severe disease, only half recognize their eligibility for antivirals, and access to antivirals remains limited.**

## RESULTS

**During survey participants' most recent COVID-19 infection:**

**The most common symptoms included:**

- **Fever** — **71.4%** (n=3568/5000)
- **Cough** — **69.6%** (n=3479/5000)
- **Sore throat** — **61.8%** (n=3091/5000)

**72.8%** (n=3549/4873) **Reported moderate-to-severe symptoms**

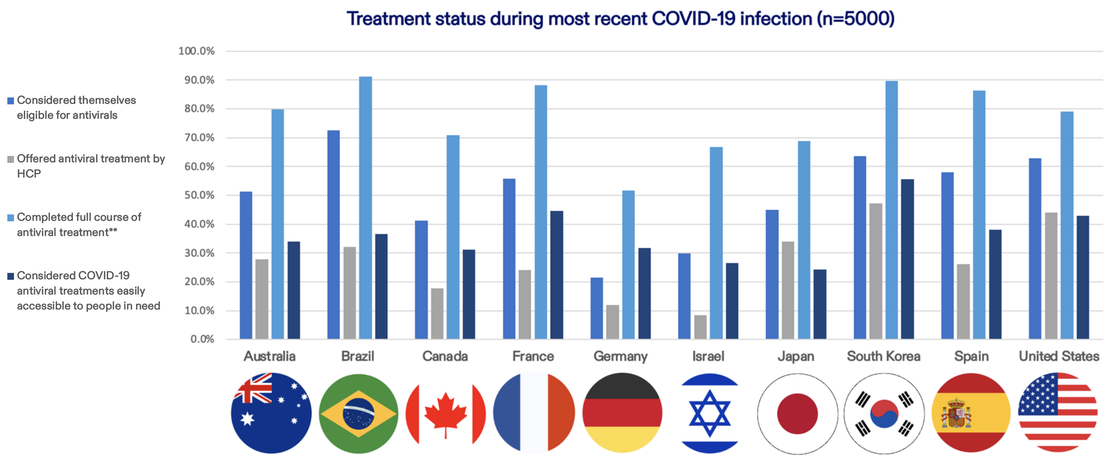
**Moderate-to-severe symptoms were most common among those who did not take antivirals** during their most recent illness because they were **unaware of their availability:** those in **Spain, Brazil, Germany, Canada, France,** and the **US**; those self-reporting **'bad' or 'very bad' general health**; and participants **aged <54**

**58.8%** (n=2942/5000) **Consulted a healthcare provider** (HCP)

**49.8%** (n=2492/5000) Of all participants **did not consider themselves eligible for antivirals**, despite their high-risk status

**27.4%** (n=1368/5000) **Were offered antivirals**

**Treatment status during most recent COVID-19 infection (n=5000)**




Of those offered antivirals, **prescribing rates were higher** among those **in self-reported 'very good' health** (**41.8%;** n=127/304) **vs. 'very bad' health** (**27.4%;** n=20/73).

Of those not offered antivirals by an HCP, reasons included: **lack of awareness** of **antiviral availability** and HCP not offering treatment (**29.7%;** n=1080/3633), **mild symptoms** (**23.6%;** n=857/3633), and **prior COVID-19 vaccination** (**12.4%;** n=451/3633).

**83.3%** (n=4163/5000) Of participants agreed that **access to COVID-19 treatment** was **'moderately' to 'very' important**.

**27.5%** (n=1375/5000) **Did not believe that antiviral treatment was easily accessible** to those **in need.**

**85.0%** (n=1169/1375) Believed **improved access** would have a **moderate-to-significant impact** on their **daily life** and **mental health**.

**56.0%** (n=2798/5000) Of all participants reported that **antiviral availability reduced their anxiety and fear** of reinfection.

## CONCLUSIONS

- ACCEPt showed that medically vulnerable individuals continue to face unmet needs in the post-pandemic period, highlighting gaps in current treatment pathways.
- Improved awareness around antiviral eligibility and more streamlined prescribing practices are needed to ensure timely access for those who could benefit.
- Enhancing antiviral treatment awareness and accessibility may enhance clinical outcomes, reduce symptom burden and anxiety, and positively impact daily life and mental wellbeing.

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**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**
The COVID Community Council is an initiative sponsored by Pfizer Inc.

*Medically vulnerable individuals are defined as those with weakened immune systems or pre-existing health conditions that increase their risk of severe outcomes and long-term complications if infected, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).[2]

**Of those offered treatment by their HCP

1. World Health Organization. Statement on the fifteenth meeting of the IHR (2005) Emergency Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic [online]. 202. https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic
2. Center of Disease Control. Underlying Conditions and the Higher Risk for Severe COVID-19. https://www.cdc.gov/covid/hcp/clinical-care/underlying-conditions.html