

## Background

With the emergence of SARS-CoV-2, drastic changes were made to the UT-Austin learning environment with lack on in-person classes, social distancing, and extensive cancellation of in-person activities. Social isolation, the absence of social interactions and contacts, can negatively impact mental health and academic performance in college students. We are still discovering the impact of COVID restrictions on our students.

## Purpose

The purpose of the study is to 1) describe safety behaviors and risk assessment of COVID of students at UT Austin and 2) identify variables that predict social isolation in UT undergraduate students during COVID.

## Methods

This cross-sectional study used an on-line survey of undergraduate UT Students between the ages of 18-35. The study used an adapted COVID risk assessment tool and the PROMIS social isolation instrument. We used descriptive analysis and multiple regression to answer our research questions.

The students selected the questions from the COVID risk assessment. Their goal was to create a survey that took less than 3 minutes to encourage participation.

**Social isolation in this sample is higher than any previous studies of college students.**

**Social isolation was predicted by:**

- Increase concern of economic impact
- Concern for their own health
- Age

**The UT Community can help our students by providing additional support to our younger students and finding ways to economically support all of our students.**

## Findings

We surveyed 254 students, 76.9% were female, 43% were White, 20.7% were Hispanic, 27.2% were Asian, and 3.6% were Black. The mean age was 19.6.

- A little over half (52.6%) of participants stated that COVID had negatively impacted them financially.
- Over half believed they would contract COVID in the next 3 months.
- Only 1.6% of participants made no changes to protect themselves from COVID.

The most frequent changes made were

- wearing masks
- hand washing
- Less than half of the students avoided in person study sessions.

## Conclusion

UT-Austin undergraduate students were taking precautions to protect themselves from COVID. However, the impact of the precautions increased social isolation.

Faculty can take steps to address the potential negative impact of COVID restrictions, by providing time for students to interact, making one-on-one contact with students by having active office hours where you invite students to your office hours.

