

# The Impact of COVID-19 on Taiwanese College Students

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## Abstract

Ever since the spring of 2020, coronavirus epidemic has affected the health, safety and well-being of people all over the world (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020). The purpose of this research was to explore the influence of COVID-19 on the life of college students at a national university of science and technology in central Taiwan. The participants in this research included both undergraduate and graduate students. Among the 318 students we surveyed online between March and April 2021, 150 were males and 168 were females. It was found that a lot of students often wore a mask to reduce the spread of COVID-19 (78%,  $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=1.02$ ) and practiced social distancing whenever it was necessary (68%,  $M=3.86$ ,  $SD=1.07$ ). The most common type of mask they usually wore was surgical mask (62%). Many students had tried to attain sufficient knowledge about COVID-19 (62%,  $M=3.76$ ,  $SD=0.95$ ) and follow the news of COVID-19 closely (56%,  $M=3.62$ ,  $SD=1.04$ ). The majority of the students were satisfied with the epidemic prevention in Taiwan (83%,  $M=4.25$ ,  $SD=0.89$ ) and considered that distance learning was much safer than face-to-face learning during the pandemic of coronavirus (81%,  $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.86$ ). Nevertheless, a good number of students (64%) felt unsure or puzzled about the vaccines they could take mainly due to the shortage and possible side effects. We urge Taiwanese government to speed up the acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines and get every Taiwanese citizen including young people like college students vaccinated to ensure the health and security of all the people who reside in Taiwan.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Vaccine, College Students, Pandemic, Taiwan

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## I. Introduction

In December 2019, a highly contagious disease of pneumonia occurred in Wuhan, China and spread around the world (Shereen et al., 2020). According to the WHO timeline of COVID-19, on December 31, 2019, Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province and a novel coronavirus was eventually identified (World Health Organization, 2020b). On February 11, 2020, the WHO then announced an official name for the disease and the name of this disease was coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021a). In COVID-19, “CO” stood for “corona,” “VI” for “virus,” and “D” for disease. Formerly, this disease was referred to as “2019 novel coronavirus” or “2019-nCoV” (ibid).

The epidemic soon began to spread to other parts of the world from China. As of July 1, 2021, 222 countries and regions around the world had reported a total of more than 182 million confirmed cases, of which more than 3.96 million had died (Worldometer, 2021). The pandemic had not only affected people's health, but also their lifestyle, such as wearing masks every day, performing hand hygiene, practicing social distancing, and engaging in distance education.

Although wearing masks is mandatory in public venues nowadays during the pandemic (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 2020b), it could be hard to demand college students to wear face masks properly all day at school. Moreover, Taiwan's ten priority groups to receive publicly funded vaccines do not include the population of college students (Tang, 2021). Therefore, it is quite important to investigate how college students feel about vaccination and how they protect themselves in the epidemic situation of COVID-19 in Taiwan. We want to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the lifestyles, education and health of college students in Taiwan.

The purpose of this research therefore is to scrutinize how Taiwanese college students perceive and prevent themselves from contracting COVID-19. In short, the following three research questions have guided the direction of this research:

1. What do Taiwanese college students do to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19?
2. How does COVID-19 affect the life of college students in Taiwan?
3. Do the college students feel that they are at risk for COVID-19?

## II. Literature Review

### 2.1. How does COVID-19 Spread?

The 2019 coronavirus pandemic has confronted the world with such an unprecedented situation that countries in the world must take urgent and aggressive action to suppress the virus (World Health Organization, 2020a). The technical lead of WHO, Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove (2020) demonstrates that COVID-19 is an epidemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which spreads mainly between people in close contact with each other. When an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks, the virus will spread from the infected person's mouth or nose in the form of small liquid particles (ibid). Although the primary mode of COVID-19 transmission is through respiratory droplets and close contact, it can also be transmitted through waste water, food, urine, and animal contact (Public Health Ontario, 2020). Symptoms of COVID-19 can include fever, dry cough, fatigue, sore throat, headache, muscle ache, diarrhea, running nose, chest pain, pneumonia, and short of breath (Wu, Chen, & Chang, 2020). Patients with COVID-19 may develop acute respiratory distress syndrome, worsen in a short period of time and die of multiple organ failure (ibid).

### 2.2. The Importance of Wearing Face Masks



It is very important to wear a mask in public especially when social distancing is not possible (Kidd, 2020). When a face mask is worn, we can prevent our droplets from hitting others' face or mouth before they drop to the ground; therefore, wearing masks protects not only ourselves, but also those around us (Miller, 2020). One should wear masks in crowded settings as well as indoor public spaces such as shopping center, public transport, restaurants, schools, and religious buildings (World Health Organization, 2020c). Wearing a mask is a preventive measure that can help us slow the spread of COVID-19 to safeguard the physical and mental health of people in the community (Wang et al., 2020). To ensure every citizen has a mask to wear, Taiwan has set up a national face mask team, launched name-based mask distribution and donated more than 50 million face masks to over 80 countries, including the U.S.A., Canada, Japan and countries in other parts of the world (Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2020).

### 2.3. Social Distancing Measures

The current situation of emergency is global. Nonetheless, there are various mitigation and suppression strategies in places worldwide, and many of them are based on enforcing, to a more or less extent, the so-called social distancing measures (Teslya et al., 2020). Take Taiwan for example, the Central Epidemic Command Center (CECC) has implemented a four-level system of COVID-19 alerts, each with defining criteria and prevention measures which can be adjusted at the discretion of the CECC (Focus Taiwan, 2021). Social distancing measures aim at reducing social interactions in the community, including the closure of school and workplaces as well as cancellation of events to avoid mass gatherings (Aquino et al., 2020).

### 2.4. The Practice of Social Distancing

To maintain physical distancing, one should keep a safe space for at least 6 feet between oneself

and other people whether indoors or away from home (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021b). Social distancing can minimize interactions of the crowd and prevent the spread of the virus among people in groups (Aslam, 2020); therefore, this method is an important way to combat the epidemic situation when medical resources are limited (Qian & Jiang, 2020). Moreover, the infection is likely due to the movements of people who are not aware that they have already contracted the virus because they have no or very mild symptoms, and that is why social distancing is such a key containment measure (Cohut, 2020).

Before the emergence of drugs and vaccines, social distancing is the most effective method of prevention. All COVID-19 vaccines currently available in the United States have been shown to be safe and effective in preventing COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021c). Experts believe that even if you do get COVID-19, vaccines can not only help you avoid serious illness but also protect those around you, especially those who are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19 (ibid). As Taiwan confronts a serious vaccine shortage, the CECC has enforced mandatory rules to specify separate social distancing standards, including wearing face masks for mass transport, supermarkets, offices, prisons, long-term care facilities, school campuses, restaurants and other commercial sites with long lines of waiting people to reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19 (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 2020a).

### 2.5. Distance Learning

Due to the severe outbreak of COVID-19, millions of people in most parts of the world have been affected, and the impact can also be seen in schools. There are numerous schools shut across the world, and more than 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom (Li & Lalani, 2020). Consequently, education after the outbreak has changed dramatically



in many places, and with the rise of e-learning, teaching is undertaken remotely on digital platforms (ibid). Although many academic institutions feel reluctant to change their traditional pedagogical approach, they have no option but shift entirely to online teaching (Dhawan, 2020). Despite the fact that COVID-19 has relatively minor impact in Taiwan during the year of 2020, we still have implemented some policies. According to the Ministry of Education (2020), colleges are allowed to adjust their teaching method and conduct an epidemic prevention drill in response to the epidemic. Distance learning is especially important for international students who are not able to travel to Taiwan due to the pandemic and local students who need to practice self-quarantine (FICHET, 2020). Distance learning enables us to set our own pace to study or teach from anywhere, and there's no need to commute from one place to another or follow a rigid schedule (Josep, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the biggest disruption of education in history while innumerable schools are shut down without announcing reopening date (United Nations, 2020). However, education is a basic human right, and we cannot simply abandon it. The loss of learning not only affects human right but also leads to skill loss to impact the economy in the long run (Schleicher, 2020). As distance learning requires Internet resources, this can cause disparities of education by depriving the opportunities for those living in rural or poor areas to continue their learning (United Nations, 2020). In undeveloped countries such as Pakistan, distance learning does not appear to yield desired results since the majority of the students do not have access to the Internet due to technical and monetary issues (Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

### III. Methodology

#### 3.1. Context

The context of this study is a national university of science and technology in central Taiwan. The technological university consists of four colleges, including the college of management, the college of applied arts and sciences, the college of engineering, and the college of electrical and computer engineering. Although this is a technological university, there are a good number of foreign students who come from countries hit hard by COVID-19 such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China.

#### 3.2. Participants

Through convenience sampling method, an online questionnaire was conducted at <https://forms.gle/wxtz199BhR4vtUtYA> during the period of March 18 to April 8 in 2021. There were totally 331 responses, including 318 valid questionnaires and 13 invalid ones due to the missing information in some items. Therefore, our participants included 318 (150 male and 168 female) college students at the technological university. They were from the college of management (88 students), the college of applied arts and sciences (89 students), the college of engineering (82 students), and the college of electrical and computer engineering (59 students).

#### 3.3. Instrument

The data collection method in this study was an online questionnaire which contained three major sections. Section one consisted of 15 five-point Likert-scale items. Items 1-5 were relevant to the ways how college students prevent themselves from getting COVID-19. Items 6-10 investigated how COVID-19 affected the life of college students in Taiwan. Items 11-15 were related to the risk for Taiwanese college students to contract COVID-19. Section two contained multiple-choice items regarding with further effects of COVID-19 on the students. Section three was about the personal



information of the participants such as their gender, grade, and institution.

#### IV. Results & Discussion

Research Question 1: What do Taiwanese college students do to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19?

Table 1 shows the kinds of actions Taiwanese college students normally take to protect themselves from contracting COVID-19. The majority of the participants often wore a face mask (78%, M=4.15, S.D.=1.02) and practiced social distancing (68%, M=3.86, S.D.=1.07) to reduce the spread of

COVID-19. Around half of the participants would consider to get vaccinated when the vaccines were available (46%, M=3.37, S.D.=1.20). Forty-one percent of the participants did wash their hands regularly with soap and water (M=3.30, S.D.=1.14) and avoid going to public places to stay away from COVID-19 (M=3.20, S.D.=1.16). The results seemed to be in line with the advice of Wang et al. (2020) who found that use of face masks could better safeguard the physical health of people in the community during the pandemic and Aslam (2020) who suggested that social distancing could minimize interactions of the crowd to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among people in groups.

**Table 1: Actions Taiwanese College Students Take to Avoid Contracting COVID-19.**

|   | Questionnaire Item / N=318   | SD/D | N   | A/SA     | S.D. | Mean |
|---|--|------|-----|----------|------|------|
| 1 | I wash my hands regularly with soap and water.                     | 75   | 113 | 130(41%) | 1.14 | 3.30 |
| 2 | I often wear a mask to reduce the spread of COVID-19.              | 24   | 45  | 249(78%) | 1.02 | 4.15 |
| 3 | I practice social distancing whenever needed.                      | 36   | 65  | 217(68%) | 1.07 | 3.86 |
| 4 | I will get vaccinated when COVID-19 vaccines are available for me. | 70   | 103 | 145(46%) | 1.20 | 3.37 |
| 5 | I avoid going to public places to keep away from COVID-19.         | 81   | 108 | 129(41%) | 1.16 | 3.20 |

Notes: SA (strongly agree) = 5; A (agree) = 4; N (neutral) = 3; D (disagree) = 2; SD (strongly disagree) = 1

Figure 1 illustrates the results of a check-all-that-apply questionnaire item which requires the participants to tick the places where they always wear masks. The top 5 occasions Taiwanese colleges students would always wear a mask were public transportation (16%), hospital (15%), supermarket (14%), movie theater (13%), and night market (12%), followed by street (9%), classroom (8%), hotel (7%), and park (6%). The college

students seemed to cooperate well with the mandatory rules enforced by the CECC which specified separate social distancing measures, including wearing face masks, for mass transport, supermarkets, school campuses, restaurants, and other public sites with long lines of waiting people to reduce the risk of infection from COVID-19 (Taiwan Centers for Disease Control, 2020). This cooperative behavior might be one of the crucial reasons why



Taiwan could remain almost COVID-19 free for more than 14 months until the outbreak in early May 2021.

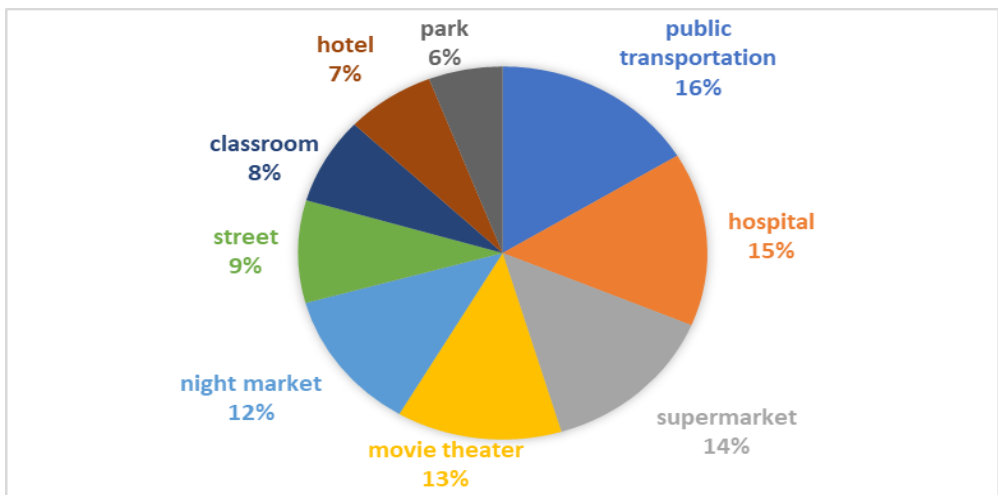


Figure 1: Where do you always Wear a Mask?

Figure 2 shows the results of another check-all-that-apply item in which the participants tick the types of face masks they usually wear. The most common mask the Taiwanese college students usually wore was surgical mask (62%), followed by activated carbon mask (12%), respirator mask (10%), dust mask (9%),

N95 mask (4%), and gauze mask (3%). Surgical masks outweighed all the other types of masks since they were so easy to acquire in Taiwan and very effective to prevent droplets from hitting one's or other people's face or mouth.

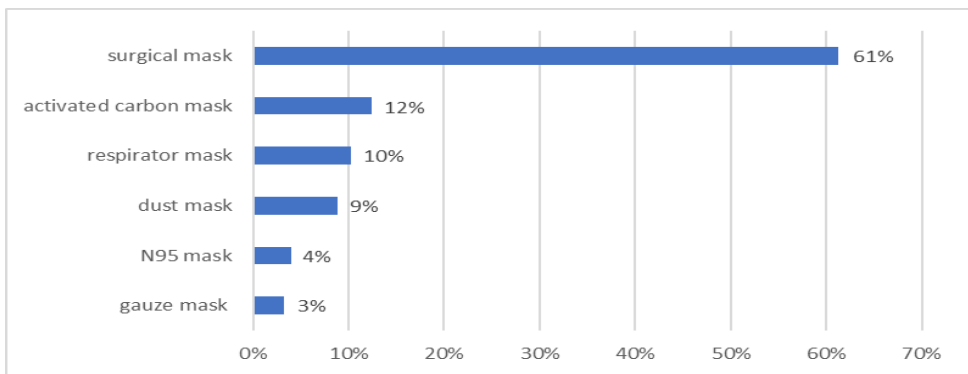


Figure 2: Face Masks Taiwanese Colleges Students usually Wear during the Pandemic.

Figure 3 shows the results of a Yes-No questionnaire item in which the participants were required to respond whether or not they developed the habit of carrying rubbing alcohol with them in case of need. It was found that

merely a quarter of the college students (23%) in this study carried rubbing alcohol with them in their daily life.



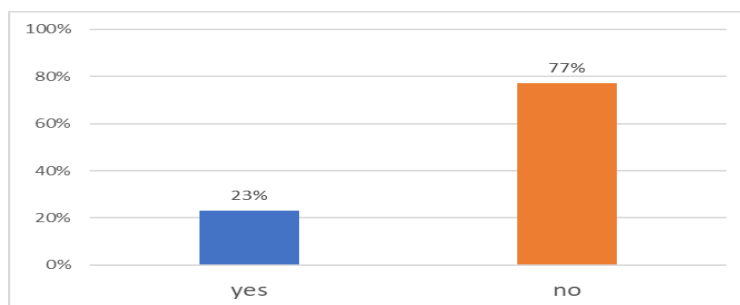


Figure 3: Do you Bring Rubbing Alcohol in case of Need?

Research Question 2: How does COVID-19 affect the life of college students in Taiwan?

In this section, we will explore how the epidemic of COVID-19 affects these college students in their everyday life. As indicated in Table 2, the majority of the students had tried to gain sufficient knowledge about COVID-19 (62%, M=3.76, S.D.=0.95) and follow the news of COVID-19 very closely (56%, M=3.62, S.D.=1.04). Although the outbreak of COVID-19 had not started yet during the period of our survey, nearly half of the students felt

scared when people around them did not wear a face mask (48%, M=3.43, S.D.=1.14), chose to stay at home on holidays (46%, M=3.34, S.D.=1.21), and preferred distance learning to face-to-face learning (42%, M=3.30, S.D.=1.23). It seemed that the college students were mostly alert and strongly aware of the danger from COVID-19 to follow the latest news and would prefer to conduct distance learning which had been the norm of education in most parts of the world during the pandemic (Dhawan, 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020).

**Table 2: The Influences of COVID-19 on the Life of College Students in Taiwan.**

| Questionnaire Item / N=318  | SD/D | N   | A/SA     | S.D. | Mean |
|---|------|-----|----------|------|------|
| 6. Due to COVID-19, I am prone to stay at home on holidays.                 | 73   | 100 | 145(46%) | 1.21 | 3.34 |
| 7. I try to attain sufficient knowledge about COVID-19.                     | 23   | 99  | 196(62%) | 0.95 | 3.76 |
| 8. I follow the news of COVID-19 closely.                                   | 43   | 98  | 177(56%) | 1.04 | 3.62 |
| 9. I prefer distance learning to face to face learning because of COVID-19. | 77   | 108 | 133(42%) | 1.23 | 3.30 |
| 10. I feel scared when people around me don't wear a mask.                  | 57   | 108 | 153(48%) | 1.14 | 3.43 |

Notes: SA (strongly agree) = 5; A (agree) = 4; N (neutral) = 3; D (disagree) = 2; SD (strongly disagree) = 1



Figure 4 is based on the results of a check-all-that-apply item in which the students are required to tick the specific aspects of life affected by COVID-19. The top 5 life aspects affected by COVID-19 for these college students were traveling (22%), recreation (16%), dinning (16%), schooling (15%), and shopping (13%).

The less affected life aspects were commuting (10%) and working (7%). Although Taiwan was not hit hard and remained relatively secure for people to commute and work, the epidemic of COVID-19 still affected people's life in many aspects such as traveling and recreation.

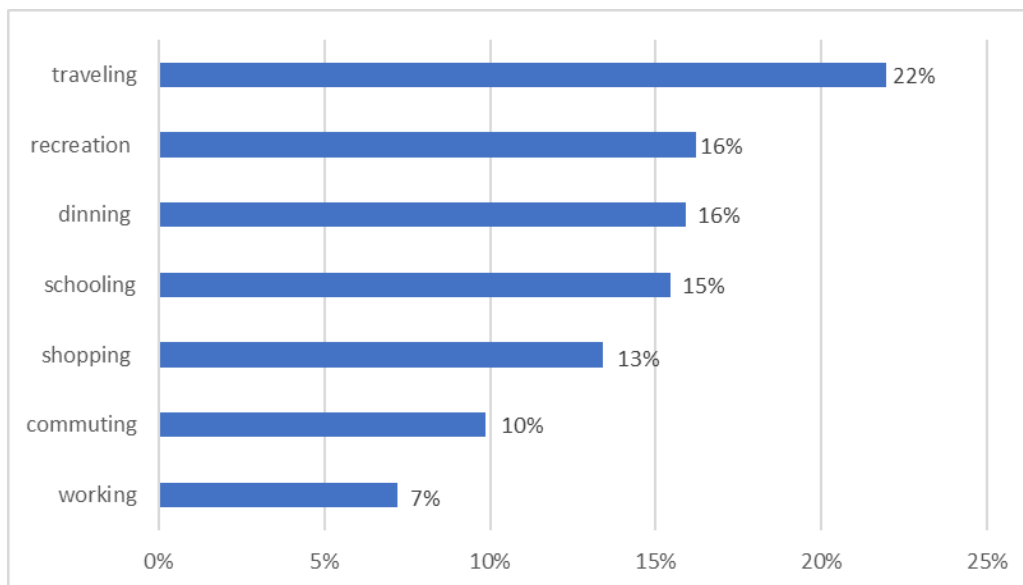


Figure 4: In what aspects has COVID-19 affected your lifestyles?

Research Question 3: Do the college students feel that they are at risk for COVID-19?

In this section, we will examine whether the Taiwanese college students feel that they are at risk for COVID-19. As indicated in Table 3, a high percentage of the students felt satisfied with the epidemic prevention and control of COVID-19 in Taiwan (83%,  $M=4.25$ ,  $S.D.=0.89$ ) but considered distance learning to be less dangerous than face-to-face learning (81%,

$M=4.22$ ,  $S.D.=0.86$ ). More than half of the students knew well about the symptoms when one contracted COVID-19 (58%,  $M=3.64$ ,  $S.D.=1.01$ ). Only one third of the students worried that they would contract COVID-19 in the future (34%,  $M=3.07$ ,  $S.D.=1.23$ ) and very few students felt they might already have the symptoms of COVID-19 (3%,  $M=1.33$ ,  $S.D.=0.79$ ).

Table 3: Are Taiwanese College Students at Risk for COVID-19?

| Questionnaire Item / N=318  | SD/D | N  | A/SA     | S.D. | Mean |
|---|------|----|----------|------|------|
| 11 I am satisfied with the epidemic prevention and control of COVID-19 in Taiwan. | 15   | 40 | 263(83%) | 0.89 | 4.25 |
| 12 I may have the symptom of COVID-19.  | 289  | 19 | 10(3%)   | 0.79 | 1.33 |





|    |   |    |     |          |      |      |
|----|---|----|-----|----------|------|------|
| 13 | I am worried that one day I will contract COVID-19.             | 98 | 112 | 108(34%) | 1.23 | 3.07 |
| 14 | I know well about the symptoms when one contracts COVID-19.     | 40 | 94  | 184(58%) | 1.01 | 3.64 |
| 15 | Distance learning is less dangerous than face-to-face learning. | 9  | 52  | 257(81%) | 0.86 | 4.22 |

Notes: SA (strongly agree) = 5; A (agree) = 4; N (neutral) = 3; D (disagree) = 2; SD (strongly disagree) = 1

Figure 5 shows the results of a check-all-that-apply item which asks the participants to tick the physical symptoms they ever had over the last few months. The more common symptoms the Taiwanese students had were sneezing (16%), running nose (15%), and coughing (10%), followed by headaches (7%) and diarrhea (5%). The items less than 5% were all combined into the portion of “Others” in the figure. Surprisingly, more than one

third of the college students (38%) did not have any physical symptoms during the last few months. Despite the fact that the percentage of these physical symptoms such as coughing, headaches and diarrhea was not very high, they might not be merely the symptoms of a small cold but could be the signs of contracting COVID-19 (Wu, Chen, & Chang, 2020) especially when young people were usually among those who tended to have no or very mild symptoms.

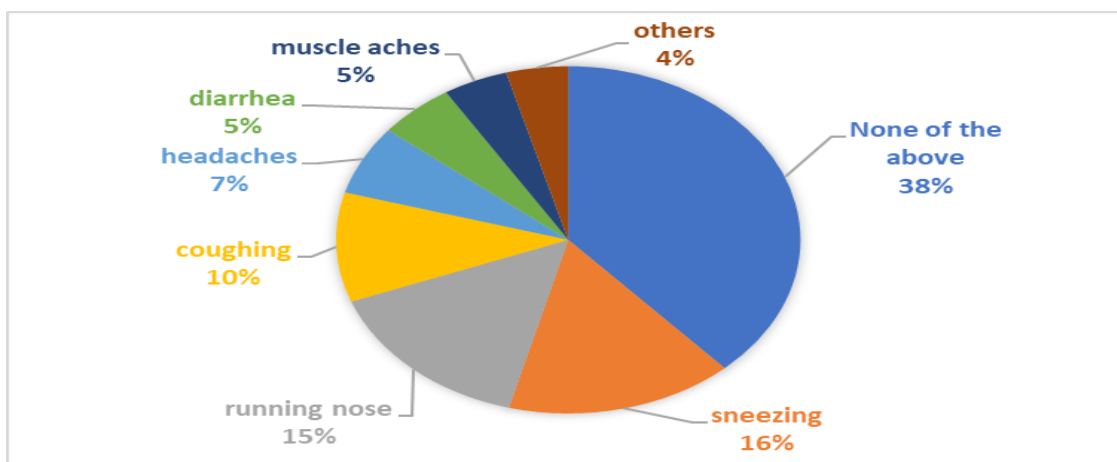


Figure 5: Physical Symptoms Colleges Students Ever Had over the Last Few Months.

Figure 6 presents the results of another check-all-that-apply item which asks the participant to tick the types of vaccines they would consider to take. A high percentage of students (64%) were unsure about taking vaccines. Nevertheless, some students would consider to take the vaccines from Pfizer-U.S.A. (9%), AstraZeneca-U.K. (8%), Moderna-U.S.A (7%), BNT-Germany (6%), COVAX-WHO (4%), and Sinovac-China (2%). It seemed that many students felt uncertain or puzzled

about taking vaccines probably due to the numerous side effects of COVID-19 vaccines and the very insufficient amount Taiwan had acquired. During the period of March and April 2021, many Taiwanese people, including doctors and nurses, were hesitant to take COVID-19 vaccines mainly because the outbreak did not start yet in the community, and the only vaccine available was A.Z. which could cause blood clots and death.



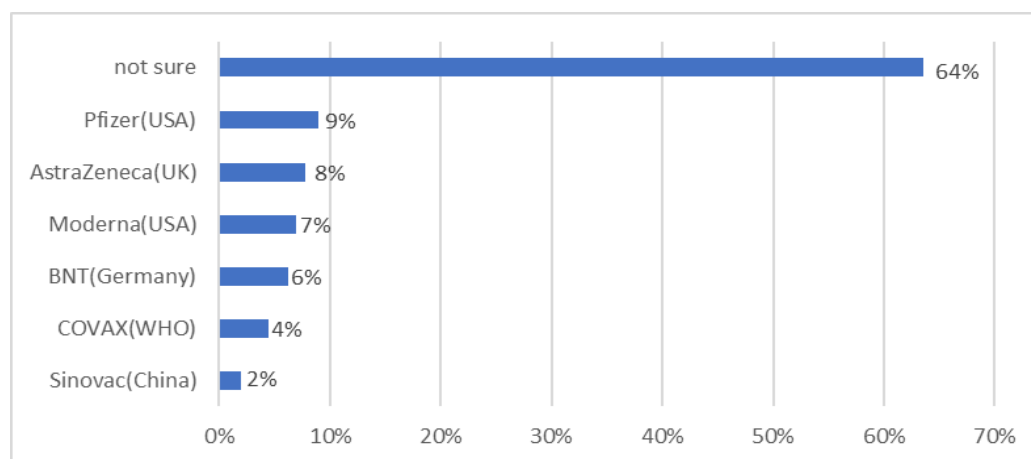


Figure 6: The Vaccines Taiwanese Colleges Students Would Consider to Take.

Note: Pfizer and BNT are the same vaccines manufactured by the U.S.A and Germany respectively.

## V. Conclusion

This study has provided insight into the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the life of college students at a national university of science and technology in central Taiwan. Despite the fact that Taiwan was not hit hard and remained relatively secure for people to commute and work, the epidemic of COVID-19 still affected people's life in various aspects such as traveling, recreation, dining, shopping and schooling. Many students chose to stay at home on holidays, felt scared when people around them did not wear a face mask, and preferred distance learning to face-to-face learning. The use of face mask and social distancing were the two important preventive measures they took to protect themselves and reduce the spread of virus. The most common mask they usually wore was surgical mask which were easy to acquire in Taiwan and very effective to prevent droplets from hitting the face or mouth.

The Taiwanese college students were quite cooperated to follow the mandatory rules enforced by the CECC to wear face masks in supermarkets, mass transport, school campuses, restaurants, and other public spaces to reduce the risk of infection. They were mostly alert and strongly aware of the potential danger from COVID-19 to follow the latest news and gain sufficient knowledge. Although most students

were satisfied with the epidemic prevention and control of COVID-19 in Taiwan, many of them felt uncertain about vaccination mainly because of the severe shortage of the vaccines and their possible side effects. The Taiwanese government need to acquire sufficient and suitable vaccines for young people like college students to ensure the health and well-being of all the people who reside in Taiwan.



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## 新冠肺炎對台灣大學生之影響

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### 摘 要

自從 2020 的春天以來，新冠肺炎就一直影響著世人的健康安危與福祉 (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020)。因此，本篇研究的主旨在探索新冠肺炎疫情對於一所位於中台灣之國立科技大學的學生之影響。參與研究的同學包括了大學生與研究所的同學。總共有三百一十八位不同科系的同學於 2021 年三月至四月期間，自由填寫了一份線上問卷，其中一百五十人為男性，一百六十八人為女性。研究結果顯示：許多同學表示自己經常戴口罩以降低病毒的擴散(78%,  $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=1.02$ )，並於必要時保持社交安全距離(68%,  $M=3.86$ ,  $SD=1.07$ )。這些學生(62%)最常戴的口罩是醫療型口罩。很多同學會試著獲取新冠肺炎的充分知識(62%,  $M=3.76$ ,  $SD=0.95$ )，並密切追蹤與疫情有關的新聞(56%,  $M=3.62$ ,  $SD=1.04$ )。大多數的同學對於政府的防疫措施感到滿意(83%,  $M=4.25$ ,  $SD=0.89$ )，而且認為遠距學習比面對面教學更為安全(81%,  $M=4.22$ ,  $SD=0.86$ )。然而有不少同學(64%)對於接種疫苗感到不確定與疑惑，很可能是因為疫苗本身的副作用以及疫苗數量的不足。我們誠心呼籲政府要加速取得有效疫苗並將年輕人都施打疫苗，以確保居住在台灣每一位人民的健康與安全。

**關鍵字：**新冠肺炎、疫苗、大學生、疫情、台灣

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