

Vaccinations and Reentry

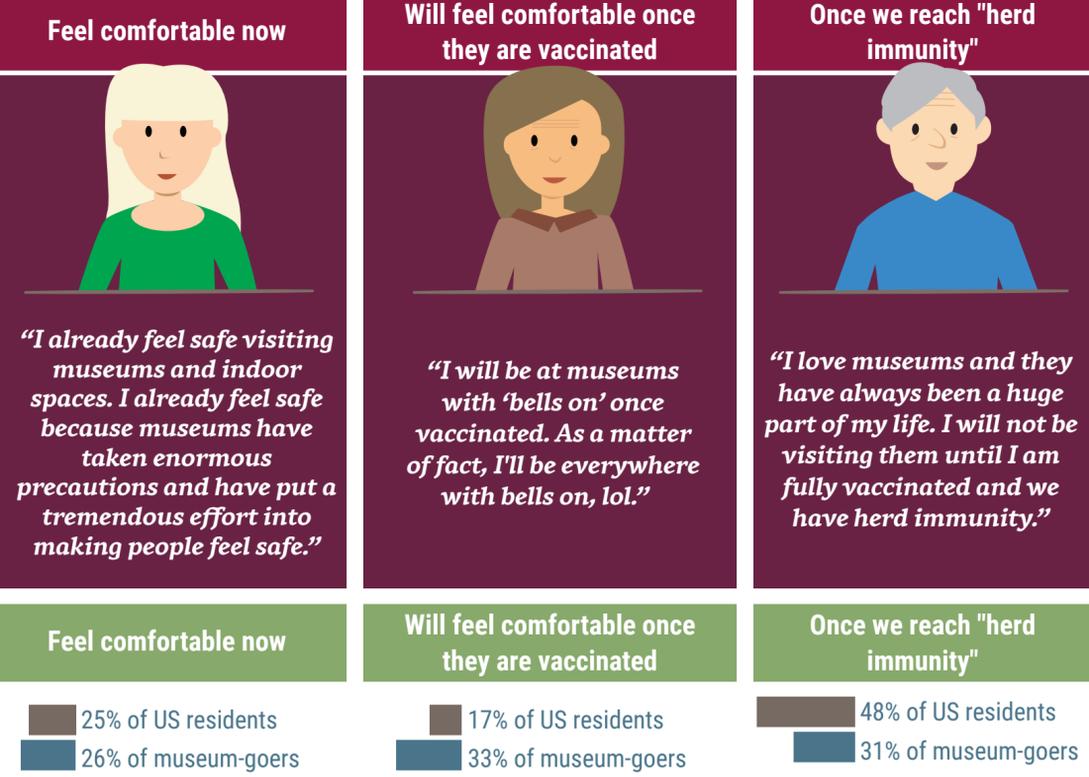
As vaccinations roll out across the United States, individual comfort levels for visiting museums will continue to shift and change. Indeed, we saw these shifts even over the past several weeks in our research.



? In January, we asked a broader population sample of US residents when they would be comfortable visiting indoor spaces, including museums.

🏛️ In February/early March, we asked over 40,000 museum-goers the same question.

Overall, as we saw last year in Pandemic Data Story #3, there was a spectrum of attitudes around feeling safe. Most people, however, fell into three categories:



Feel comfortable now

"I already feel safe visiting museums and indoor spaces. I already feel safe because museums have taken enormous precautions and have put a tremendous effort into making people feel safe."

Will feel comfortable once they are vaccinated

"I will be at museums with 'bells on' once vaccinated. As a matter of fact, I'll be everywhere with bells on, lol."

Once we reach "herd immunity"

"I love museums and they have always been a huge part of my life. I will not be visiting them until I am fully vaccinated and we have herd immunity."

Why are these results so different?



First, these are two totally different samples:
 A JANUARY sample of mostly non-museum-goers
 A FEBRUARY/early MARCH sample of museum-goers.

KEEP THAT IN MIND.

There is no reason to believe that museum-goers are less risk-averse than non-museum-goers. The shift over the past few weeks towards "when I am vaccinated" (and away from "herd immunity") may reflect a growing feeling that receiving a vaccine is enough to make indoor places like museums feel safe ... and herd immunity will only be the threshold for some.

Nevertheless, a return to normal visitation is still going to be a lengthy process, with museum audiences gradually increasing their in-person visits throughout 2021.

Once vaccinations are widely available, some businesses, entertainment venues, and resorts are considering requiring proof of vaccination prior to entry. We asked museum-goers in our Pandemic Panel what they thought of this idea (and if museums should consider it).



Responses varied widely.

"I think this is a huge overreach and goes against freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution."

"I cannot risk being with and among those who refuse mask wearing and are reckless in their beliefs about public health, civility, and citizenry. For that reason, I would like admission to museums and other public venues to require proof of vaccination ... I also think that this type of proof might be an incentive to get the vaccine. Want to go to a concert, a ball game, or an amusement park? Then, be sure to be vaccinated."

And panelists also considered reasonable accommodation for those who truly cannot be vaccinated and brought up concerns that this type of policy would be discriminatory:

"I could see why museums would want us to show vaccination cards AND am worried for how classist and ableist this policy would be. In a world in which everyone has equal access to healthcare, I think I would have a more robust opinion on the vaccination cards. Right now, I'm so focused on how many people will struggle to have access to the vaccine."

Interestingly, the conversation this question engendered was eerily reminiscent of the mask debate of spring 2020, with opposing sides feeling strongly, and a consensus not emerging. But this discussion may be moot, given growing comfort levels with vaccines and their efficacy thus far.

As vaccinations increase, and we learn how effective they really are against new variants, we anticipate even more shifts in attitudes. As relevant, we'll re-sample the broader population to track these shifts.



Museums and the Pandemic Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
 • Ongoing Online Panel of Museum-Goers ("Pandemic Panel")
 • Spring 2020 Broader Population Sampling
 • 2020 and 2021 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers
 • Winter 2021 Broader Population Sampling

*Data Stories share research about both museum-goers (who visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums).

The entire series of Museums and the Pandemic Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories.