



Omicron Concerns? Poll Finds Sports Fans More Cautious About Attendance at Games

First Downward Trend Since Question First Asked in 2020

South Orange, NJ, Dec. 20 - For the first time since the introduction of the COVID-19 vaccine a year ago, the number of people saying they would attend a live sporting event has decreased.

The Seton Hall Sport Poll has regularly asked the public about their concerns over COVID-19 and live attendance at games since April, 2020, soon after the virus took hold in America.

In April of 2020, without distinguishing between indoor and outdoor events and six months prior to the advent of the vaccine, the Poll found that 72 percent of the general public and 61 percent of sports fans said they would not attend. Since that time, and after the introduction of vaccines, the number who said they would attend live sporting events has steadily trended upward – until this month.

Indoor Events

The introduction of the Omicron variant after Thanksgiving and the attendant publicity over increased hospitalizations and deaths has seemingly contributed to the increased reluctance to attend sporting events. In May 2021, 59 percent of sports fans said they would attend an indoor live sporting event; today, even with the added incentive of free tickets, that number has fallen to 55 percent. Among the general population in May 2021, the number who would attend a live indoor sporting event was 43 percent, today it is 38 percent.

These were the findings of a Seton Hall Sports Poll conducted December 8-13 across the United States using a national representative sample weighted according to gender, age, ethnicity, education, income and geography based on U.S. Census Bureau figures. The Poll had 1,570 adult respondents with a margin of error of +/- 3.2 percent.

“The data is clear, and it’s disturbing,” said Seton Hall Marketing Professor and Poll Methodologist Daniel Ladik. “The question remains if this is a blip or the beginning of a downward trend and a return to more challenging times for sports and the country.”

General Population Indoor Events, Nov. 2020 – Dec. 2021

	Dec 2021	May 2021	April 2021	Mar 2021	Jan 2021	Nov 2020
Yes, I would attend	38%	43%	42%	35%	32%	21%
No, I would not attend	45%	43%	38%	47%	44%	67%
Don't know/No opinion	17%	14%	20%	18%	19%	12%

Sports Fans Indoor Events, Nov. 2020 – Dec. 2021

	Dec 2021	May 2021	April 2021	Mar 2021	Jan 2021	Nov 2020
Yes, I would attend	55%	59%	56%	49%	46%	29%
No, I would not attend	32%	31%	29%	37%	38%	60%
Don't know/No opinion	13%	10%	15%	14%	16%	11%

Outdoor Events

As for outdoor sporting events given the same parameters, in May 2021, 69 percent of sports fans said they would attend an outdoor event with personal protective equipment, social distancing measures and restricted attendance. Today, that number, even with those free tickets, has dropped to 61 percent. Among the general public, 41 percent said they would attend an outdoor event; in May 2021 the number was 51 percent.

General Population Outdoor Events Nov. 2020 – Dec. 2021

	Dec 2021	May 2021	April 2021	Mar 2021	Jan 2021	Nov 2020
Yes, I would attend	41%	51%	50%	43%	40%	28%
No, I would not attend	42%	35%	32%	40%	41%	58%
Don't know/No opinion	17%	14%	18%	17%	19%	14%

Sports Fans Outdoor Events Nov.2020 – Dec. 2021

	Dec 2021	May 2021	April 2021	Mar 2021	Jan 2021	Nov 2020
Yes, I would attend	61%	69%	62%	61%	57%	39%
No, I would not attend	27%	22%	24%	27%	29%	50%
Don't know/No opinion	12%	9%	14%	12%	14%	11%

Vaccine Requirement to Attend?

Perhaps surprisingly, whether or not teams required those in attendance to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test had little (if any) impact on whether or not the general public or fans would attend.

“During these unprecedented times, our sports leagues are challenged to strike that delicate balance between health and public safety, and a business model that is sustainable,” said Professor Charles Grantham, director of the Center for Sport Management within Seton Hall’s Stillman School of Business, which sponsors the Poll.

The Poll further asked whether people agreed with a requirement that players be vaccinated in order to participate, (as is the case in New York, San Francisco and Boston) and 61 percent of sports fans (and 55 percent of the general public) agreed, with 24 percent and 27 percent disagreeing, respectively.

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Questions and charted breakdowns below; an online version of this release may be found at <https://blogs.shu.edu/sportspoll/>

ABOUT THE POLL

The Seton Hall Sports Poll, conducted regularly since 2006, is performed by the Sharkey Institute within the Stillman School of Business. This poll was conducted online by YouGov Plc. using a national representative sample weighted according to gender, age, ethnicity, education, income and geography, based on U.S. Census Bureau figures. Respondents were selected from YouGov’s opt-in panel to be representative of all U.S. residents. This poll release conforms to the Standards of Disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls. The Seton Hall Sports Poll has been chosen for inclusion in iPoll by Cornell’s Roper Center for Public Opinion Research and its findings have been published everywhere from USA Today, ESPN, The New York Times, Washington Post, AP, and Reuters to CNBC, NPR, Yahoo Finance, Fox News and many points in between.

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December 2021 Seton Hall Sports Poll

This SHSP was conducted December 8th through December 13th and includes responses from 1,570 US adults with a margin of error of 3.2%. The sample mirrors the US Census percentages on age, gender, income, education, ethnicity, and region.

Q1. Which, if any, of the following statements best describes you?

- I am an avid sports fan **15%**
- I am a sports fan **38%**
- I am **not** a sports fan **47%**

Q2a. If the money was not an issue (i.e. someone gave you two free tickets), would you attend...
A live outdoor sporting event in-person anytime in the next month?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes, I would attend	41%	61%	19%	77%	54%
No, I would not attend	42%	27%	59%	17%	32%
Don't know/No opinion	17%	12%	22%	6%	14%

Q2b. If the money was not an issue (i.e. someone gave you two free tickets), would you attend...
A live indoor sporting event in-person anytime in the next month?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes, I would attend	38%	55%	19%	66%	51%
No, I would not attend	45%	32%	61%	28%	34%
Don't know/No opinion	17%	13%	20%	6%	15%

Q2c. If the money was not an issue (i.e. someone gave you two free tickets), would you attend...
A live indoor sporting event in-person, if all fans are required to show proof of vaccination or a recent negative Coronavirus (COVID-19) test?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Yes, I would attend	36%	55%	15%	67%	50%
No, I would not attend	49%	34%	67%	24%	38%
Don't know/No opinion	15%	11%	18%	9%	12%

Q3a. For the 2021-22 NBA season, at least 15 basketball teams require fans to show proof of vaccination or a recent negative Coronavirus (COVID-19) test to attend games. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Agree	56%	62%	49%	68%	59%
Neither agree nor disagree	19%	17%	21%	13%	18%
Disagree	25%	21%	30%	19%	23%

Q3b. Some cities, such as New York, Boston, and San Francisco, require home, professional team athletes (i.e. athletes that play for a professional sports team in their city) to be vaccinated to play in indoor venues. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Agree	55%	61%	48%	67%	59%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%	15%	22%	12%	16%
Disagree	27%	24%	30%	21%	25%

Q3c. Faced with a player who remains unvaccinated and therefore unable to play home games in New York City, the Brooklyn Nets basketball team chose to disallow one of its All-Star players from practicing or playing with the team at all. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?

N=1,570	General Population	Sports Fan	Non Fan	Avid Fan	Casual Fan
Agree	54%	61%	48%	67%	58%
Neither agree nor disagree	18%	15%	21%	11%	16%
Disagree	28%	24%	31%	22%	26%