

## Preventive and risky health behavior of Swiss university students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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### Background:

Young adults are not considered a risk group for contracting COVID-19, but they are disproportionately affected by pandemic containment measures compared to other age groups. University students were confronted with abrupt changes both in their personal and academic lives. The “Health in Students during the Corona pandemic” study (HES-C) investigated the health and health behavior, concerns and views in students of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences. In the current analyses, we focused on COVID-19 related preventive behaviors, alcohol and marijuana consumption during the pandemic.

### Methods:

All students of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (N = 12,429) were invited to a voluntary repeated cross-sectional open cohort survey which took place from the April 3 2020 (T0) to January 25 (T5), covering two university semesters with overall 6 surveys. Participation rates varied from T0 20% to T5 13%.

### Results:

While overall adherence to containment measures was high, men yielded lower adjusted odds (OR; 95%-CI) of adherence regarding the following measures: social distancing (0.68; 0.53-0.87), non-utilization of public transport (0.74; 0.56-0.97), 5-person limit for social gatherings (0.47; 0.35-0.64) and the stay at home rule (0.64; 0.51-0.82). In addition to gender, factors associated with adherence were information source and perceived susceptibility to the virus. Out of 80% who reported having drunk alcohol during the last 30 days at T0, 31% engaged at least once in binge drinking (>5 beverages) and 18% consumed more than usual. Marijuana was consumed by 11%, of which 27% reported higher use during the lock-down than before. Longitudinal data on risk behavior and factors associated with risk behavior and changes in behavior are currently being analyzed and will be presented.

### Conclusions:

Public health communication targeting university students should not only address pandemic related preventive behavior but also risk behavior during the pandemic.

**Key messages:**

- The pandemic has led to increased risky health behavior among certain students.
- Public health communication targeting university students should not only address pandemic related preventive behavior but also risk behavior during the pandemic.