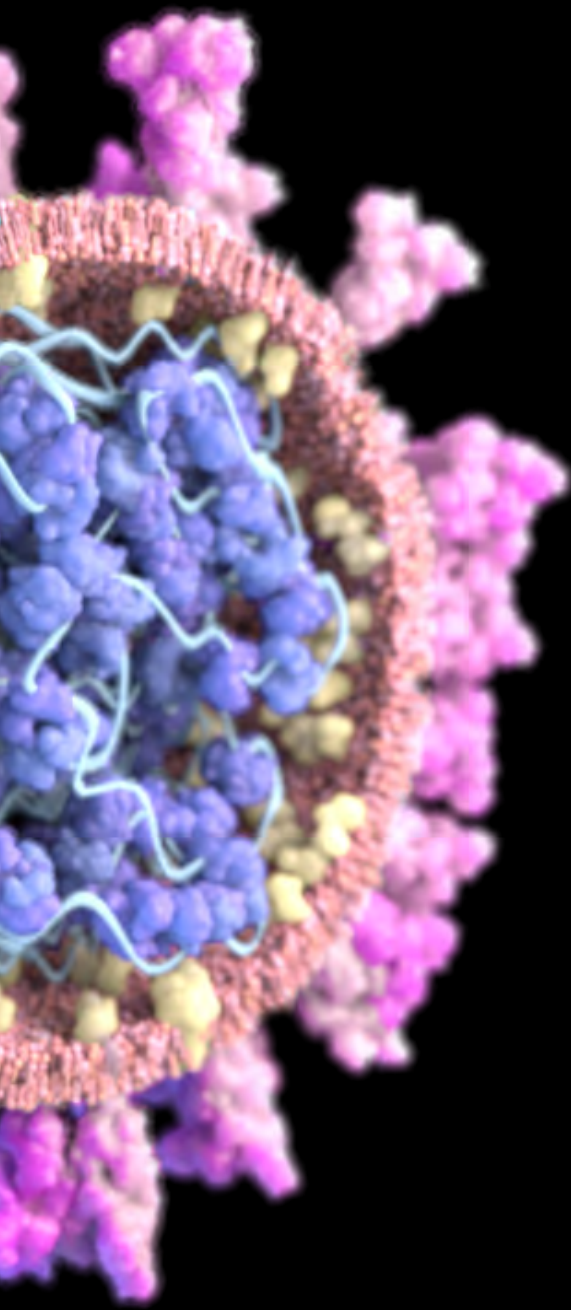




**Safe Today, Sick Tomorrow?:  
The Impact of Pandemic Non-Compliance**

Authored by  
Diana Nagel, Vice President, Strategy



**The piece you're about to read is from Klick Health's Life (Sciences) After COVID-19 series,** a collection of expert perspectives designed to inform and inspire the life sciences community for the coming changes and opportunities we anticipate as a result of this global health crisis.

We invite you to engage with a multitude of these viewpoints by seeking out other pieces from this series, including *Increased Self-Interest or Increased Solidarity?* and *Can COVID-19 Design a Better World for People Living with Chronic Conditions?* at **[covid19.klick.com](https://covid19.klick.com)**.

# THE INSIGHT

A man living with a chronic illness takes a drug holiday because he's furloughed and needs to save money where he can. Skipping a dose here or there hasn't caused any issues in his daily life—so he thinks he doesn't *really* need to take this expensive, brand name medication everyday...

A young woman is overdue for a follow-up appointment with her gynecologist after an abnormal pap smear in February. Her doctor was adamant that she come in for a follow-up in March, but the appointment keeps getting delayed by her physician—so she thinks it can't *really* be that serious...

A working-from-home mom is told that her company's office won't be opening until 2021 at the earliest, but her 11-year-old's pediatrician is insisting her son come in to stay up to date on vaccinations. If it's not safe to be in her private office at work—then she thinks it can't *really* be safe to visit a doctor's office where her son could be exposed to sick kids...

## What do these people have in common because of COVID-19? Non-compliance.

Healthcare non-compliance has usually been defined as skipping appointments, not taking medications, and not eating well against healthcare provider (HCP) recommendations.

But the pandemic has created two new segments of non-compliance consumers, who are (or think they are) following doctor's orders:

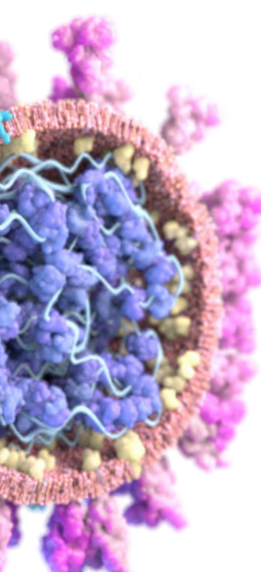
1. **Forced non-compliant consumers** driven by the healthcare system halting non-urgent procedures and delaying in-office appointments or treatments.
2. **Anxiety-driven non-compliant consumers** who fear being in a healthcare setting during the pandemic.

Whether it's because their healthcare experience stalled when the system came to a halt or because they've chosen to avoid it, many Americans are becoming uncomfortably comfortable with non-compliance.

## And lack of compliance today can impact consumer health and habits in the long run.

### After the pandemic, what will be at stake if these non-compliant behaviors continue?

- **How embedded will non-compliance become in our everyday lives?**
- **How will consumers feel about the healthcare system?**
- **And how difficult will it be for life sciences companies to convince consumers to re-engage with the healthcare system?**



# THE EVIDENCE

As lockdowns lift across the U.S. and new routes of care (such as telehealth) help fill the gaps, the return to the healthcare system has been slow as both routine and urgent care continues to be deferred, including vaccination, routine chronic care check-ups that are used to monitor progression and adjust medications, cancer screenings and referrals, and emergency room visits for serious symptoms.



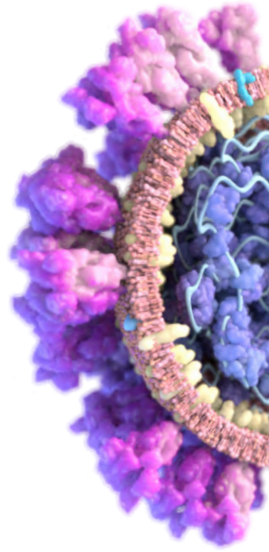
New non-compliant behaviors are in many ways grounded in trust (or lack thereof) in the healthcare system. Those who cannot access care may be losing confidence that the system can adequately care for their existing health problems, and those who are afraid to access care don't have confidence that the system can keep them safe during the pandemic. HCPs worry that this shift will impact the health of their patients longer term, and are losing trust

themselves—more than half expect the policy changes made to support primary care will be reversed once the pandemic is under control.<sup>1</sup>

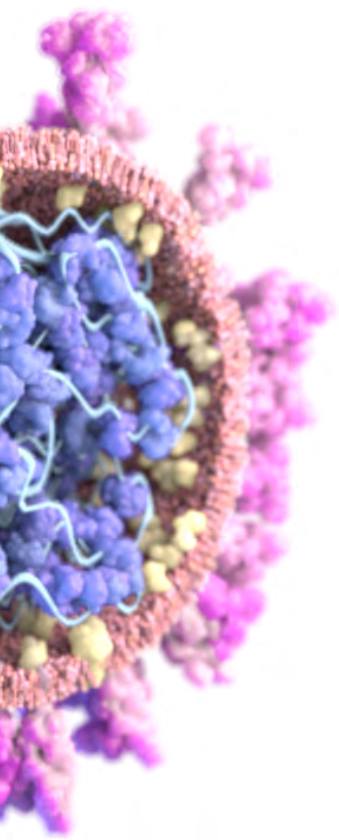
- 1. There are consumers who are habitually non-compliant.** Some level of non-compliance has always existed in healthcare, and that will continue to be a challenge the life sciences industry faces regardless of the pandemic. Approximately 50% of medications prescribed for chronic conditions are not taken properly, leading to 125,000 preventable deaths each year in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>
- 2. But some consumers are still in a state of forced non-compliance** as a result of access barriers or financial constraints.

Many medical offices were closed for a period early in the pandemic and many are still operating at a reduced capacity, creating a backlog of patients who will take time to address. A survey by the Cancer Action Network highlighted that 79% of cancer patients have experienced delays in care due to closures, and 17% have experienced delays in treatment.<sup>3</sup>

To minimize the impact of closures, providers have ramped up telehealth offerings and the government and payers have loosened restrictions to make this an option for consumers.



covid19.klick.com



Telehealth has helped many consumers maintain regular care, but unreliable internet (or none at all) leaves many without access, especially more vulnerable populations, such as the elderly and lower income families.<sup>4</sup>

And more than five million Americans have lost insurance coverage due to pandemic-related layoffs so far in 2020, significantly higher than any annual increase ever recorded.<sup>5</sup> Though many are eligible for government-covered or subsidized health plans, consumers are often unaware of options or cannot afford the premiums of subsidized plans so they continue to defer care.

**3. And others continue to actively avoid the healthcare system out of fear of exposure to COVID-19.** To them, the risk of exposure outweighs the benefit of routine and urgent care.

A recent poll for the American Heart Association found that one in four people experiencing a heart attack or stroke would rather stay home than risk getting infected at the hospital.<sup>6</sup>

Equally concerning is the sharp decline in routine cancer screenings and its impact on diagnoses. For instance, colonoscopies have declined by 90% compared to the same time last year, which has led to 32% fewer colon cancer diagnoses.<sup>7</sup> Models suggest this will lead to the delay of 19,000 colorectal cancer diagnoses.<sup>8</sup>



Chronic or acute conditions that haven't received proper care during the pandemic will result in disease progression that was avoidable, especially if these behaviors continue for many months. Skipping routine care, including that for chronic conditions and vaccinations, may result in delayed diagnosis of less symptomatic conditions and vaccine-preventable outbreaks. These consumer behaviors (forced or not) during the pandemic may drive a surge of care needs across the healthcare system in the near-term and a generally sicker population long-term.

covid19.klikk.com



# THE POSSIBLE FUTURES

covid19.klikk.com

As non-compliance feels more acceptable to (or even expected of) consumers at the height of the pandemic, what might compliance look like as we learn to live with COVID-19 or post-pandemic? And how will the current state of uncertainty and diminishing trust in the healthcare system impact the future of consumer engagement?

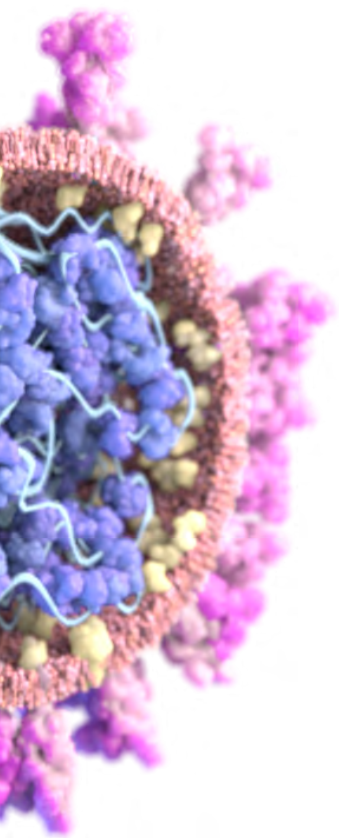
## Making the case for continued non-compliance post-pandemic...

Whether because they've been forced into non-compliance by deferred appointments, they're afraid of possible COVID-19 exposure in a medical office, or they've opted to skip appointments or medications and haven't seen any negative

effects, wavering trust in the healthcare system is at the core of pandemic non-compliance.

Once that trust is broken, it will be difficult to restore. And sustained non-compliance could cause serious long-term health implications if people only re-engage with the healthcare system when they're sick, such as:

- **Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases such as meningitis or measles.**



- **More rapid progression of chronic conditions such as lupus, diabetes, or heart disease, leading to more health and financial burdens for patients.**
- **Late or end-stage cancer diagnoses that could have been caught and treated more effectively earlier with timely screenings and prompt referrals.**

Non-compliance due to anxiety about safety or lack of trust in the healthcare system could also impact consumer likelihood to get vaccinated against COVID-19. Though 65% of consumers expressed interest in receiving the vaccine in a recent survey<sup>9</sup>, limited follow-through or deferrals may cause unnecessary surges of cases before herd immunity is established.

## **Making the case against continued non-compliance post-pandemic...**

Most people don't *want* to be non-compliant and are ready for life to return to "normal," but the pandemic has created so much anxiety around how and when to re-engage with the healthcare system and (for those who've had to defer care) a new level of distrust that the system will put to prioritize their needs, that it will require time and effort to get consumers to fully return.



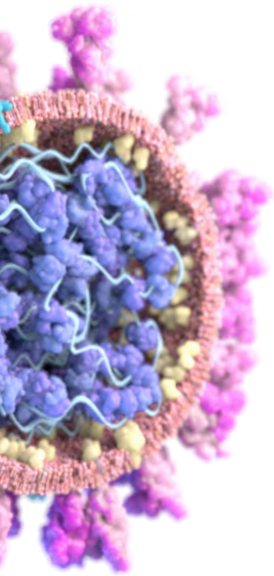
covid19.klick.com

But if the healthcare system can rebuild consumer confidence and encourage re-engagement sooner rather than later, the long-term health implications of non-compliance can be minimized.

To ensure pandemic non-compliance doesn't continue longer term, the industry will need to rebuild consumer trust and prioritize opportunities to optimize their experiences with the healthcare system—taking into consideration how and when care should be accessed in the future and opportunities to optimize care through earlier detection and ongoing disease management.

This possible future may include...

- **Pandemic-driven policy changes, such as those to support broader telehealth usage, will become more cemented and can offer more consumers the opportunity to access care when they need it so they don't defer because of financial constraints or safety concerns.**
- **A model that focuses on earlier detection of serious diseases to limit progression and support better outcomes, and that prioritizes what is truly essential care—potentially minimizing procedures and reducing prescribing in favor of preventative measures or lifestyle management efforts.**
- **Consumers who are better educated on the long-term risks of non-compliance, whether they are deferring preventative care such as wellness visits and vaccinations or delaying routine, ongoing management for a chronic condition.**



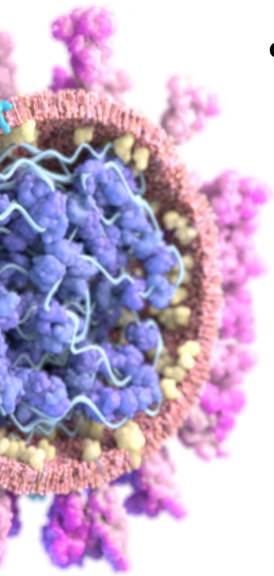


# THE ACTION PLAN FOR LIFE SCIENCES LEADERS

How can life sciences companies help rebuild consumer confidence in (and re-engage them with) the healthcare system?

**1. Come together across the industry to educate consumers through broader public health initiatives:**

- a. Reinforce the importance of ongoing health management beyond just minimizing COVID-19 exposure.
- b. Instill confidence that the healthcare system is implementing safety procedures and limiting COVID-19 exposure for in-person care.
- c. Collaborate across life sciences to support increased access to new care models such as telehealth and tools for at-home screenings or remote condition management, such as ongoing blood sugar, blood pressure or sleep data.



**2. Redefining what patients need if they enter (or re-enter) the healthcare system later in the disease journey:**

- a. Today's patient journey focuses on the "early" stages and needs, getting more people diagnosed and providing education on the benefits of earlier management and treatment adherence.
- b. Tomorrow's patient journey must also consider that those re-entering the healthcare system may be sicker after an extended period of non-compliance—providing appropriate disease and treatment education for this "new" entry point that prioritizes the importance of longer-term management and support.

**3. Educate consumers on the risk/reward analysis of delaying care:**

- a. Some conditions progress more quickly than others, while others require more routine management—redefine the role of disease state education to support the personal risk/reward analysis consumers conduct when deciding when to access care.

- 4. Kaiser Family Foundation, Opportunities and Barriers for Telemedicine in the U.S. During the COVID-19 Emergency and Beyond
- 5. Families USA, The COVID-19 Pandemic and Resulting Economic Crash Have Caused the Greatest Health Insurance Losses in American History
- 6. American Heart Association, Fueled by COVID-19 fears, approximately half of Hispanics and Black Americans would fear going to the hospital if experiencing symptoms of a heart attack or stroke
- 7. Medscape, Plunging Colonoscopy Rates May Signal Crisis Ahead
- 8. MD Edge, Three months of COVID-19 may mean 80,000 missed cancer diagnoses
- 9. Gallup, One in Three Americans Would Not Get COVID-19 Vaccine

**References:**

- 1. Primary Care Collaborative, Primary Care & COVID-19: Week 8 Survey
- 2. The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association, August 2016, Vol. 116, 554-555.
- 3. American Cancer Society, COVID-19 Pandemic Ongoing Impact on Cancer Patients and Survivors

---

We hope you've found this piece from our Life (Sciences) After COVID-19 series valuable and engaging. For more content like this, download our other published perspectives at **covid19.klick.com** and sign-up to receive future insights as soon as they become available.



## **Diana Nagel**

### **Vice President, Strategy**

Diana has more than 10 years of experience working in marketing strategy and analytics, with the majority in pharmaceuticals.

At Klick, she brings a unique understanding of how to deliver innovative solutions for clients with a trained eye towards measuring business impact.

She has expertise supporting healthcare professional and consumer marketing efforts for brands across a variety of therapeutic areas, including primary care, vaccines, and rare disease.

---

*Prior to joining Klick, Diana held senior strategy and analytics roles at other health agencies. She has an MS in Marketing and Analytics from NYU and a BA in Communication from Villanova University.*

---



While change can create challenges, it also opens the door to new opportunities. Join us as we explore the many imaginable paths to post-pandemic growth. We welcome you to start a dialogue with the author of this piece:

**Diana Nagel**  
dnagel@klick.com

**Disclaimer:** Klick Inc. is not a law firm, and the authors of this document are not lawyers. The information provided in this document is not intended to be taken as legal advice. If you have legal questions, please seek the advice of a licensed attorney.