

Video games breakout to record-setting levels as a perfect stay-at-home pastime amid coronavirus pandemic

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Video games are playing a big part in helping people cope during the coronavirus pandemic.

Since earlier this spring with the onset of stay-at-home orders meant to stem the spread of COVID-19, more Americans have pressed play on video games.

For some, games are an entertaining way to pass the time not spent on other pursuits. Others use them to stay connected with friends they used to see in person—and to bond with family members.

Jennifer Fidler, 47, and her husband of Portland, Oregon, have been playing "Animal Crossing: New Horizons" with her two middle school-aged daughters since the pandemic led to school closings. They may get another Nintendo Switch soon to expand their options.

Playing the [game](#), "I am able to connect with my sister in Tennessee and play 'live' with her and my

nieces," Fidler said. "It's something we could all enjoy together in our home. ... It's a fun game and non-violent—win-win for a mom."

In Washington state, Chad Aller, 30, and his girlfriend have found games including "Apex Legends" and "Borderlands 3" on the Xbox One "an excellent source of entertainment and stress release" as they stay home to "do our part keeping the pandemic under control," he said. "They are also cost-efficient, which is a concern right now."

Brianna Bowers, 16, of Cypress, Texas, is playing more, too, sometimes sneaking in some game time after finishing a school assignment during remote classes.

"Among Us," in particular, is extremely convenient for these quick bursts of extra time, since it's right there on my laptop and only takes a few minutes per round. I know many of my other friends have taken up the game, too, and it makes for precious moments of connection with them," says Bowers, who also plays on Xbox and PlayStation consoles.

In addition to playing online multiplayer games such as "Fortnite" and "Call of Duty: Warzone" with others, Thomas Mehaffey, 48, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, began streaming his gameplay on Twitch. He says he has been playing "more by far, due to isolating with lung immune problems" to avoid contracting COVID-19.

The number of Americans playing video games has grown to 244 million, which is 30 million more than in 2018, according to The NPD Group's 2020 Gamer Segmentation Report, which the research firm released in July.

And players are devoting more time to their gaming pursuits, about 14 hours a week, on average, in this

year, compared with 12 hours a week in 2018, according to the report, which surveyed 5,000 active gamers in May.

Spending on games from March to August rose 30% or more beyond the same month a year ago, additional NPD research found.

The surge in gaming—and reduced spending on other things such as travel, theme parks and tickets for sports and music events—should lead to spending in November and December of \$13.4 billion, a projection by NPD that's 24% higher than last year. Total spending in 2020 is projected to reach a new annual record of \$50 billion, NPD says.

"Video games have provided a safe way to get together with family and friends either virtually or at home," said Mat Piscatella, NPD's executive director of games. "The social aspect of gaming has now been established with the mass market, and people gathering together this way may be a more permanent behavioral change."

New Xbox, PlayStation arrive next week

Helping spur interest in games: next week's arrival of new [video game](#) consoles from Microsoft and Sony. Microsoft's Xbox Series X and Series S consoles arrive on Nov. 10. Sony's PlayStation 5 and PS5 digital console hit on Nov. 12.

Also on tap: "Call of Duty: Black Ops Cold War," out Nov. 13, which Piscatella predicts will be the best-selling game of 2020. That's not a stretch, as the first-person shooter and online multiplayer favorite has been the top-selling gaming franchise in the U.S. for the past 11 years.

Another likely holiday winner is Nintendo, which has seen its 2 1/2 -year-old Switch console remain a hot seller and in short stock during the pandemic. The Switch could also be in short supply the rest of 2020, too, Piscatella said in his holiday outlook, published on NPD's blog. "The lack of available inventory of new PlayStations and Xbox systems will leave Switch as an appealing available option," he said.

Landing a new PS5 or Xbox Series X or S may be tough this season, says Pedro Palandrani, research analyst with Global X, an exchange-traded funds investment firm.

But that won't hamper growth. Global X expects sales for the next 12 months (including October) to be more than 25% higher than the previous year. More than 2 billion worldwide play games, with growth also coming on smartphones, tablets and personal computers, Palandrani says.

"We see more than just COVID-induced momentum," he said. "For many, video games also became their new social media outlets. As video games continue to expand their audience and add additional features, it is emerging as potentially the next generation of the internet; a metaverse filled with millions of users interacting in a truly life-like virtual reality."

That idea of a VR world can help some cope with the real world. Games have been a good way to socialize with friends daily as he stays home more, says Connor Gorman, 25, of Brooklyn Park, Minn.

The project engineer at a software company plays multiplayer games such as "Rogue Company" on his PlayStation 4 and "Animal Crossing" on his Nintendo Switch, plus the online flying game "Ace Combat 7" and cooperative horror game "Phasmophobia" on his PC.

He's in the market for a PlayStation 5. The selling point for video games?

"The social aspect of them," Gorman said, "and also they help to relieve stress and anxiety."

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