

# Health Reports, January 2018

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## Multiple sclerosis: Prevalence and impact

Estimates from individual provinces suggest that the prevalence of multiple sclerosis (MS) among Canadians may be one of the highest in the world. A new study released today in the publication *Health Reports* provides information on the impact MS has on people's lives, such as mobility, pain, sleep and cognition. About two-thirds of those diagnosed reported that their lives were affected moderately, quite a bit, or extremely by MS.

Although 57% of people with MS could walk without aid, almost one-third (31%) required a wheelchair, a mechanical aid such as a cane or walker, or the help of another person, and 12% could not walk at all. Just over half (53%) were usually pain-free, with the rest reporting pain that prevented a few activities (21%) or some/most activities (25%). Close to two-thirds (62%) experienced difficulty getting a good night's sleep. Half (50%) of people whose only neurological condition was MS had difficulty remembering most things and/or thinking and solving problems.

MS can be limiting in other ways. Close to one-third reported that it had prevented them from driving (30%), or compromised their educational opportunities (32%). More than half (58%) experienced at least some limitations in job opportunities. As well, 43% reported that MS had a negative impact on their social interactions, such as feeling left out, embarrassed, or that others felt uncomfortable around them or avoided them.

This study also provides the most recent national prevalence estimates of MS. An estimated 93,500 Canadians living in private households and 3,800 in long-term care institutions reported a diagnosis of MS. At 290 cases per 100,000 in the household population, prevalence exceeded that in many other countries and was higher than reported in earlier Canadian studies.

Women are two to three times more likely than men to have MS (2.6 women reported MS for every man with the condition). Unlike neurological disorders such as dementia and Parkinson's disease that tend to develop at older ages, MS is more prevalent in younger adults. MS was diagnosed between the ages of 20 and 49 for 82% of those with the disorder.

### Note to readers

*This study is based on cross-sectional, nationally representative data from the 2011 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS); the Neurological Conditions Prevalence File derived from the 2010 and 2011 CCHSs; the 2011 Survey on Living with Neurological Conditions in Canada; and the 2011/2012 Survey of Neurological Conditions in Institutions in Canada. Death data are from the Canadian Vital Statistics Death Database.*



"[Multiple sclerosis: Prevalence and impact](#)" is now available in the January 2018 online issue of *Health Reports*, Vol. 29, no. 1 ([82-003-X](#)).

This issue of *Health Reports* also contains the article, "[Trends and correlates of frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption, 2007 to 2014](#)."

To enquire about "Multiple Sclerosis: Prevalence and impact," contact Heather Gilmour ([heather.gilmour@canada.ca](mailto:heather.gilmour@canada.ca)), Health Analysis Division.

To enquire about "Trends and correlates of frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption, 2007 to 2014," contact Health Canada media relations (613-957-2983).

For more information about the publication *Health Reports*, contact Janice Felman (613-799-7746; [janice.felman@canada.ca](mailto:janice.felman@canada.ca)), Health Analysis Division.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; [STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)).