

# Health of youth in Canada

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Canadians aged 15 to 30 are less obese, more active and smoke less than older Canadians. However, when compared with Canadian youth 20 years ago, they are more obese, less active and eat fewer servings of fruit and vegetables.

These findings are from the first chapter, "[Health of youth in Canada](#)," of *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report*, a brand-new publication that will highlight what is known about Canadian youth. In the next few months, *Portrait of Youth in Canada* will focus on themes such as demographics, employment, education, social engagement and well-being, the environment, and Indigenous youth.

The first chapter also reveals worse mental health for Canada's youth, in comparison both with older Canadians (before and during the COVID-19 pandemic) and with youths 20 years ago.

## Physical health and behaviours

In 2019, about 70% of males and 66% of females aged 15 to 30 reported excellent or very good general health. This is higher than for males (47%) and females (53%) aged 47 and older. In addition, compared with older Canadians, Canadian youth had lower daily smoking rates and obesity rates. Youth were also more active.

Compared with previous years, Canadian youth daily smoking rates continuously declined, from 26% in 2001 to 8% in 2019 for males and from 22% to 6% for females. However, obesity slightly increased, from 9.6% to 11.8% for males and from 7.0% to 11.7% for females, during the same period.

Income and belonging to a group designated as a visible minority remain key social determinants among Canadian youth. In 2019, smoking rates were 22% for males living in a household in the lowest income quintile, compared with 15% for males living in the highest income quintile. The corresponding figures were 18% and 8% for females. Young Canadians belonging to a group designated as a visible minority smoke less and have lower obesity rates than White Canadians. However, those belonging to a group designated as a visible minority spend less time, on average, doing active recreational activities and eat less fruit and vegetables than White Canadians.

## Mental health

A decade ago, young Canadians reported more positive mental health than their older counterparts. In 2011/2012, for example, 74% of females aged 15 to 30 reported excellent or very good mental health, compared with 69% of females aged 47 and older.

However, this picture has reversed since then, and, in 2019, a lower proportion of Canadian youth reported having excellent or very good mental health than older Canadians. The difference was essentially driven by young females: 54% reported excellent or very good mental health, compared to 69% of females aged 47 and older.

While the mental health of Canadian youth has declined over the last few years, the impact of COVID-19 on the mental health of youth was the largest of any age group. In the summer of 2020, less than half of youth aged 15 to 30 reported excellent or very good mental health (40%). Moreover, youth were the most likely to report a negative impact on their mental health since physical distancing began, while seniors were the least likely to do so.

## Substance use

In 2019, heavy drinking and cannabis use in the past 12 months were higher among Canadian youth than among older Canadians. The general trend shows that heavy drinking has likely declined among males aged 15 to 30 over the last 20 years and likely increased among females in the same age group.



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Heavy drinking and cannabis use are more frequent among White Canadians than among Canadians belonging to a population group designated as a visible minority. Heavy drinking was reported by 29% of White Canadians, as opposed to 16% of Canadians belonging to a group designated as a visible minority. Cannabis use by White Canadians (41%) was almost double that of Canadians belonging to a group designated as a visible minority (23%).

**Note to readers**

Most of the data highlighted in this study come from the various cycles of the Canadian Community Health Survey. This information is supplemented with data and findings from published research papers and reports from the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series.

**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 5015 and 5311.**

The chapter "Health of youth in Canada" is now available in the online issue of *Portrait of Youth in Canada: Data Report* ([42280001](#)).

The infographic "[Portrait of Youth in Canada: Physical Health and Behaviours](#)" is now available as part of the series *Statistics Canada — Infographics* ([11-627-M](#)).

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)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).