

Physical activity among adults and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2018 and 2020

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According to a new study published by Statistics Canada, over one-third (37.2%) of youth aged 12 to 17 met the Canadian physical activity recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic, compared with half (50.8%) of youth before the pandemic. The study, titled "[Youth—but not adults—reported less physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," compares physical activity before and during the COVID-19 pandemic by using data from the fall collection periods of the 2018 and 2020 cycles of the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS).

Although policies aimed at controlling the spread of COVID-19 have varied across the country, Canadian youth and adults have been generally asked to limit contact with people outside of their household, which reduces opportunities for physical activity outside of the home. The study finds that youth aged 12 to 17 reported significantly fewer average daily minutes of physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic, but there was no significant change for adults aged 18 to 64.

Youth were asked about physical activity from four sources: active transportation (e.g., walking and cycling to get to and from places), recreation (e.g., participation in sports outside of school), school (e.g., gym class), and household chores. When comparing fall 2018 and fall 2020, youth reported significantly fewer average daily minutes of physical activity from recreation and school. There was no significant difference in physical activity achieved through active transportation or household chores. Among adults, results were similar between men and women, and among youth, results were similar between boys and girls.

The study also reports on physical activity among older adults aged 65 and over, and among workers by whether they worked from home.

Note to readers

This study uses data from the 2018 and 2020 cycles of the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), an annual cross-sectional survey that collects information on health status, health care utilization, and health determinants for the Canadian population. Although data for both years are from the CCHS, the 2020 cycle of the survey had some differences. In March 2020, CCHS collection was paused and did not resume until September 2020, at which point the collection periods transitioned from three months to five weeks. In-person interviews were halted and collection was only completed via telephone interview.

Some bias was discovered in the 2020 CCHS cycle, which is likely attributable to the limitations of survey collection during the pandemic, including the decreased response rate and the use of telephone interviews only. Based on weighted estimates, results show that respondents interviewed during the pandemic (September to December 2020) appear to have slightly higher educational attainment, and they were slightly more likely to own their place of residence than in previous cycles.

As in previous CCHS cycles, survey weights for the 2020 data were adjusted to minimize any potential bias that could arise from survey non-response. Non-response adjustments and calibration using available auxiliary information were applied and are reflected in the survey weights provided with the data file. Extensive validations of survey estimates were also performed and examined from a bias analysis perspective. Despite these rigorous adjustments and validations, the higher non-response increases the risk of a remaining bias and the magnitude with which such a bias could impact estimates produced using the survey data. Therefore, caution in using the CCHS 2020 data is advised, especially when creating estimates for small sub-populations or comparing data with other CCHS years.



For more details, readers are invited to consult "[Youth—but not adults—reported less physical activity during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)," available as part of the series *StatCan COVID-19: Data to Insights for a Better Canada* (**45280001**).

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