

# Mental health among health care workers in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Seven in ten health care workers who participated in a recent crowdsourcing initiative reported worsening mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to results released today by Statistics Canada. Participating health care workers who worked in direct contact with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 and those who experienced restrictions or conditions on the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) were more affected than others.

These findings come from a new crowdsourcing initiative, *Impacts of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers: Infection Prevention and Control*, developed by Statistics Canada in collaboration with Health Canada, the Canadian Institute for Health Information and the Public Health Agency of Canada. A [previous study from Statistics Canada](#) has shown that Canadian adults (aged 18 and older) reported lower self-perceived mental health than before the pandemic. Health care workers face particular challenges because of an increased risk of infection, high workloads affecting work–life balance, and issues involving the supply of PPE. The current initiative was developed to examine these issues by gathering information from health care workers about their health, mental health and work environment.

Approximately 18,000 health care workers from the provinces and territories filled out the crowdsourcing questionnaire, which was open for completion from November 24 to December 13, 2020. Health care workers include workers who provide health care services directly to individuals, technical support to medical staff, and support services within a health care setting. Given that this crowdsourcing initiative did not involve sample selection, findings cannot be used to make inferences about the overall population of health care workers in Canada.

## One-third of participating health care workers report fair or poor mental health

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that health care workers may be at increased risk of mental health impacts because of a number of factors, such as increased risk of exposure and demanding working conditions. Eight months into the global pandemic, one-third (33%) of participating health care workers reported fair or poor mental health, one-third (33%) reported good mental health, and one-third (33%) reported very good or excellent mental health. Most participating health care workers (70%) reported that their mental health was "somewhat worse now" or "much worse now" compared with before March 2020. In addition, when asked to choose between five levels indicating how stressful most days were, 56% chose one of the two highest levels, reporting that most days were "quite a bit stressful" or "extremely stressful."

## Three-quarters of health care workers working in direct contact with confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases report worsening mental health

Some health care workers are at disproportionate risk of infection because of the nature of their job. Among crowdsourcing participants, 40% reported working in direct contact with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19; most of these workers were nurses (41%), followed by other health professionals (31%) and personal support workers or care aides (12%). Over three-quarters (77%) of health care workers who reported working in direct contact with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 reported worsening mental health compared with before the COVID-19 pandemic. By contrast, among health care workers who did not work in direct contact with people, 62% reported that their mental health was somewhat or much worse than before the pandemic.

In addition, a higher proportion (63%) of those working in direct contact with confirmed or suspected cases of COVID-19 reported that their days were quite a bit or extremely stressful, compared with 44% of participants who did not work in direct contact with people. A higher proportion of those working in direct contact also rated their mental health as fair or poor (40% vs. 29%).



**Table 1**  
**Self-reported mental health and stress levels of participating health care workers, proportion (%),**  
**Canada**

	Self-perceived mental health			Change in mental health since March 2020 Worse now / Much worse now	Stressfulness of most days  Quite a bit stressful / Extremely stressful
	Excellent / Very good	Good	Fair/Poor		
<b>Overall</b>	33	33	33	70	56
<b>Contact with people at job</b>					
Direct contact with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19	27	32	40	77	63
Direct contact only with those not suspected of COVID-19	37	34	28	66	53
No direct contact with people	39	32	29	62	44
<b>Profession</b>					
Physician	38	35	27	73	62
Nurse	29	34	37	75	61
Personal support worker or care aide	32	34	35	63	55
Other health professional (e.g., physiotherapist, dentist, pharmacist)	36	32	31	69	53
Other (e.g., security, cleaning, student)	31	34	35	66	50

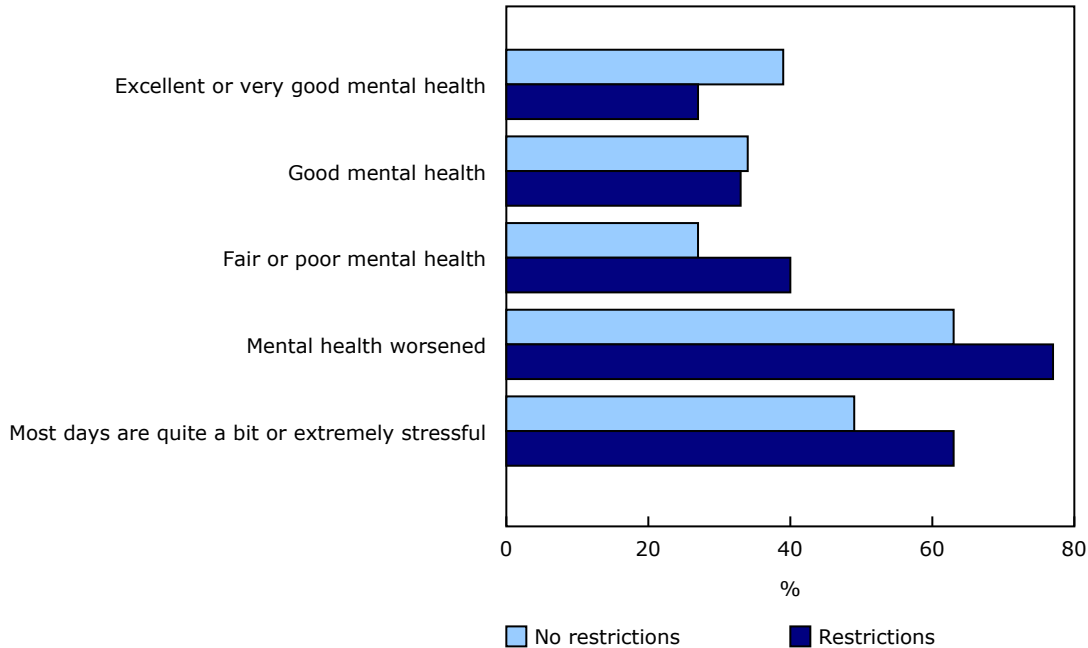
Source(s): Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers: Infection Prevention and Control, November 24 to December 13, 2020.

### Access to appropriate personal protective equipment is associated with better self-reported mental health and lower stress levels

Appropriate PPE—such as masks, face shields and N95 respirators—is essential for reducing infection risk. For the month before they participated in the crowdsourcing initiative, which took place from late November to mid December 2020, 47% of health care workers reported that they did not have any restrictions or conditions on the supply of PPE. However, 31% of participants reported that they extended the use of PPE beyond normal practice, 18% were required to reuse PPE they had previously worn without decontamination, and 11% needed to supply their own PPE. Almost one-third (30%) reported that their access to PPE was subject to some restrictions, such as requiring permission to access PPE. These reported PPE access restrictions could be attributable to a combination of inventory control measures put in place by health care settings and ongoing shortages in the supply of PPE.

Health care workers citing no restrictions or conditions on the supply of PPE reported better mental health and stress outcomes than participants who experienced restrictions or conditions. For example, a lower proportion of health care workers with unrestricted access to PPE reported worsening mental health, compared with those who experienced at least one restriction (63% vs. 77%). Similarly, while 49% of workers with unrestricted access to PPE indicated that most of their days were quite a bit or extremely stressful, 63% of participants with restricted access to PPE reported the same.

**Chart 1**  
**Mental health and stress outcomes, participating health care workers with and without restrictions in supply of personal protective equipment in month previous to crowdsourcing initiative, proportion (%), Canada**



Source(s): Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers: Infection Prevention and Control, November 24 to December 13, 2020.

**Note to readers**

This article is based on the crowdsourcing initiative [Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers: Infection Prevention and Control](#). Health care workers were invited to complete the online questionnaire between November 24 and December 13, 2020. Health care workers and those working in a health care setting living in the provinces and territories were eligible to participate. This includes people who provide health care services directly to individuals (e.g., physicians, nurses, massage therapists, dentists, dietitians), provide technical support to medical staff (e.g., receptionists, technicians) or provide support services in a health care setting (e.g., cleaning and food services staff, security). The results featured in this article are based on health care workers who have worked since March 2020. Results pertain to those who participated in the crowdsourcing initiative and are not representative of all health care workers in Canada.

Methodological adjustments have been made to account for differences in the distribution of occupations and province or territory of residence between the crowdsourcing participants and the population of health care workers in Canada, based on the 2016 Census.

For information on the mental health of Canadian adults during the COVID-19 pandemic, see "[Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19](#)" and "[Canadians report lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)"

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**Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5340](#).**

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)).