

Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians – Testing and Vaccination, February 21 to March 13, 2022

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In late November 2021, the Omicron variant was first reported in Canada, and started to spread quickly throughout the country. The rapid spread of Omicron resulted in the highest COVID-19 case counts of the pandemic, which put a strain on COVID-19 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and increased the demand for rapid antigen testing. Results from an online crowdsourcing survey show that more than half of participants aged 15 and older (55%) reported using a rapid test between December 1, 2021 and the date of data collection (February 21 to March 13, 2022).

There are two main types of COVID-19 tests approved for use in Canada: PCR tests and rapid antigen tests.

Rapid antigen tests, used to screen for COVID-19, are often self-administered, produce a quicker test result but are considered less reliable than PCR testing. Canadians have been required to take or have chosen to take rapid tests for various reasons, including to attend work or school, out of caution when gathering with friends or family, as well as for travelling purposes. During the Omicron wave, Canada reached capacity limits for PCR tests and saw a dramatic increase in demand for COVID-19 rapid tests. At the same time, there were many anecdotal reports of Canadians experiencing difficulties obtaining rapid tests during this time. To better understand Canadians' experiences with COVID-19 testing during this period, Statistics Canada conducted an online crowdsourcing questionnaire, Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Testing and Vaccination.

From February 21 to March 13, 2022, 36,857 Canadians aged 15 and older participated in the crowdsourcing collection. Participants were asked a series of questions about their experiences with COVID-19 testing between December 1, 2021 and the date they completed their questionnaire. Unlike other surveys conducted by Statistics Canada, crowdsourcing data are not collected under a sampling design using probability-based sampling. Therefore, caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings. No inferences about the overall Canadian population should be made based on these results.

More than half of the participants reported taking a rapid test

Among participants aged 15 and older, 55% reported using a rapid test between December 1, 2021 and the date of data collection. Canadians take COVID-19 tests when they are experiencing symptoms, as well as at times they are asymptomatic. Among crowdsourcing participants who had used a COVID-19 rapid test, 31% reported receiving at least one positive result during this time. The results in this article represent the experiences of the crowdsourcing participants, and do not represent the overall Canadian population.

Overall, a higher proportion of participants in younger age groups reported using COVID-19 rapid tests, with 64% of participants aged 15 to 34, and 69% of those aged 35 to 49 reporting that they used such a test during the reference period. Just over one-third (34%) of crowdsourcing participants aged 65 and older reported taking a COVID-19 rapid test, the lowest percentage of all the age groups. Among those who had taken a COVID-19 rapid test, 32% of participants aged 65 and older reported receiving a positive test result on a rapid test. Comparatively, 35% of participants aged 15 to 34, 32% of participants aged 35 to 49, and 27% of participants aged 50 to 64 reported receiving a positive rapid test result.

The distribution of COVID-19 rapid tests and the guidelines for use varied widely across the country. The percentage of crowdsourcing participants who reported taking a COVID-19 rapid test ranged from 37% in British Columbia to 84% in Saskatchewan. In late 2021 and early 2022, rapid test kits were not distributed to the public in British Columbia and instead were focused on use in high-risk settings. This was a different approach compared with other provinces, such as Saskatchewan, where rapid test kits were distributed to the public.



Table 1
Proportion of crowdsource participants who reported taking a COVID-19 rapid test between December 1, 2021 and the date of data collection

	Took a COVID-19 rapid test
	%
Total	55
Age group	
Aged 15 to 34	64
Aged 35 to 49	69
Aged 50 to 64	51
Aged 65 and older	34
Gender	
Man	52
Woman	59
Non-binary person	51
Geography	
Newfoundland and Labrador	43
Prince Edward Island	61
Nova Scotia	77
New Brunswick	73
Quebec	51
Ontario	59
Manitoba	52
Saskatchewan	84
Alberta	62
British Columbia	37
The territories	57

Source(s): Impacts of COVID 19 on Canadians – Testing and Vaccination (February 21 to March 13, 2022) ([5323](#)).

Many schools distributed rapid tests to students, encouraging them to test regularly during the holidays, when experiencing symptoms, or when notified of close contact with a positive case. Among participants who lived in a household with children under the age of 18, 73% reported that at least one child in their household had taken a rapid test during the reference period. Among participants living in households with a child aged 5 to 11, 80% reported that a child had used a rapid test and 77% of participants living with a child aged 12 to 17 reported the same. Comparatively, a lower proportion of participants living with a child under the age of 5 in the household, reported that a child had taken a rapid test (65%).

Nearly 2 in 5 participants report difficulties getting a COVID-19 rapid test

In late 2021, with the spike of COVID-19 cases and the reaching of capacity limits for PCR testing, Canada saw an increased demand for rapid tests. Overall, 39% of crowdsource participants aged 15 and older reported that, at least once in the reference period, they would have liked a COVID-19 rapid test for themselves or a child in the household, but they could not get one.

Difficulties accessing rapid tests varied across the country, ranging from 7% in Saskatchewan to 50% in British Columbia.

Difficulties in getting access to rapid tests were similar between households with children (38%) and without children (39%). However, the proportion experiencing access difficulties varied when considering the age of children in the household. Just over 2 in 5 (43%) crowdsource participants living with a child under the age of 5 reported they would have liked a COVID-19 rapid test for themselves or a child in the household but could not get one. Among crowdsource participants living with children aged 5 to 11, 33% reported this barrier to access, while 37% of participants living with children aged 12 to 17 reported similar barriers. Households with school-aged children may have experienced fewer difficulties accessing rapid tests, as many schools provided test kits to students.

Having a disability could result in an additional barrier to accessing COVID-19 tests. Among crowdsourcing participants who identified as persons with a disability, 45% reported that they had wanted a rapid test for themselves or a child in their household but could not get one. This was a higher proportion compared with those who did not identify as persons with a disability (38%).

An essential worker is defined as an individual who works in a service, facility or in an activity that is necessary to preserving life, health, public safety and basic societal functions of Canadians. A higher proportion of participants who are essential workers or were living in households with an essential worker reported difficulties accessing rapid tests (42%), compared with participants whose households did not have any essential workers (37%).

Table 2
Proportion of crowdsourcing participants who reported that they would have liked a COVID-19 rapid test for themselves or a child in the household, but they could not get one between December 1, 2021 and the date of data collection

	Wanted a rapid test, but did not get one
	%
Total	39
Geography	
Newfoundland and Labrador	36
Prince Edward Island	32
Nova Scotia	28
New Brunswick	22
Quebec	31
Ontario	42
Manitoba	39
Saskatchewan	7
Alberta	44
British Columbia	50
The territories	36
Households with children	
Total - Household with children under the age of 18	38
Children under the age of 5	43
Children aged 5 to 11	33
Children aged 12 to 17	37
No children in the household	39
Disability status	
Participant reported having a disability	45
Participant did not report a disability	38
Essential worker	
Essential worker(s) in the household	42
No essential worker in the household	37

Note(s): Participants could have reported living with children in multiple age groups. For analysis by the age of child in the household, participants were included in the analysis for each of the children's age groups that they reported and will therefore be accounted for multiple times.

Source(s): Impacts of COVID 19 on Canadians – Testing and Vaccination (February 21 to March 13, 2022) (5323).

There is a range of reasons that may explain why participants had difficulties accessing rapid tests. Among participants who wanted a rapid test but did not get one, 3 in 5 (60%) reported that no tests were available when they tried to get a test or an appointment. Further, one-quarter (25%) of these participants reported that they did not get one as they had assumed that no tests were available. Just over 1 in 5 (21%) reported that they did not know where to get them or when to go, while 22% said the available tests were too expensive, and 18% said the wait time to get a test or an appointment was too long.

Most participants who reported experiencing difficulties accessing rapid tests reported experiencing this in December 2021 (64%) or January 2022 (61%), with just over one-quarter (26%) reporting similar difficulties in February or March 2022, suggesting that there may be fewer barriers to accessing rapid tests in the more recent months.

Note to readers

Basic demographic information was collected from participants including age, gender, postal code, visible minority status, and presence of children in the household. At the end of collection, males were underrepresented as they only accounted for approximately 25% of the participants. Youth (15 to 24 years old) and seniors (65 years and older) were also underrepresented, as well as participants from Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, and Alberta. Participants who were designated as a visible minority were also underrepresented. Adults aged 35 to 54 years old were overrepresented as well as participants from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Ontario, and British Columbia. Individuals from households with children aged 5 to 11 were overrepresented, while individuals from households with children aged 12 to 17 were underrepresented.

Demographic projections of the number of people by province/territory, sex and age group as of February 2022 and Census 2016 rates for presence of children by age group were used to calculate a benchmarking factor for every participant to compensate for over/underrepresentation. These benchmarking factors were used to calculate the proportions presented in this text. Nevertheless, crowdsourcing results should not be used to generate inferences about the Canadian population and should not be used to make comparisons with other probabilistic surveys. No inferences about the overall Canadian population should be made based on these results.

Participants could have reported living with children in multiple age groups. For analysis by the age of child in the household, participants were included in the analysis for each of the children's age groups that they reported and will therefore be accounted for multiple times.

Crowdsource participants were asked if they identified as a person with a disability, based on the following definition: A person with a disability is a person who has a long-term or recurring impairment such as vision, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain, learning, developmental, memory or mental health-related impairments which limits their daily activities inside or outside the home such as at school, work, or in the community in general. This differs from the method used by Statistics Canada on the Canadian Survey on Disability, which administers the Disability Screening Questionnaire to identify persons with a disability and calculate the official rates of disability across Canada.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5323](#).

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; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).