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Concerns over resuming activities in Canada

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Concerns over resuming activities in Canada

by **Manon Langevin** and **Martin Turcotte**

This article provides disaggregated data to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on specific groups. Visit the [Gender, Diversity and Inclusion Statistics Hub](#) for more analysis, including disaggregated data on labour, public safety, health and more.



To combat the spread of COVID-19, authorities prohibited all activities deemed non-essential in March, disrupting the daily lives of all Canadians. Since then, activities have gradually begun to resume across Canada. Rules about outdoor and indoor gatherings have been relaxed, and many businesses and establishments are gradually reopening.

As some COVID-19 safety measures have now been relaxed, many people are eager to resume their usual activities, including social and recreational activities. However, many people may feel torn between the need to resume their activities and the fear of a second wave of the virus. In addition, some provincial and municipal governments have made it mandatory to wear masks in indoor public spaces, and this has led to changes in how some activities take place. Relaxing lockdown measures may therefore constitute a source of anxiety and concern for these people, who are more reluctant to resume their activities and are more concerned about health risks.

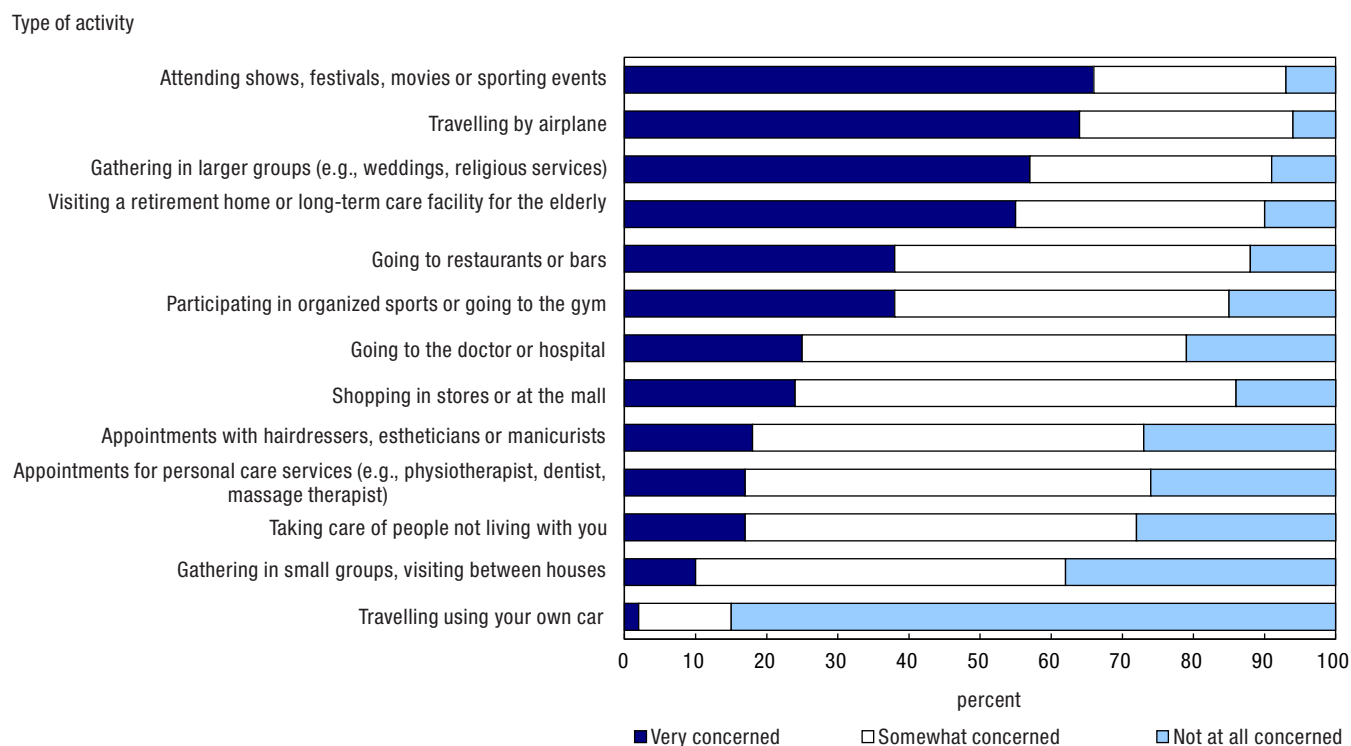
During the week of June 15 to 21, Statistics Canada collected data for the third iteration of the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS). The CPSS asked a sample of respondents, representative of the Canadian population, about their level of concern with resuming certain activities, as well as the measures they intended to adopt to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission.

CPSS data were used to examine Canadians' level of concern about the health risks of resuming various types of activities, such as shopping at a mall, going to restaurants, attending gatherings or even going to the doctor. The relationship between respondents' level of concern about the health risks of resuming activities and their willingness to continue taking various precautions to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission was also examined.

Canadians' level of concern varies by type of activity

The risk of contracting COVID-19 is known to vary depending on the type of activity, the number of people involved and whether it takes place indoors or outdoors. Similarly, Canadians' level of concern varied significantly by activity. For most activities, the proportion of people who reported being "somewhat concerned" or "very concerned" ranged from 62% to 94% during the survey week, excluding travelling using their own car, which was of little concern to Canadians (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Self-reported level of concern about the health risks of resuming certain activities or relaxing safety measures related to those activities, week of June 15 to 21, 2020



Note: The sum of proportions may not be equal to 100% for all activities due to rounding.

Source: Third iteration of the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (June 2020).

Specifically, more than 6 in 10 people reported being “very concerned” about the health risks of resuming shows, festivals, movies or sporting events (66%) and travelling by airplane (64%). More than half of Canadians reported being very concerned about gathering in larger groups (57%), such as weddings and religious services, as well as visiting a retirement home or long-term care facility for the elderly (55%).

By contrast, a smaller percentage of Canadians expressed concern about gathering in small groups and visiting between houses (10%) or travelling using their own car (2%). The percentage of people who were “not at all concerned” about the risk posed by these two activities was 38% and 85%, respectively.

While changes in future behaviour are currently difficult to predict, Canadians’ concerns could lead to changes in certain habits in the long term. For example, fear of visiting someone living in a retirement home or long-term care facility could lead to a decrease in the frequency of family care for many seniors in these facilities. According to data from the General Social Survey, 1.1 million Canadians were providing family care to a senior living in a care facility in 2018.

Youth, single people, and people working outside the home are less likely to be concerned about the health risks of resuming activities in Canada

Over the past few days, there has been a slight increase in the number of COVID-19 cases across the country, largely due to an increase in cases among the youth. Canadians aged less than 35, people who were single, and people working outside the home were less likely to express a high level of concern about the health risks of resuming activities (Table 1).

Table 1
Proportion of individuals who were very concerned about the health risks of resuming activities, by activity type and selected demographic characteristics, week of June 15 to 21, 2020

Characteristics	Attending shows, festivals, movies or sporting events	Travelling by airplane	Gathering in larger groups (e.g., weddings, religious services)	Visiting a retirement home or long-term care facility for the elderly	Going to restaurants or bars	Participating in organized sports or going to the gym	Going to the doctor or hospital	Shopping in stores or at the mall
	percent							
Combined population	66	64	57	55	38	38	25	24
Men (ref.)	62	60	56	54	35	36	23	24
Women	69	68*	58	57	41	40	26	25
Age group								
15 to 34 (ref.)	59	51	48	50	31	28	25	25
35 to 54	64	65*	54	58	40	40*	29	23
55 to 64	68	71*	64*	56	38	43*	22	25
65 and older	76*	78*	67*	60	48*	51*	20	26
Marital status								
Married (ref.)	70	69	63	60	42	44	26	24
Living common-law	59*	64	52*	57	33*	41	25	22
Widowed	70	71	70	55	55	52	28	26
Separated	56	59	43	53	33	29	17	20
Divorced	64	65	59	50	40	39	20	26
Single, never married	60*	54*	47*	49	31*	26*	23	26
Region								
Atlantic provinces	65	72	53	54	31*	39	19*	23
Quebec	57*	65	49*	48	35	29*	27	22
Ontario (ref.)	73	65	63	59	44	44	29	27
Prairie provinces	56*	55*	48*	51	36	33*	18	24
British Columbia	72	68	66	65	34	39	19	22
Rural area								
Yes	52*	62	46*	48	30*	30	16*	17*
No (ref.)	68	65	59	57	40	39	26	26
Immigration status								
Canadian-born individual (ref.)	61	63	53	54	34	35	21	22
Landed immigrant	81*	68	70*	64	52*	49*	37*	30
Place of work (reference week)								
Outside the home (ref.)	55	56	46	47	31	28	19	22
At home	71*	68*	64*	64*	42*	41*	32*	24
Not working or absent from work	70*	68*	60*	58*	40*	43*	25	26
Dwelling type is an apartment building								
No (ref.)	64	64	55	53	36	37	24	24
Yes	72*	65	64*	66*	48*	42	27	27

* significantly different from reference category (ref.) (p < 0.05)

Source: Third iteration of the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (June 2020).

In particular, people aged less than 35 were less likely than people aged 65 and older to be “very concerned” about the risk of resuming travelling by airplane (51% versus 78%), gathering in larger groups (48% versus 67%) and participating in sports (28% versus 51%). However, they were as concerned as people aged 65 and older about relaxing measures related to going to the doctor or hospital and about reopening stores and malls.

In addition, immigrants were generally more concerned than Canadian-born individuals about the health risks of resuming activities. They were particularly concerned about the risk of resuming shows, festivals, movies or sporting events (81%, compared with 61% among Canadian-born individuals) and gathering in larger groups for weddings and religious services for example (70%, compared with 53% among Canadian-born individuals). These results are consistent with findings from previous studies that showed that immigrants were generally more concerned about the social and economic consequences of the pandemic than Canadian-born individuals.¹

Overall, women and men were equally concerned about resuming activities in Canada. However, women were more likely than men to express fears about resuming travelling by airplane (68% versus 60%).

Not all provinces have been equally affected by the pandemic, and reopening strategies vary from region to region. As well, level of concern varied by province of residence. Residents of Ontario were generally more concerned about the health risks of resuming activities than those of Quebec and the Prairie provinces. Among other things, they were more concerned about relaxing measures for shows, festivals, movies or sporting events (73%, compared with 57% in Quebec and 56% in the Prairies), for gathering in larger groups (63%, compared with 49% in Quebec and 48% in the Prairies) and participating in organized sports or going to the gym (44%, compared with 33% in the Prairies and 29% in Quebec). However, residents of the other provinces were just as concerned as residents of Ontario when it came to visiting people in retirement homes and long-term care facilities.

Preoccupations were generally higher in urban areas. For example, 68% of residents in urban areas were concerned about the health risks of relaxing measures for shows, festivals, movies or sporting events, compared with 52% of those in rural areas.

Those most concerned about resuming activities in Canada are more likely to want to take precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19

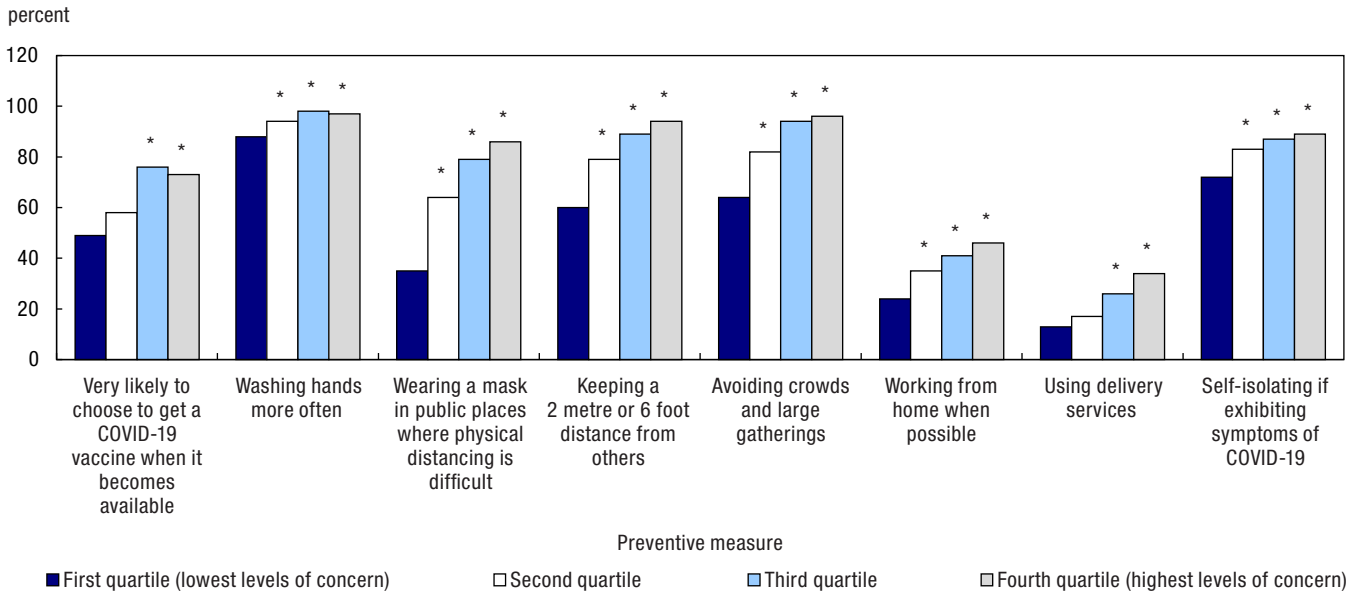
To examine the relationship between Canadians’ level of concern and the precautions they take to limit the spread of COVID-19, an overall index of concern was created based on responses for each activity. For the purposes of this article, those who expressed a “high overall level of concern” are those who scored in the fourth quartile of concern (for more details on the overall index of concern, please refer to the “Data sources, definitions and methodology” section).²

Individuals who expressed a high level of concern about the health risks of resuming activities were also more likely to take various precautions to limit the spread of the virus (Chart 2).

1. LaRochelle-Côté and Uppal (2020); Turcotte and Hango (2020).

2. In general, Canadians younger than 35 (16%, compared with 29% among those aged 65 and older) who are single (18%, compared with 29% among those who are married) and who work outside the home (19%, compared with 30% among those working from home) were less likely to express a “high overall level of concern.” Residents of the Prairies (20%) and Quebec (21%) were also less likely than those of Ontario (30%) to be among the most worried. This was particularly true in rural areas, where 16% of residents expressed a high overall level of concern, compared with 27% among urban residents.

Chart 2
Proportion of Canadians willing to take various precautions to limit the spread of COVID-19, by quartile of overall level of concern, week of June 15 to 21, 2020



* significantly different from reference category (first quartile—lowest levels of concern) ($p > 0.05$)

Note: A score of 1 to 3 was assigned to the answers provided for each activity item (attending shows, travelling by airplane, etc.). A score of 1 was given for “not at all concerned,” a score of 2 for “somewhat concerned” and a score of 3 for “very concerned.” Level of concern quartiles were determined based on the rank ordering of scores. Average scores were used rather than total scores to account for respondents’ non-response to certain items. For the purposes of this article, those who expressed a “high overall level of concern” are those who scored in the fourth concern quartile.

Source: Third iteration of the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (June 2020).

People with a high degree of concern were also significantly more likely to choose to get a COVID-19 vaccine (73%), once it becomes available, than those who expressed little concern (49%) about resuming activities in Canada. A recent study showed that those who expressed a higher level of trust in others and in the various levels of government were more likely to get vaccinated.³

Those who were least concerned were also less likely to report that they would wear a mask in public places. Although they were more likely to want to return to their normal activities, they were half as likely to want to wear a mask in public places (35%) as people who expressed a high level of concern (86%). Since the survey was conducted, however, many governments across Canada have made it mandatory to wear masks in indoor public spaces.

The gaps between the different levels of concern were smaller for basic preventive measures such as “washing hands more often” and “self-isolating if exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19.” These two measures were among the most popular for those who expressed a low level of concern.

3. Frank and Arim (2020).

Data sources, definitions and methodology

Data in this article are from Statistics Canada’s new Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS), which represents a panel of Canadians who have agreed to complete a number of short online surveys. The CPSS is a probabilistic panel based on the Labour Force Survey and is therefore representative of the general population. The CPSS enables Statistics Canada to collect important information from Canadians more efficiently, faster and at a lower cost, compared with traditional survey methods. The first iteration of the CPSS was conducted from March 29 to April 3 and collected information from 4,600 respondents. The second iteration of the CPSS was conducted from May 4 to 10, with mostly the same respondents. The third iteration, used in this article, was conducted from June 15 to 21. Statistics Canada would like to thank the Canadians who took the time to answer these questions during the pandemic.

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For the purposes of this article, those who expressed a “high overall level of concern” are those who scored in the fourth concern quartile.

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