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## Trends in businesses' needs for personal protective equipment since May 2021

by Patrick Ndolo

Release date: October 18, 2021

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Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

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# Trends in businesses' needs for personal protective equipment since May 2021

by **Patrick Ndolo**

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic there was unprecedented demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), resulting in global uncertainty about supplies and inventories. As provinces across the country continue to adapt to changing public health guidelines, availability of PPE remains important for businesses to safely operate in accordance with the COVID-19 guidelines. The Personal Protective Equipment Survey (PPES) provides a portrait of demand and supply of PPE in Canada. This article examines the evolution of private sector businesses' demand and supply of PPE using data from the August 2021 PPES.

Demand for PPE among businesses that needed or expected to need PPE stayed the same in August. In fact, aside from a 5.5 percentage point decrease in May 2021, demand for PPE has been stable since December 2020. More businesses (23.1%) reported having concerns about shortages of essential PPE in August compared to May 2021, when 19.6% had shortage concerns. Most shortage expectations were reported by businesses in the educational sector. This contrasts with the May 2021 results, when businesses in the healthcare and social assistance sector led shortage expectations.

## Businesses' need for Personal Protective Equipment unchanged in August

Just over three-fifths (60.5%) of businesses operating in the provinces and territories reported that they needed or expected to need PPE to operate in accordance with the COVID-19 related public health guidelines.

Similar to May 2021, demand for PPE was highest among businesses in the services-producing sector, with businesses in the educational services (91.7%) and accommodation and food services (87.0%) having the highest demand compared to businesses in professional, scientific and technical services (39.2%) and agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting (34.9%), which had the lowest demand for PPE.

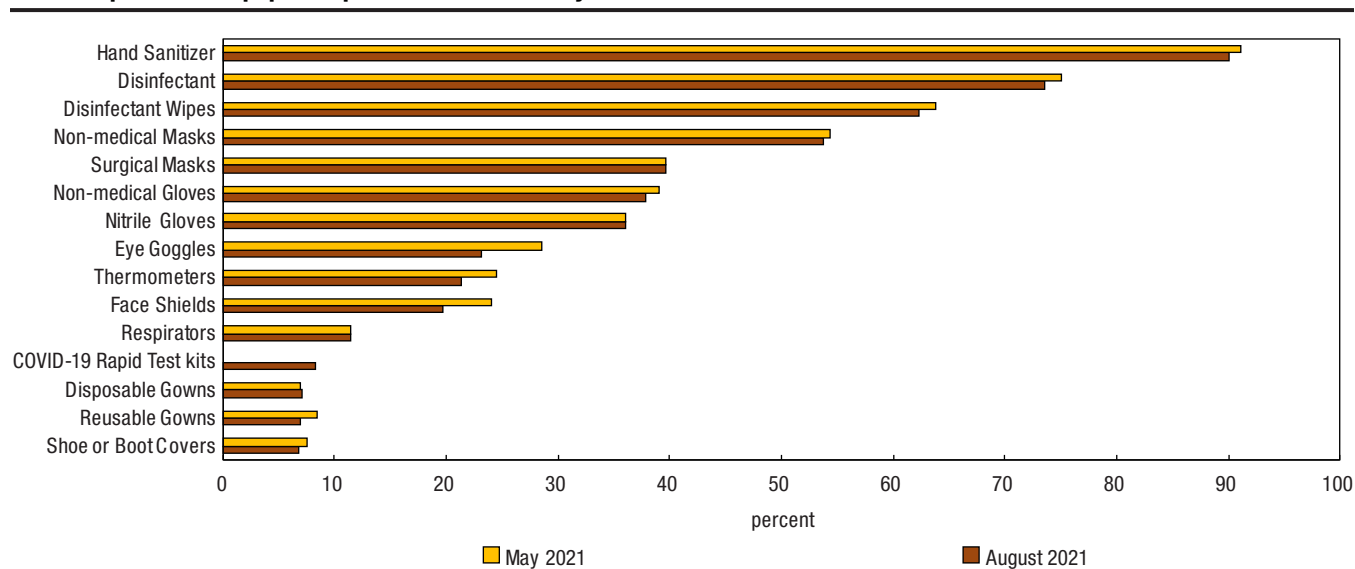
In August 2021, close to 7 out of 10 businesses (68.6%) that indicated requiring PPE to operate needed at least 4 of the 15 types of PPE that are covered in this survey.<sup>1,2</sup> The distribution of PPE items most demanded by businesses has remained relatively the same compared to May 2021. Items of PPE that are related to cleaning and disinfecting surfaces, as well as face and hand coverings continue to be the most demanded by businesses – see chart 1.

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1. These include; COVID-19 rapid test kits, disinfectant, disinfectant wipes, disposable gowns, eye goggles, face shields, hand sanitizer, nitrile gloves, non-medical gloves, non-medical masks, respirators, reusable gowns, shoe or boot covers, surgical masks, and thermometers.  
2. The results obtained in May 2021 are not directly comparable to the August 2021 survey due to the inclusion of COVID-19 Rapid test kits.



**Chart 1**  
**Personal protective equipment products demanded by businesses**



**Note:** Each bar gives the proportion of PPE most demanded by businesses.  
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Personal Protective Equipment Survey, May 2021, August 2021.

## Businesses' concerns about Personal Protective Equipment increase in August

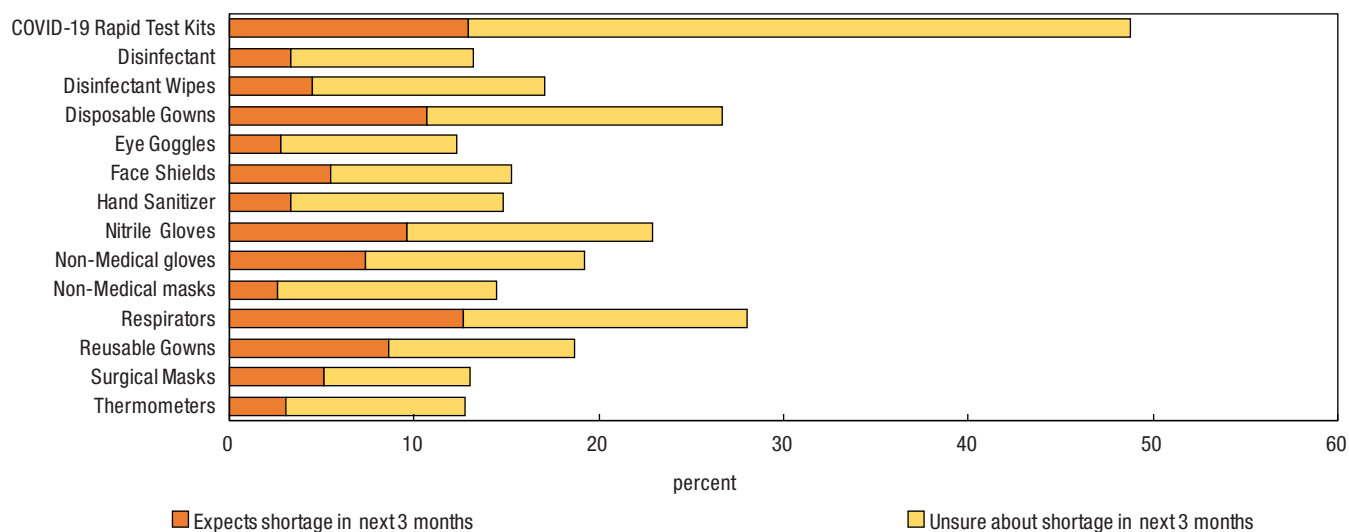
Almost one-quarter (23.1%) of the businesses that needed at least one type of PPE to operate in accordance with the public health guidelines had concerns about PPE shortages within the next three months.<sup>3</sup> This represents a 3.5 percentage point increase from May 2021.

Concerns about potential shortages of required PPE vary by sector and type of PPE. Businesses in educational services (24.2%) were more likely to expect a shortage in PPE that they require than businesses in retail trade (3.6%). Among the different types of PPE that businesses require, shortage concerns were more pronounced in COVID-19 rapid test kits (48.8%), respirators (28.0%) and disposable gowns (26.7%) – see chart 2.

3. Some businesses both expect a shortage for some types of PPE and are unsure whether they will experience a shortage for other types of PPE. These businesses are counted as expecting a shortage.



**Chart 2**  
**Businesses' shortages concerns for Personal Protective Equipment**



**Note:** Values for shoe or boot covers are suppressed.  
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Personal Protective Equipment Survey, August 2021.

## Majority of businesses are unlikely to use and adopt COVID-19 Rapid tests

More than four-fifths (81.7%) of businesses that had employees working on-site in August 2021 reported not using the COVID-19 rapid test kits to check their on-site employees for COVID-19 infection. Out of the one-in-twenty (4.5%) that did, on average, just over 7 out of 10 (71.0%) of their employees were tested using COVID-19 Rapid tests.<sup>4</sup>

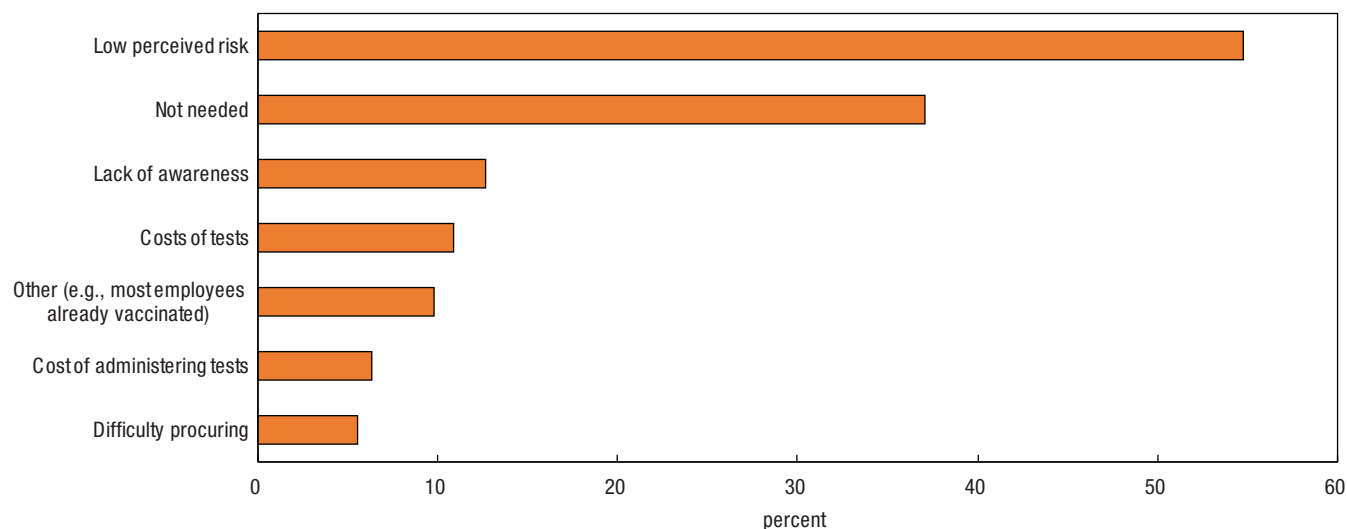
The August 2021 PPES results show that, in the next three months, close to 7 out of 10 businesses (68.5%) do not plan on implementing COVID-19 Rapid tests to check for COVID-19 infections among their on-site employees. Low perceived risk (54.8%) and COVID-19 rapid tests not being needed (37.1%) were among the reasons provided by businesses for not planning to adopt COVID-19 Rapid test kits in the next three months—see chart 3.

4. Just over 1 in 10 (13.7%) of the businesses that had on-site employees indicated that use of COVID-19 Rapid test kits was not applicable in their business.



**Chart 3**

**Reasons cited by businesses for not planning to adopt the use of COVID-19 Rapid Test Kits**



**Note:** Each bar gives the proportion of businesses that selected each reason as a pretext for not having plans to use COVID-19 Rapid test kits in the next three months.  
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Personal Protective Equipment Survey, August 2021.

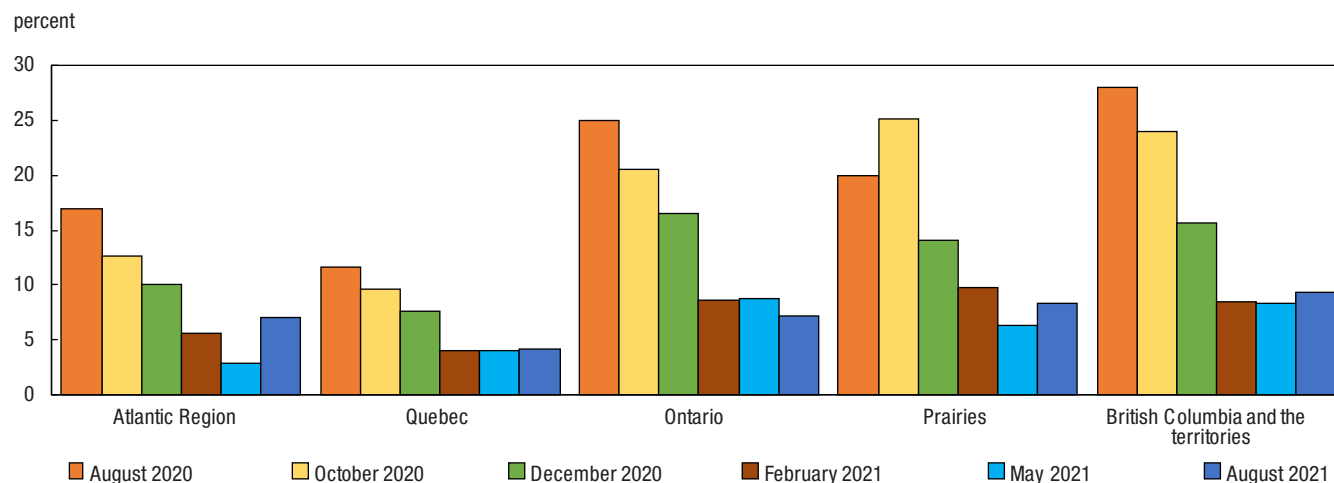
## Shortage expectations and demand for Personal Protective Equipment similar in August and vary across the provinces

Shortage expectations for PPE required by businesses across the provinces are considerably lower at this time compared to the same time last year. However, businesses are more likely to expect shortages in any one type of PPE that they require within the next three months than they were in May 2021. An increase in general concern for shortages was reported in all regions except Ontario—see chart 4.

The distribution of demand for PPE among businesses across the provinces in August 2021 is largely consistent with the results from the May 2021 PPES. Businesses in British Columbia and the territories (64.5%) continue to have the highest demand for PPE. They are followed by businesses in Ontario (63.3%), with businesses in Quebec (55.6%) and the Atlantic region (55.8%) having the least demand for PPE.



**Chart 4**  
**Proportion of businesses expecting a shortage in at least one PPE**



**Note:** Each bar gives the proportion of businesses that expect a shortage in the next three months for at least one type of PPE that they require, among businesses that need PPE.  
**Source:** Statistics Canada, Personal Protective Equipment Survey, August 2020, October 2020, December 2020, February 2021, May 2021, August 2021.

## Share of businesses involved in the manufacturing or distribution of personal protective equipment slightly increases

Just over one-in-twenty (5.4%) of the businesses in the manufacturing, retail trade and wholesale trade sectors were involved in the manufacturing or distribution of personal protective equipment in August 2021. This represents a 0.8 percentage point increase from the 4.6% reported in May 2021.

### Data sources

Data for this analysis come from the PPES for August 2021. This voluntary survey aims to collect information on private-sector businesses' supply, demand, use, and inventories of PPE. Along with the results of this analysis, these data are used to help the federal government model usage and inventories of PPE in Canada, and forecast potential shortfalls in these items. Results from the August iteration were based on responses from 5,509 businesses operating in Canada.