

STATCAN COVID-19:
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COVID-19 testing: Do Canadians plan to get tested and why?

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Release date: August 25, 2020



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Published by authority of the Minister responsible for Statistics Canada

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COVID-19 testing: Do Canadians plan to get tested and why?

by **Kristyn Frank** and **Rubab Arim**

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.



In the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, viral testing was limited in an effort to focus on providing care for infected individuals and protecting essential workers (Chung 2020). With increased availability of COVID-19 tests, provinces and territories have developed their own testing strategies based on local needs (Government of Canada 2020). Generally, provinces and territories have now expanded their testing criteria to include all individuals exhibiting symptoms associated with COVID-19, while some have also extended testing to asymptomatic individuals.¹

While access to COVID-19 testing has become more widely available, little is known about the extent to which Canadians intend to get tested for the virus and the reasons why they would request a test. Statistics Canada's recent crowdsourcing data indicated that less than half of participants (41.8%) either agreed or strongly agreed with mandatory random COVID-19 testing in Canada.² However, these findings cannot be generalized to the overall Canadian population because crowdsourcing data were not collected under a probability-based sampling design.

Given the role of testing in reducing the spread of the virus and informing public health measures (Government of Canada 2020), knowledge on Canadians' willingness to get tested for COVID-19, including their reasons, is important. Indeed, some individuals may not plan to get tested for various reasons ranging from personal concerns, such as a fear of being stigmatized (Kumar and Nayar 2020; Das 2020), to structural reasons such as an insufficient amount of paid sick days required for self-isolation (Berger et al. 2020; Heymann et al. 2020), even if they are symptomatic.

This study aims to shed light on the reasons why Canadians would get tested for COVID-19 if testing were widely available and examines whether certain groups are more likely than others to indicate that they would get tested.

Most Canadians would get tested for COVID-19 if symptomatic or in contact with others who were symptomatic

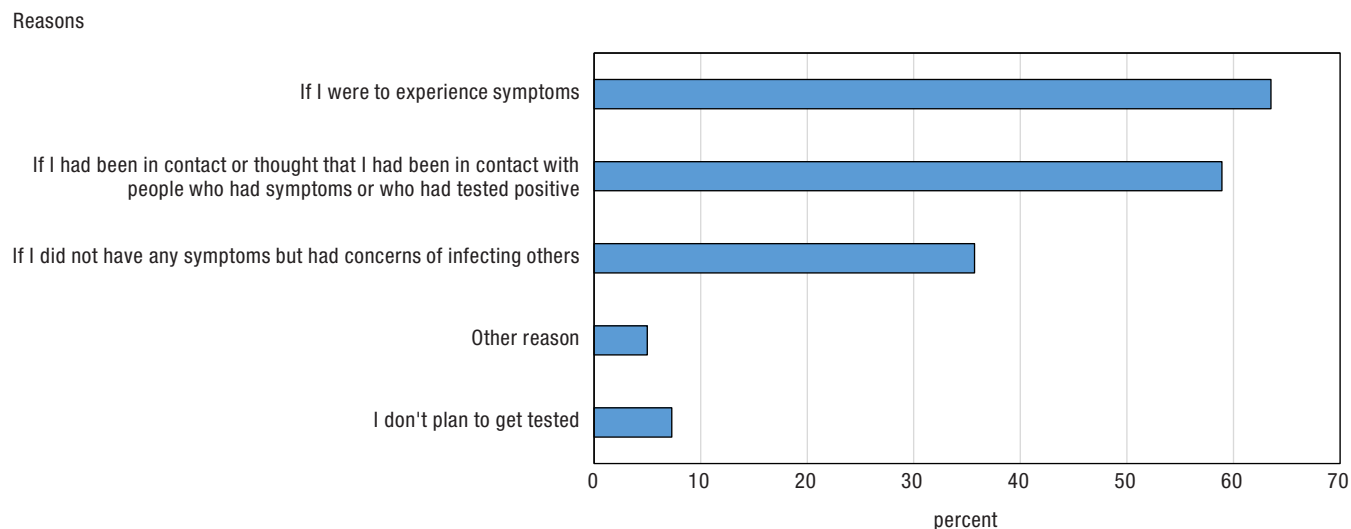
Results from the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS) show that the vast majority of Canadians (92.7%) reported that they would get tested for COVID-19 if testing were widely available. Fewer than 1 in 10 Canadians (7.3%) indicated that they did not plan to get tested (Chart 1).³

1. For example, Ontario (Government of Ontario 2020) and Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan Health Authority 2020).
2. An online crowdsourcing questionnaire conducted between May 26 and June 8, 2020 asked participants to indicate their level of agreement with the statement "Canadians selected at random should be required to take a COVID-19 test." Responses were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Few differences were observed across sociodemographic groups, with the exception of participants aged 65 or older indicating greater support than participants aged 15 to 24 (Frank and Arim 2020).
3. Note that the CPSS data are representative of the Canadian population living in the ten provinces. For further information about this survey, please refer to the Methodology section.

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Most Canadians would get tested for the COVID-19 virus if they were to experience symptoms (63.5%) or if they had been, or thought they had been, in contact with people who had symptoms or who had tested positive for COVID-19 (58.9%). Just over one-third of Canadians reported that they would get tested if they were not experiencing symptoms but had concerns about infecting others (35.7%).

Chart 1
Canadians' reasons to get tested for the COVID-19 virus, if testing were widely available



Note: Categories do not sum to 100% because respondents could select more than one response.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 3 (June 2020).

Women, university degree holders and workers absent from work more likely than others to get tested if symptomatic

The top three reasons for being tested for the COVID-19 virus were cited to varying degrees by different groups of Canadians. In particular, the proportion of Canadians indicating that they would get tested if they were symptomatic or if they were in contact with a symptomatic person varied across sex, education, and employment status (Table 1).

Women (66.5%) were more likely than men (60.3%) to indicate that they would get a COVID-19 test if they experienced symptoms (Table 1). Individuals with a bachelor's degree were more likely to indicate they would get tested for this reason than individuals with lower levels of education. Similar results were found by sex and education among those who intended to get tested if they were in contact with someone who was symptomatic or who had tested positive for COVID-19.

Differences were somewhat larger by employment status. About three-quarters of individuals who were employed but absent from work during the reference week, either because of business closures and restrictions due to COVID-19 (75.1%) or for other reasons (76.4%), indicated that they would be tested if they experienced symptoms compared to 63.2% of individuals who were employed and working during the reference week (reference group). Additionally, a higher proportion of individuals who were employed but absent from work during the reference week due to COVID-19 intended to get tested if they were in contact with someone who was symptomatic or who had tested positive (72.6%) than those who were employed and working (59.3%).

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Some regional differences were also apparent. For example, compared to Ontario (reference group), a higher proportion of Canadians residing in the Atlantic provinces and a lower proportion of residents of British Columbia indicated that they would get tested if they were to experience symptoms. Additionally, Quebec residents were less likely than Ontario residents to report that they intended to get tested if they were in contact with another person who was symptomatic or who had tested positive (48.4% and 61.1%, respectively).

Table 1
Reasons why Canadians would get tested for the COVID-19 virus if testing were widely available to all Canadians, by sociodemographic characteristics

	If I were to experience symptoms			If I had been in contact/thought that I had been in contact with people who had symptoms or who had tested positive			If I did not have any symptoms but had concerns of infecting others			I don't plan to get tested		
	percent	95% confidence limits		percent	95% confidence limits		percent	95% confidence limits		percent	95% confidence limits	
Sex												
Male (reference group)	60.3	56.4	64.1	54.0	50.0	58.0	35.1	31.3	39.1	8.4	6.4	11.0
Female	66.5*	63.1	69.7	63.7*	60.1	67.2	36.3	32.9	39.9	6.1	4.7	8.0
Age group												
15-24	70.0	59.1	79.0	64.8	53.1	74.9	41.6	31.2	52.8	5.7	1.9	16.0
25-44	64.9	60.9	68.8	60.4	56.1	64.6	38.2*	33.9	42.7	7.4	5.5	9.9
45-64	61.6	57.6	65.4	56.7	52.7	60.5	33.6	30.0	37.5	8.7	6.6	11.4
65+ (reference group)	59.6	54.6	64.3	56.0	51.3	60.6	31.1	26.5	36.1	5.8	4.0	8.3
Highest level of education completed												
Grade 13 graduate or less or some post-secondary education	61.2*	56.0	66.2	56.4*	51.0	61.6	33.5	28.5	38.8	7.7	5.3	11.1
Trades, Community college, CEGEP, or university certificate below Bachelor's degree	60.7*	56.7	64.6	56.2*	52.0	60.4	35.8	31.8	40.0	8.8*	6.7	11.5
Bachelor's degree (reference group)	68.6	64.0	72.9	63.9	58.8	68.7	35.8	31.4	40.5	5.0	3.3	7.4
Above Bachelor's degree	72.2	66.7	77.0	69.1	63.4	74.4	44.9*	39.2	50.9	4.5	2.5	7.8
Employment status												
Employed and at work at least part of the reference week (reference group)	63.2	60.0	66.4	59.3	55.7	62.8	35.2	32.2	38.4	6.4	5.0	8.0
Employed but absent from work for reasons not related to COVID-19	76.4*	61.8	86.7	57.4	42.3	71.2	32.9	21.2	47.1	x	x	x
Employed but absent from work due to COVID-19	75.1*	64.0	83.6	72.6*	61.7	81.4	44.2	31.5	57.6	6.0	2.6	13.4
Not employed	61.3	56.8	65.7	57.7	53.3	61.9	34.8	30.4	39.6	8.9	6.5	12.2
Marital status												
Married or living common-law (reference group)	62.9	59.9	65.9	58.0	55.0	61.0	35.2	32.2	38.4	7.1	5.7	8.9
Widowed, separated or divorced	55.8	48.4	63.0	52.0	44.8	59.2	33.6	26.8	41.1	8.9	5.9	13.3
Single, never married	67.8	61.6	73.5	63.8	57.6	69.6	37.8	31.9	44.0	6.8	4.0	11.3
Has a child under the age of 18 as of June 15th, 2020												
No (reference group)	61.8	58.7	64.7	58.5	55.5	61.4	35.9	32.9	38.9	7.1	5.8	8.7
Yes	66.7	62.0	71.1	59.7	54.3	64.9	35.5	30.7	40.6	7.5	5.0	11.1
Immigrant status												
Born in Canada (reference group)	63.5	60.7	66.2	58.1	55.2	61.0	34.4	31.7	37.3	7.1	5.6	8.9
Landed immigrant	63.6	57.7	69.2	61.0	54.3	67.3	39.8	33.5	46.5	7.7	5.2	11.3
Not a landed immigrant	61.2	43.5	76.4	65.0	46.8	79.7	37.3	22.4	55.0	x	x	x
Region of residence												
Atlantic provinces	72.5*	67.6	76.8	67.5	62.6	72.1	34.8	30.1	39.9	3.3*	2.2	5.1
Quebec	59.6	54.1	64.9	48.4*	42.3	54.6	31.7	26.3	37.6	8.5	6.0	12.1
Ontario (reference group)	65.5	60.5	70.2	61.1	56.0	65.9	36.2	31.7	41.0	6.7	4.4	10.0
Prairies region	67.0	62.1	71.5	63.6	59.3	67.6	34.9	30.5	39.6	7.8	5.7	10.5
British Columbia	55.0*	48.5	61.2	60.1	54.1	65.9	42.7	36.3	49.3	7.9	5.0	12.5

x suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the Statistics Act

* significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 3 (June 2020).

Some differences were also observed among Canadians who intended to get tested for COVID-19 if they did not have symptoms but were concerned about infecting others. For example, Canadians aged 25 to 44 years old were more likely to report an intention to get tested for this reason than Canadians aged 65 or older (38.2% vs. 31.1%). Moreover, compared to Canadians with a bachelor's degree only (reference group), a higher proportion of Canadians with a university degree above the bachelor's level intended to get tested out of concern for infecting others (35.8% and 44.9%, respectively).

Finally, some regional and educational differences were found among Canadians who did not plan to get tested for COVID-19 (Table 1). Notably, a higher proportion of Ontario residents (reference group) than residents of the Atlantic provinces did not plan to get tested (6.7% and 3.3%, respectively). Further, compared to Canadians with a bachelor's degree only (reference group), Canadians with trades, community college or CEGEP certificates or diplomas or university certificates below the bachelor's level were more likely to indicate that they did not plan to get tested (5.0% and 8.8%, respectively).

Methodology

This study uses data from the third wave of Statistics Canada's Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS), collected between June 15 and June 21, 2020. The CPSS is a new web panel survey administered by Statistics Canada that obtains information on how Canadians in the ten provinces are feeling about various aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 4,000 respondents participated in the third wave of the CPSS, which focused on respondents' perspectives on resuming economic and social activities during COVID-19. Because the CPSS targets a subsample of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) sample, demographic variables such as age, sex, and highest level of education were drawn from the LFS data.

Results from this study are based on the CPSS question: "If testing were widely available to all Canadians, why would you go to get tested for the COVID-19 virus?" Response categories included five specific reasons (Chart 1). Respondents were able to select more than one reason for getting tested for COVID-19.

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