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Navigating the second wave: Trends in businesses' needs for personal protective equipment since August

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Navigating the second wave: Trends in businesses' needs for personal protective equipment since August

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.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an unprecedented demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), resulting in global uncertainty about supplies and inventories. With the second wave emerging in the fall there has been an increase of COVID-19 cases across the country and subsequent mitigation measures to curb the spread. PPE supply chains continue to be important for Canadians and the Personal Protective Equipment Survey (PPES) provides an evolving portrait of demand for decision makers. This article examines the evolution of private sector businesses' demand for PPE since August and concerns about lack of supply using new data for October 2020 from the Personal Protective Equipment Survey (PPES). Additional insights reflecting the scope of demands arising from the second wave will be released in the next iterations of the survey.

Demand for PPE among businesses that needed, or expected to need, PPE declined slightly. A notable portion of businesses continue to have concerns with PPE shortages, in particular, the private health care and social assistance businesses, with increase in general concern for PPE shortages recorded in the prairie region. Insufficient products or equipment available from suppliers remain the leading cause of concern for shortages of required PPE.

Demand for personal protective equipment declines slightly in October

Just over two-thirds (66.3%) of businesses operating in the provinces and territories in October 2020 reported that they needed, or expected to need, PPE to operate in accordance with COVID-19-related public health guidance. This represents a 3.6-percentage-point reduction in demand for PPE among businesses compared with August (69.9%).¹ Demand for PPE continued to be highest among businesses in private health care and social assistance (91.9%), retail trade (81.0%), accommodation and food services (80.8%), and manufacturing (77.5%). However, demand in October was lower than in August as the tightening of public health measures in response to increasing COVID-19 cases in several provinces across the country stalled growth in these sectors (Statistics Canada 2020a, 2020b).

Close to four-fifths (77.6%) of the businesses that reported needing PPE required at least 4 of the 14 types of PPE covered in the PPES to operate safely.² The distribution of PPE most needed among businesses remained similar to that in August. Items related to cleaning surfaces and hands, along with masks, continued to be those demanded by most businesses, with businesses needing PPE most likely to require hand sanitizer (93.2%), disinfectant (79.3%), disinfectant wipes (67.4%), non-medical masks (64.0%), non-medical gloves (i.e., vinyl gloves, plastic gloves) (44.2%), nitrile gloves (41.0%) and surgical masks (37.5%). Among the businesses that needed at least four types of PPE, businesses in health care and social assistance (95.4%), accommodation and food services (83.4%), and those in wholesale trade (80.1%) were the most likely to need at least four types of PPE.

1. Since the August report does not include results from the territories, the changes in demand recorded in this paper are not directly comparable with those in August, though the trend is generally in the same direction.

2. These include 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.

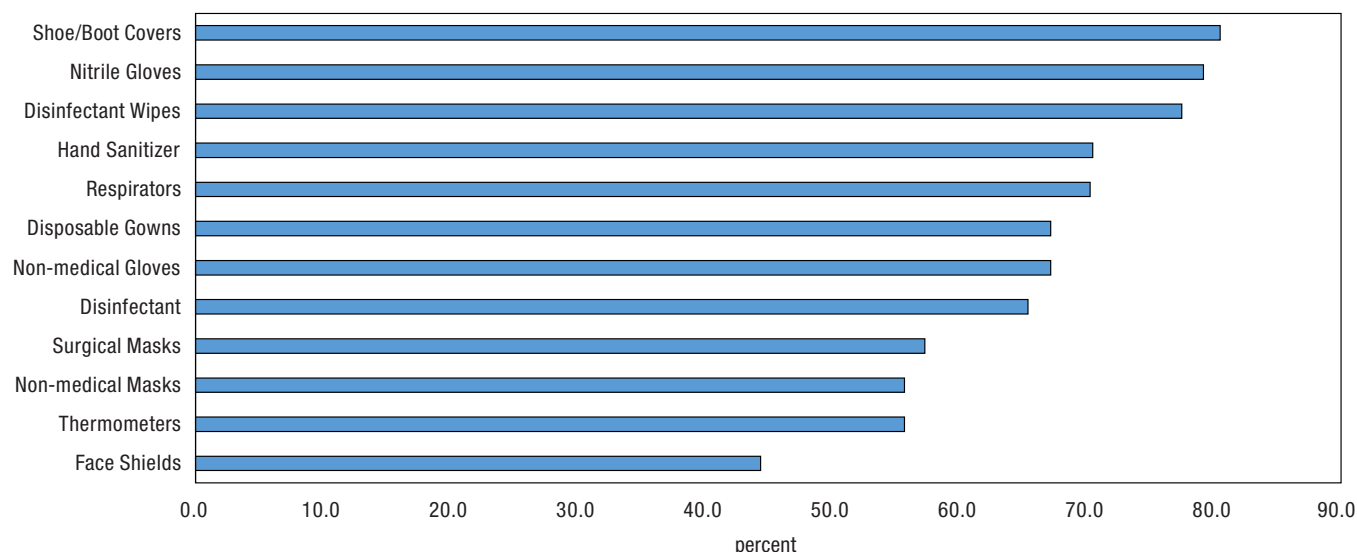


Two-fifths of businesses are concerned about personal protective equipment shortages

Close to two-fifths (39.1%) of businesses that reported requiring at least one type of PPE to operate in October indicated that they were concerned about potential shortages in at least one type of PPE in the next three months. These were consistent with results regarding concerns about potential shortages expressed in August. Three-fifths (60.9%) of businesses did not expect a shortage of any type of PPE that they needed, also consistent with August results.³

For the businesses concerned about shortages in PPE those in private health care and social assistance were more likely (40.8%) to expect a shortage in any one type of PPE that they required. These were followed by businesses in accommodation and food services (22.6%), and manufacturing (21.6%). Among the different types of PPE required, businesses were more likely to expect a shortage in respirators (25.0%), disinfectant wipes (17.2%), nitrile gloves (16.4%), and disposable gowns (14.0%). Over two-thirds of the expected shortages in disinfectant wipes, nitrile gloves, respirators, and shoe or boot covers stemmed from lack of or insufficient products available from suppliers.⁴

Chart 1
Proportion of businesses expecting a shortage of personal protective equipment because of insufficient products from suppliers



Note: Each bar gives the proportion of businesses that expect a shortage of PPE because of insufficient products/equipment available from suppliers, among businesses that expect a shortage of PPE. Values for Eye goggles and Resusable gowns are suppressed.

Source: Statistics Canada, Personal Protective Equipment Survey, October 2020.

The public health restrictions imposed to curb the spread of COVID-19 have led to the slowdown of economic activity of Canadian businesses (Statistics Canada 2020a). Across businesses, small businesses were found to have been disproportionately negatively impacted by these measures compared with large or medium businesses

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.
 4. Other reasons given by respondents, include delay in receipt of supplies from suppliers, no supplier identified, and insufficient purchasing power to buy quantities of PPE needed to secure the suppliers.



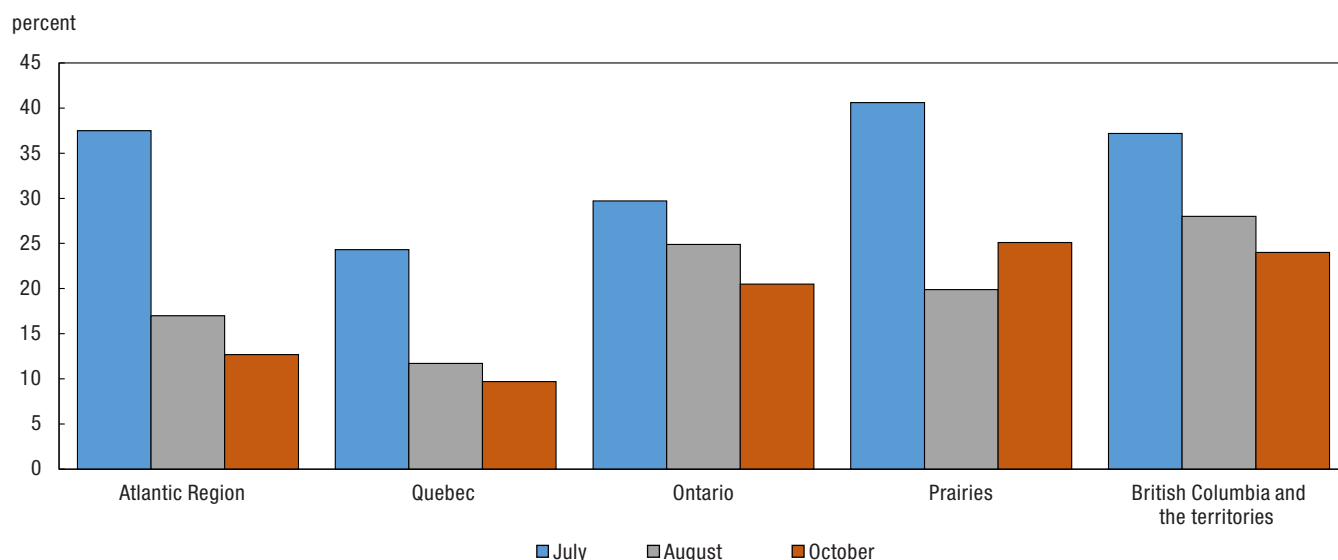
(Gu, 2020). This raised concerns that small businesses might have difficulties sourcing funds to acquire the required PPE for them to operate safely in accordance with the public health restrictions. However, data collected in the PPES show that small businesses were less likely to need PPE than medium or large businesses, with 66.2% of small businesses requiring PPE to operate, compared with 85.9% of medium and large businesses.

Similar to the August results, lack of funds to purchase PPE was not the main reason explaining small businesses' expectation of a shortage in one or more types of PPE that they required. Most small businesses expected a shortage in PPE as a result of lack of availability from suppliers. By contrast, in August, medium and large businesses that expected a shortage in one or more types of PPE did so as a result of insufficient funds; in October, the most common reason for expecting a shortage among medium and large businesses was as a result of insufficient products or equipment available from suppliers.

Personal protective equipment shortage expectations across the provinces

In general, businesses' expectations of possible shortages in any one type of PPE that they required within the next three months have been steadily declining across the provinces. By October, 9.7% of businesses in Quebec that required PPE to operate indicated that they expected to have a shortage in the next three months of at least one type of PPE that they required. The declining trend was consistent across all regions with the exception of the prairies where 25.1% of businesses expected to have shortages in PPE in the next three months, a 5.2-percentage-point increase from August.

Chart 2
Proportion of businesses expecting a shortage in at least one PPE



Note: Majority-owner owns 51% or more of the business. Respondents were asked if the business or organization expected to experience difficulty in procuring various personal protective equipment or supplies.

Source: Statistics Canada, Personal Protective Equipment Survey, July/August/October 2020.



Share of businesses involved in manufacturing and distribution of personal protective equipment

10.8% of businesses in manufacturing, retail trade, and wholesale trade were involved in the manufacturing and distribution of PPE in October.⁵ A 0.6-percentage point increase compared with August (10.2%). About 0.6% of businesses in Canada were involved in the manufacturing of PPE in October, a small change from 0.5% in August. Of the businesses involved in the manufacturing of PPE in October, 17.4% retooled their equipment to allow for the manufacturing of PPE.

Data sources

Data for this analysis come from the PPES for October 2020. This voluntary survey aims to collect information on private sector businesses' supply of, demand for 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. The results for the October iteration of the survey are based on responses from 3,761 businesses operating in Canada.

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Gu, W. 2020. [Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Canadian Businesses across Firm Size Classes](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2020017-eng.htm). Economic Insights, no. 119. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 11-626-X. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2020017-eng.htm>.

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5. On average, businesses in the manufacturing sector were more likely to be involved in the manufacturing of PPE than those in any other sector. Businesses in retail trade and wholesale trade were more likely to be involved in the distribution of PPE.