

## Vast majority of Canadians say vaccines should be mandatory for school aged kids

*But among those with children under 12, one-fifth say it should be up to parents whether to vaccinate*

**February 21, 2019** – As public health workers [in Canada and around the world](#) work to quell a new rash of measles outbreaks this winter, and as heated debated between pro- and anti-vaccine parents rage on social media and in real life, the latest public opinion survey from the Angus Reid Institute finds the vast majority of Canadians (70%) saying vaccinations against common deadly diseases should be a requirement for children entering school.

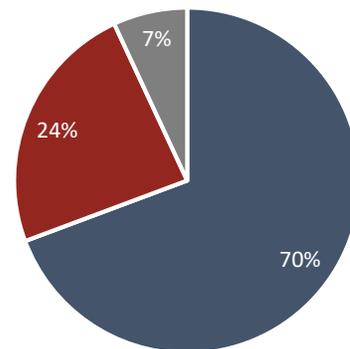
And while more than four-in-five (83%) say they would vaccinate their children without hesitation, a significant segment – one-in-five who have children under the age of 12 (20%) – say vaccinations should be a parent's choice, and not mandatory.

Further, 29 per cent are of the view that the science on vaccinations isn't "quite clear"; a finding that increases with the age of respondents.

### More Key Findings:

- Nine-in-ten Canadians (92%) say that vaccinations are effective at protecting the community from diseases (59% very effective, 32% mostly effective).
- The view that vaccinations should be mandatory for children to attend school crosses political lines. At least two-thirds of each of the major federal parties potential supporters say this should be the standard (CPC 66%, Liberal 80%, NDP 77%)
- One-quarter of Canadians say (26%) they are concerned about the risk of side effects for those being vaccinated. Seven-in-ten (68%) say this is not something they worry about

**Views on mandatory vaccinations for school children (All Respondents)**



- Vaccinations should be mandatory
- Vaccinations should be the parent's choice
- Not sure

### METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from February 1 – 6, 2019 among a representative randomized sample of 1,723 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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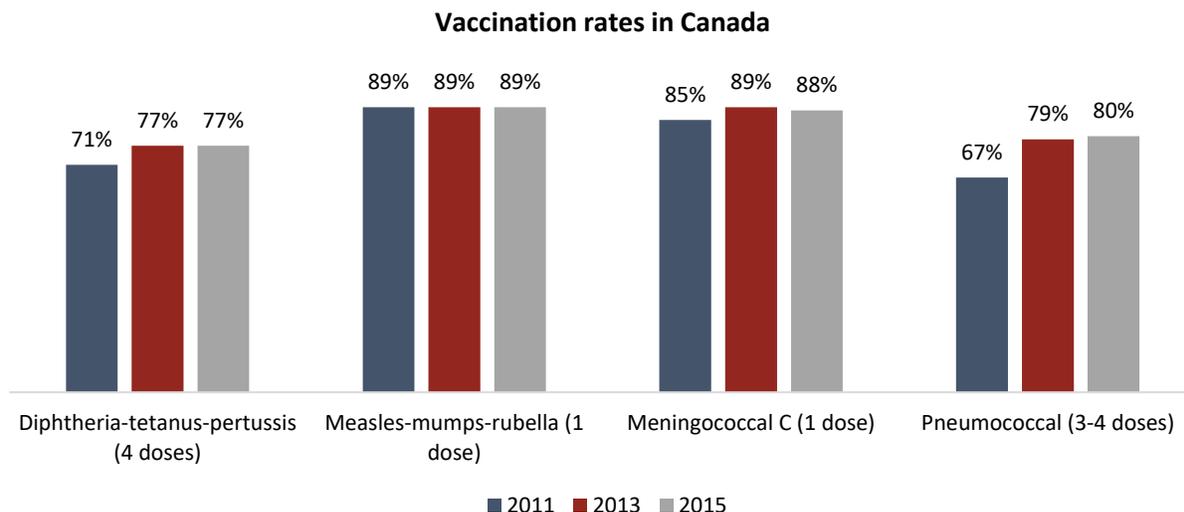
**Eight-in-ten would vaccinate their children**

Vaccinations are not new. Some historical [sources suggest that](#) the Chinese may have been inoculating in some form against smallpox as early as 200 BCE. In the 1770's during the American Revolution George Washington [demanded that his troops be inoculated](#) against smallpox, calling it a greater threat than "the Sword of the Enemy".

But for all the progress made in disease minimization and eradication in the past 100 years – smallpox was [eradicated in 1977](#) – debates continue in modern times over the benefits and risks of vaccination.

Fueled by lower than suggested vaccination rates, measles has recently broken out, both in the [United States](#) and [Canada](#). Physicians have expressed concern as rates have fallen below 'herd immunity' levels – a sufficient number of the population vaccinated to prevent a particular disease from spreading. For example, the herd immunity level for measles is [95 per cent](#).

In Canada, as of 2015, 89 per cent of children were vaccinated against measles, mumps and rubella, by the age of two, while 88 per cent had received the meningococcal C vaccine at the same age. The rates for multi-dose vaccines is slightly lower, but still hovers around four-in-five, based on the most recent available data from the Public Health Agency of Canada.

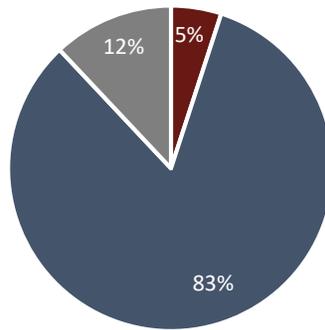


These rates closely align with the number of Canadians who say they would vaccinate their children without reservation (83%). Notably, 12 per cent of Canadians say they remain unsure about this, while five per cent are against vaccinating their children outright.

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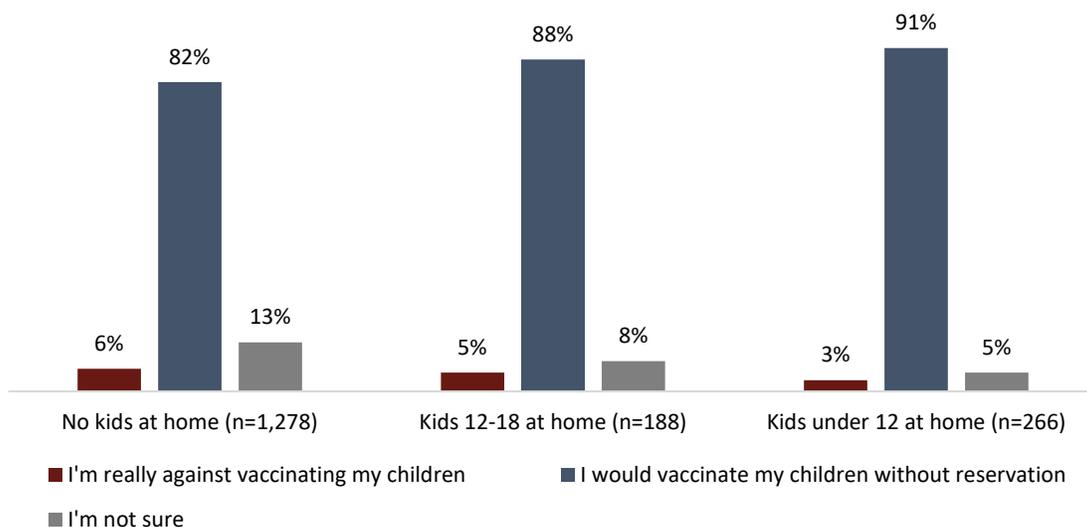
**Thinking about your own children, how do you feel about vaccinating them? Even if you don't have children please let us know how you would treat them if you did:  
(All respondents)**



- I'm really against vaccinating my children
- I would vaccinate my children without reservation
- I'm not sure

Among those with children at home, the percentage who say they would vaccinate without reservation rises to nine-in-ten:

**Thinking about your own children, how do you feel about vaccinating them? Even if you don't have children please let us know how you would treat them if you did**

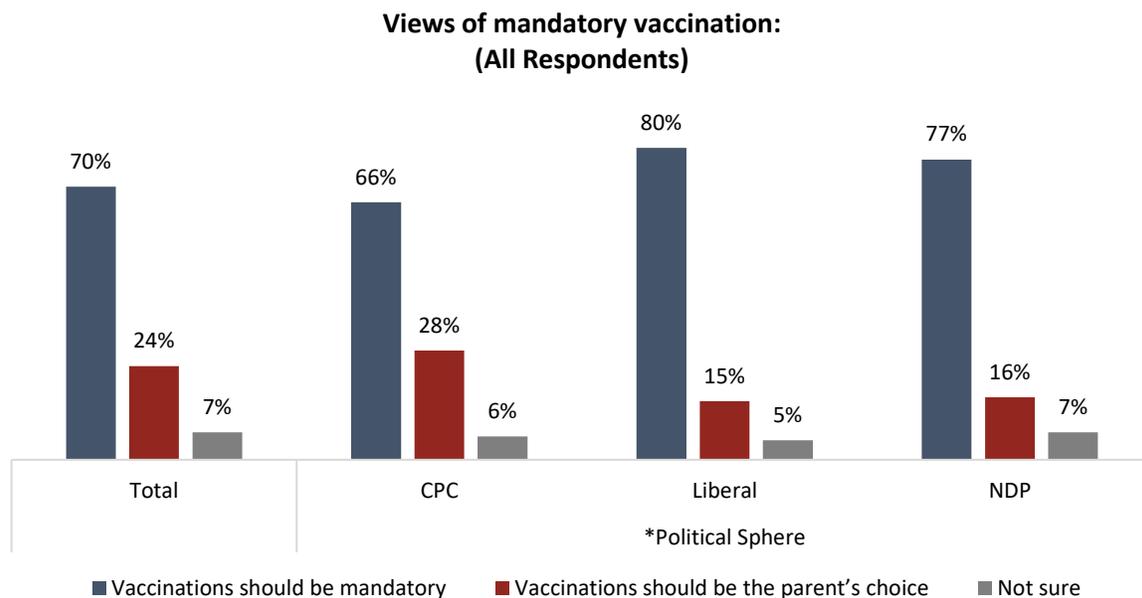


**Fewer, but still seven-in-ten say vaccines should be mandatory**

Often, philosophical, religious or personal reasons are cited when parents exempt their child from vaccinations. For example, in 2015, 15 per cent of parents told Health Canada that they believed chiropractic practices and naturopathy were viable alternatives to vaccination – something Health Canada reports as “not true”.

This has led some observers and experts to question whether vaccinations should become mandatory. Some jurisdictions require proof or immunization before enrolment, but vaccines remain the choice of parents across the country.

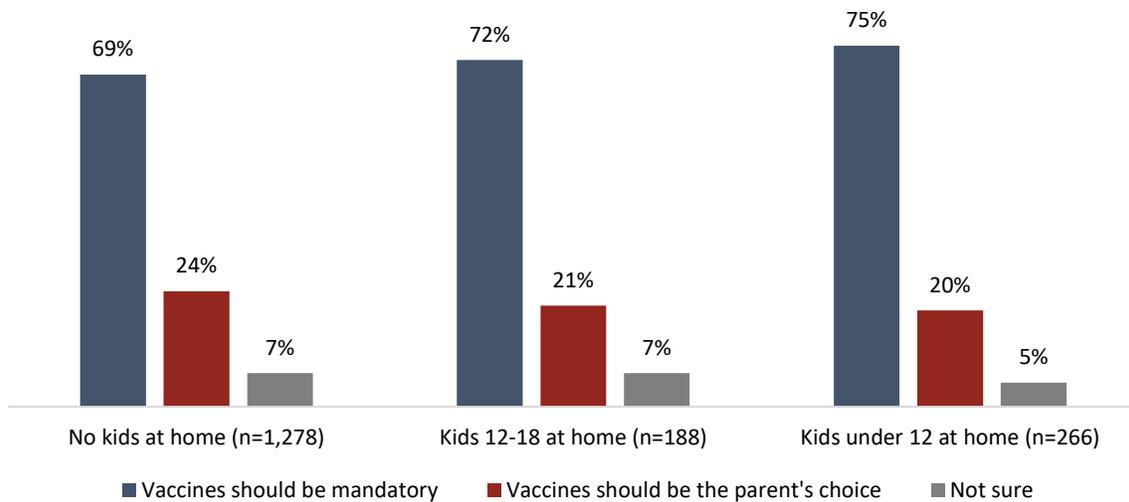
Seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) say that they would be comfortable with mandatory vaccinations, while one-quarter (24%) say it should remain a parent’s choice. Canadians within the Conservative political sphere (see methodology at end of report) are twice as likely to say that the choice should be the that of the parent:



\*see end of report for Political Sphere Methodology

On this question, there is little difference between Canadians who have children at home and those who do not. Seven-in-ten among each group support mandatory vaccination:

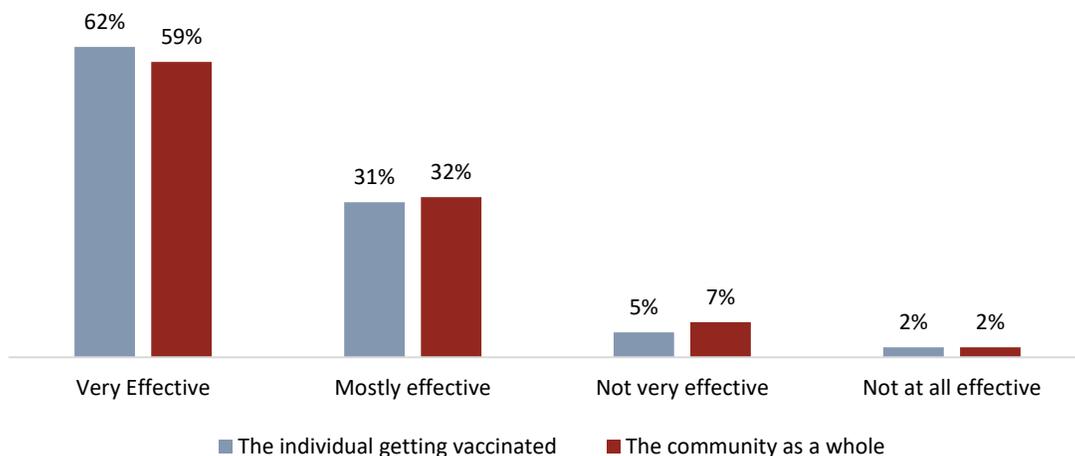
**Views of mandatory vaccinations:**



**Strong agreement with effectiveness**

When considering the impact on both the individual being vaccinated and the community as a whole, more than nine-in-ten Canadians believe each is effective at reducing the prevalence of diseases:

**As a general rule do you think these vaccinations are effective at reducing the chances of catching these diseases for...  
(All Respondents)**



Vaccines have proven effective at minimizing a number of diseases. Smallpox has been eradicated entirely, while polio now afflicts only 500 or so individuals globally each year. There are difficulties however, in controlling diseases in the face of vaccination fears. After Doctor Andrew Wakefield stoked fears against the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination in 1998, many parents became concerned that MMR had a connection with causing autism. Wakefield was removed from the General

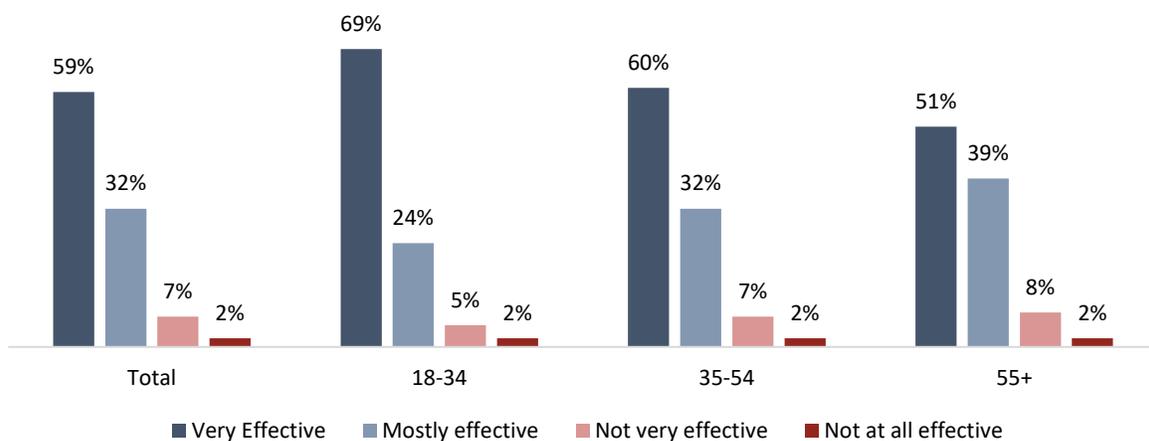
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Medical Council in the United Kingdom for unethical behaviour, and is no longer allowed to call himself a doctor. [No scientific link between MMR and autism](#) has been established. The fallout however, and lower rates of MMR uptake, have led to a [significant increase in measles](#) in recent years.

Views on this issue are consistent across age group, with effectiveness relatively unquestioned in Canada. The intensity of belief in effectiveness is higher in younger Canadians compared to their older peers:

**As a general rule do you think these vaccinations are effective at reducing the chances of catching these diseases for the community as a whole  
(All Respondents)**



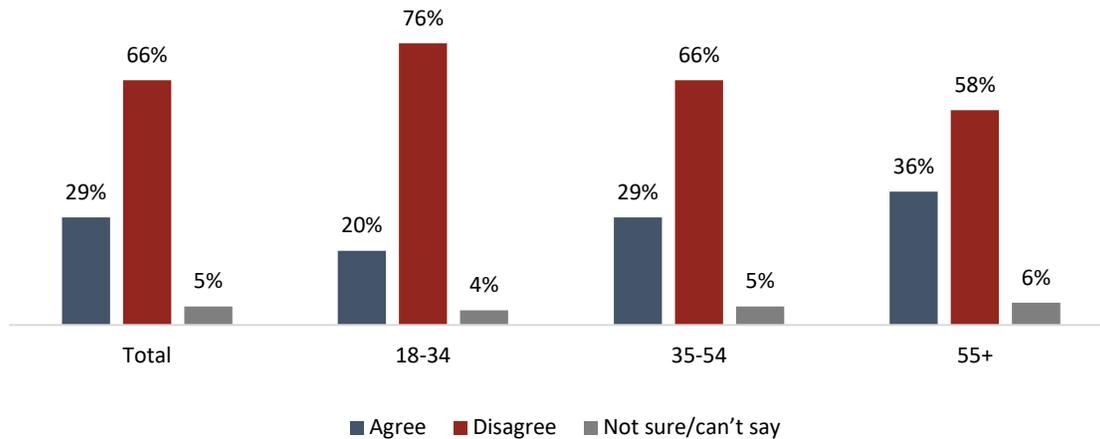
**One-quarter say the science isn't quite clear, worry about side effects**

The opinion that Canadians hold with respect to effectiveness in vaccinations does not preclude many from worrying about risks. Indeed, three-in-ten (29%) say that they do not believe the science on vaccinations is quite clear. Skepticism is lowest among younger respondents, and rises with age. More than one-in-three Canadians over the age of 55 (36%) say the science is unclear.

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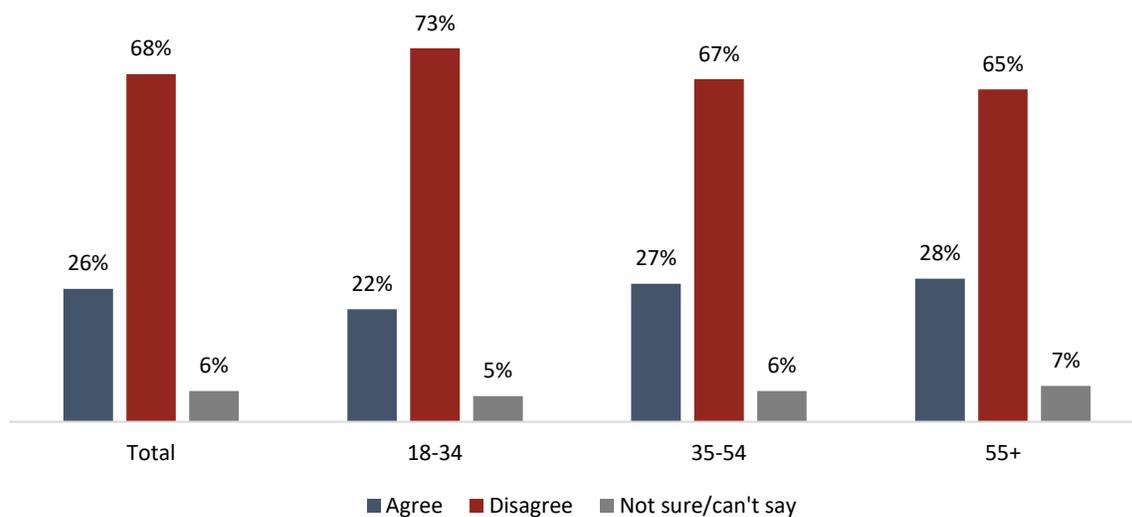
**Agree vs Disagree - The science on vaccinations isn't quite clear  
(All Respondents)**



Approximately the same number (26%) to say that they believe there is a serious risk of side effects from being inoculated. The Centre for Disease Control highlights [a number of the associated side effects](#) from vaccination. They note that while minor side effects can be common and vary for each inoculation, the possibility of severe injury is remote.

At least one-in-five Canadians across all age groups carries these concerns:

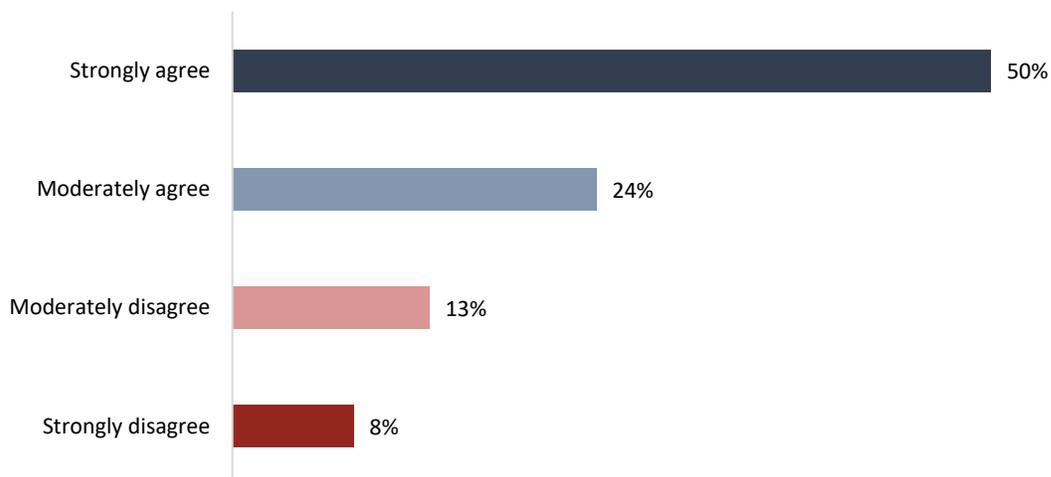
**Agree vs Disagree - I believe there is a real risk of serious side effects from  
these vaccinations  
(All Respondents)**



**But most still say not vaccinating children is irresponsible**

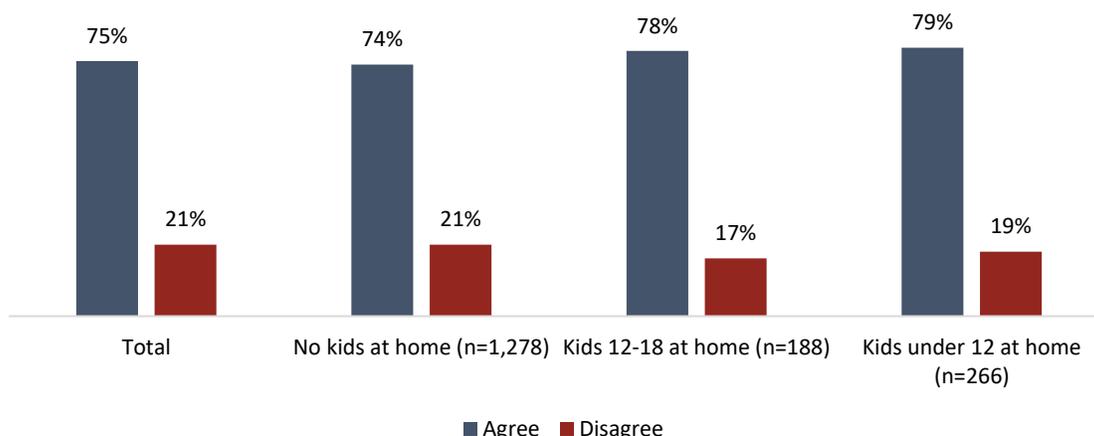
While the potential for side effects gives some Canadians pause, the overwhelming majority say that people who are campaigning against childhood vaccination are irresponsible. Three-quarters (75%) hold this opinion, while one-in-five say they disagree (21%):

**Agree vs Disagree - People against childhood vaccination are irresponsible  
(All Respondents)**



Canadians with young children at home are slightly more likely to say that anti-vaccination advocates are irresponsible, though the presence of children in the house generates minimal impact on responses to this question:

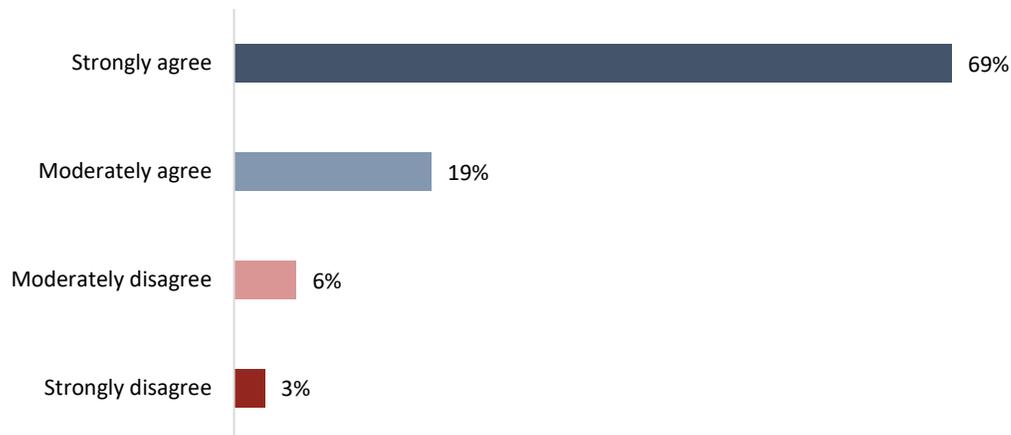
**Agree vs Disagree - People against childhood vaccination are irresponsible:**



As noted previously, one of the concerns with low vaccination rates is the absence of 'herd immunity'. Lower rates increase the likelihood that diseases will spread among the population. This is a particularly

resonant area of concern for Canadians. Nine-in-ten (88%) say that it is important to have children vaccinated because it protects the community more broadly:

**Agree vs Disagree - It is important that parents get children vaccinated because it protects the community as a whole (All Respondents)**



**Political Sphere Methodology**

Rather than rely on respondents’ potentially faded memories regarding their vote in the 2015 federal election, ARI researchers constructed a measure of political partisanship based on willingness to vote for the main federal parties in a future election under their current leaders.

The question specifically asked respondents how likely they would be to vote for “The Liberal Party led by Justin Trudeau,” “The Conservative Party led by Andrew Scheer,” and “The New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh” in a future election. The response options were “definitely support” the party and leader in question, “certainly consider” them, “maybe consider” them, and “definitely not even consider” them.

Respondents choosing either of the first two options (definitely support or certainly consider) are considered to be a party’s “sphere.” They represent potential supporters of that party, not necessarily decided voters.

It should be noted that the categories are not mutually exclusive. Respondents were asked to give an opinion on each of the main parties and had the option to say they would “certainly consider” each one. Thus, many respondents may appear in the spheres of multiple parties.

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

*For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).*  
*For detailed results by political sphere and kids at home, [click here](#).*

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