

Coronavirus Reckoning: As outbreak hits home, Canadians brace for worse on health, economic fronts

Half fear illness will severely harm someone close; 65% worry for personal finances amid chaotic market

March 18, 2020 – The threat, severity and infection rates of what had initially been a new viral outbreak a world away has in the last two weeks caused local, provincial and federal governments to take steps unseen before in the lifetimes of millions in this country, the magnitude of which has left many reeling.

As the COVID-19 virus has spread across the country and claimed more lives, a solid majority of Canadians (68%) now say they view the threat of a coronavirus outbreak as serious, representing more than a fifty per cent increase in the number saying so just ten days ago.

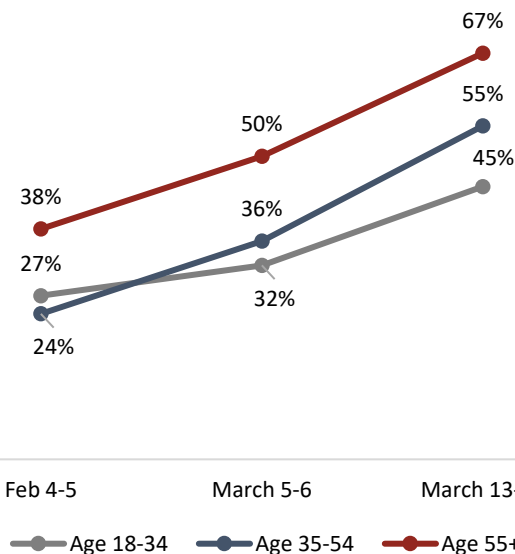
These are among the latest findings of the latest tracking survey data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute.

That said, fully one-in-three (32%) (representing approximately 10 million Canadians) continue to view the situation as one that's been "overblown". Those who say this are more likely to either be under the age of 35, a middle-aged male, or someone who voted for the Conservative Party of Canada in the last federal election.

Meantime, anxiety over personally falling ill – or seeing it happen to a friend or family member – is also dramatically increasing. Where three-in-ten were worried for themselves at the beginning of February, twice as many are now (57%). Where fewer than half (39%) were worried about family and friends six weeks ago, fully three-quarters (76%) are now.

Against this backdrop, a country that can sometimes be [skeptical of its institutions](#) is placing more trust in them than before. More Canadians are expressing trust in the information news organizations and officials are offering about the crisis than they were a week ago. More Canadians are inclined to say their provincial governments are doing a good job handling the crisis over the same period of time. And in every region of the country with the exception of Quebec (where sentiment is unchanged) more people say the same about the federal government's performance.

Percentage concerned about personally becoming sick from this new coronavirus



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from March 13 – 16, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,593 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 +/- 2.5 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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More Key Findings:

- Nearly one-in-five (17%) Canadians worry that if they contract COVID-19, their illness will be severe or life threatening. Considering the increased vulnerability to the virus of older Canadians, this sentiment almost doubles (33%) among those over the age of 65.
- Enhanced handwashing is the new normal: the number saying they are doing this more has doubled between the beginning of February and now (41% to 82%, respectively).
- That said, Canadians are more circumspect over whether such behaviour changes will have a significant impact on slowing or stopping the outbreak: one-quarter (24%) say their efforts will have a “huge” impact. Most (65%) say there is only so much they can possibly do.

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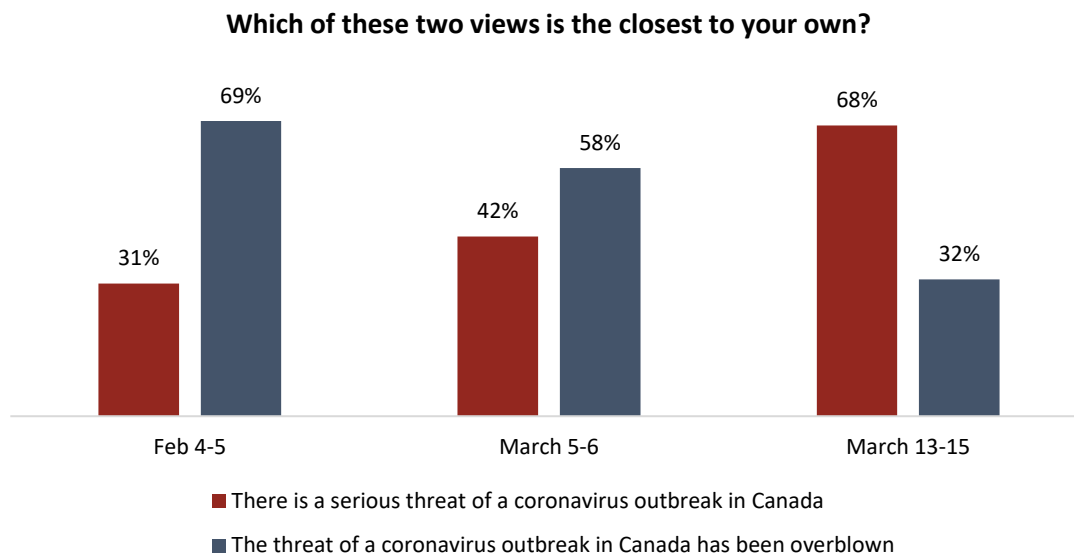
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Part One: Tracking concern level and confidence in healthcare

As the world scrambles to slow the outbreak of COVID-19 and deal with its current impacts, Canadian opinions continue to evolve. In three waves of tracking since the beginning of February, they have become increasingly convinced that the virus is a serious threat in Canada.

Outbreak now 'serious threat' for two-thirds

In early February, just 31 per cent of Canadians felt that Canada was at serious risk. That number has risen to 68 per cent now. Firm majorities of all major demographic groups are now in agreement that the risk is serious in this country ([see detailed tables for more](#)).

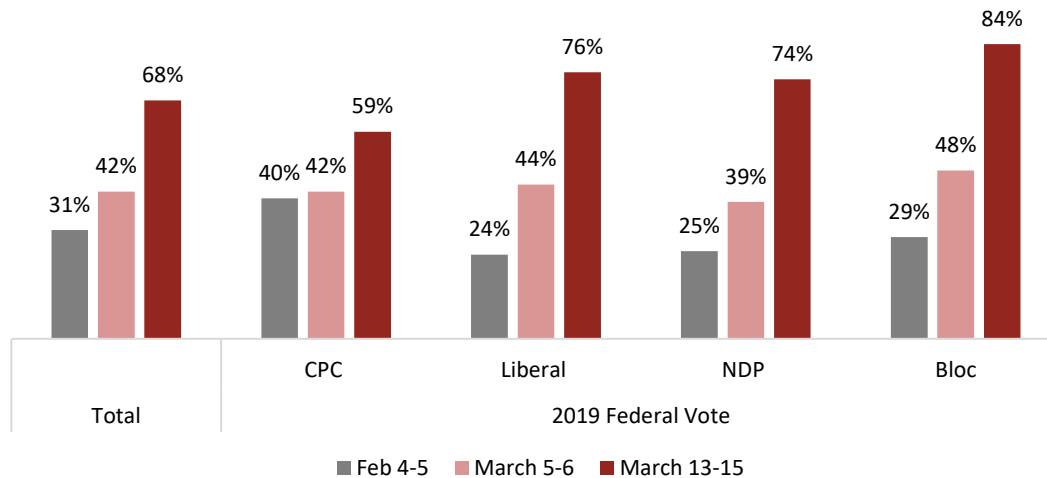


As noted, while this view is more suppressed among millennials (those 35 and under) and men aged 35-54, the most striking driver of perceptions of gravity appears to be political preference. Past Conservative voters were initially most concerned about the risk, but that sentiment has slowed within that group. This group is now considerably less likely than past Liberal and NDP voters to say that they feel the situation is serious:

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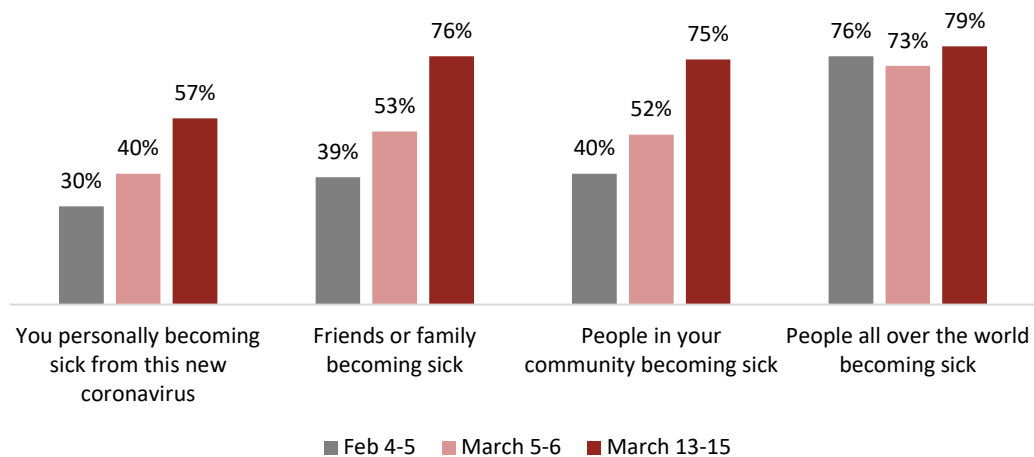
Percentage saying "There is a serious threat of a coronavirus outbreak in Canada"



Personal concern reaches majority, community concern widespread

As cases of the coronavirus spread to each region of the country, the perhaps inevitable rise of personal concern has followed. That said, the primary concern for Canadians continues to be external, looking to the potential impact on friends and the family they hold close:

How concerned are you about each of the following...?

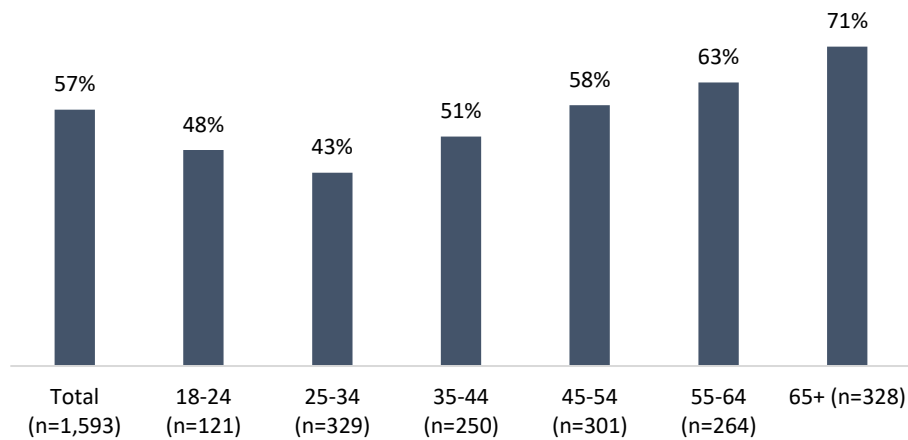


Personal concern continues to be highest among those most at risk, older Canadians. 71 per cent of those 65 and older are worried, while this drops below a majority for people under 35:

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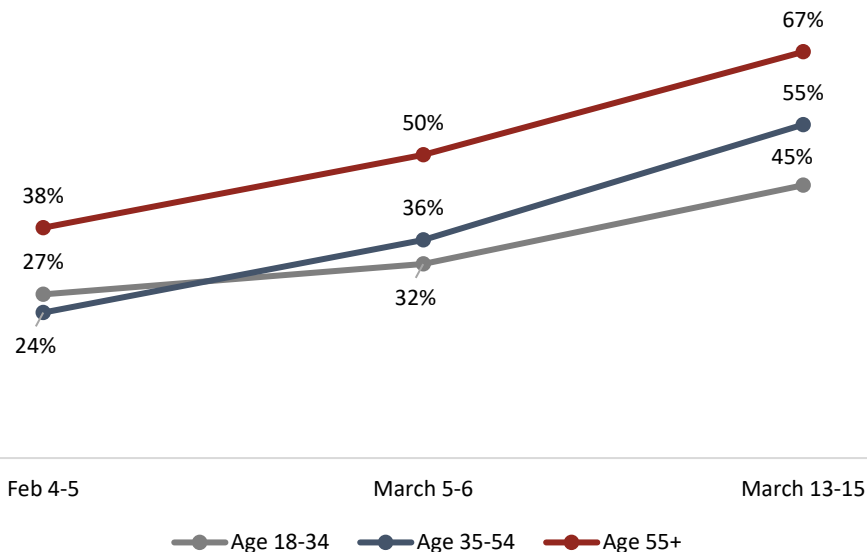
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**Personally concerned about contracting COVID-19
(All Respondents, n=1593)**



Looking at this over time and by age group, concern has more than doubled among those aged 35-54, and indeed increased across all age groups:

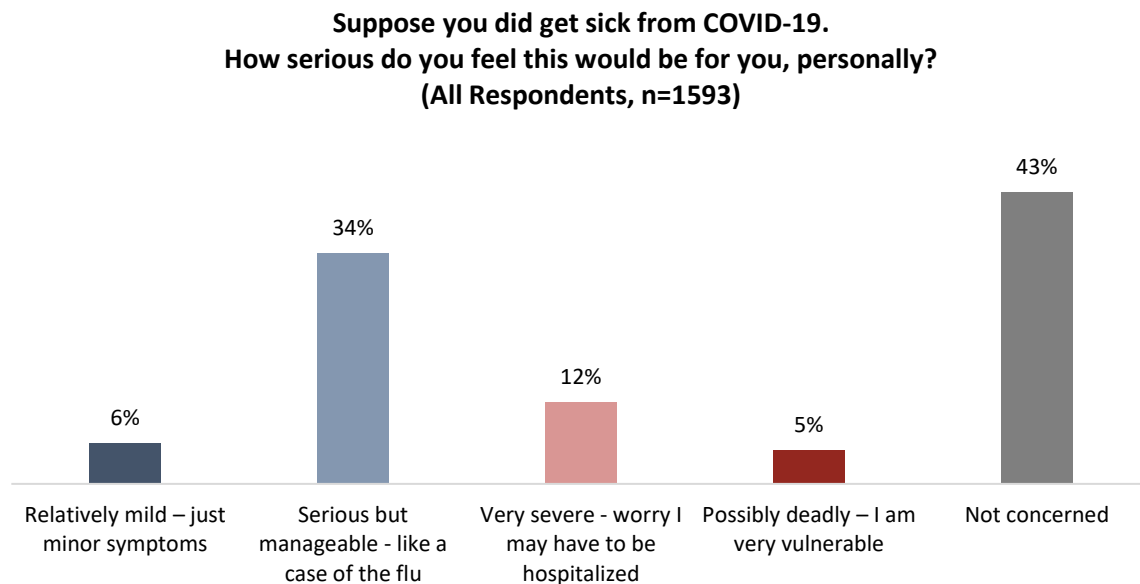
Percentage concerned about personally becoming sick from this new coronavirus



Close to one-in-five feel they are at high risk if infected

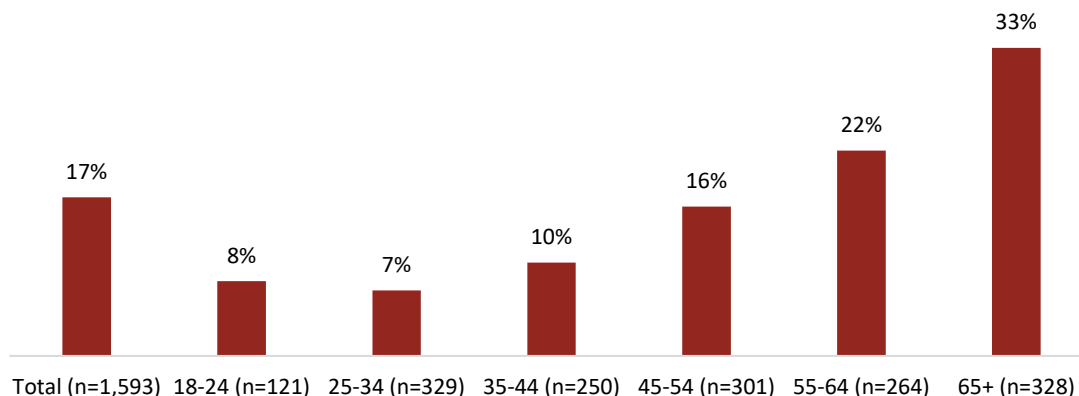
Not all Canadians face the same level of risk if they are infected. Public health officials point out that some may be asymptomatic and face few, if any, health problems. Others, with increased risk factors such as respiratory conditions, or compromised immune systems, face more serious consequences. With this in mind, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians who expressed concern over falling ill from COVID-19 what risk they'd face *if* it happened.

Overall, five per cent of Canadians say that they are worried that they may face the worst possible consequence if they contract COVID-19, while 12 per cent say they fear hospitalization:



Consider again the heightened anxiety levels for Canadians as age rises. One-in-three (33%) of those ages 65 and over worry about hospitalization or death as a consequence of contraction:

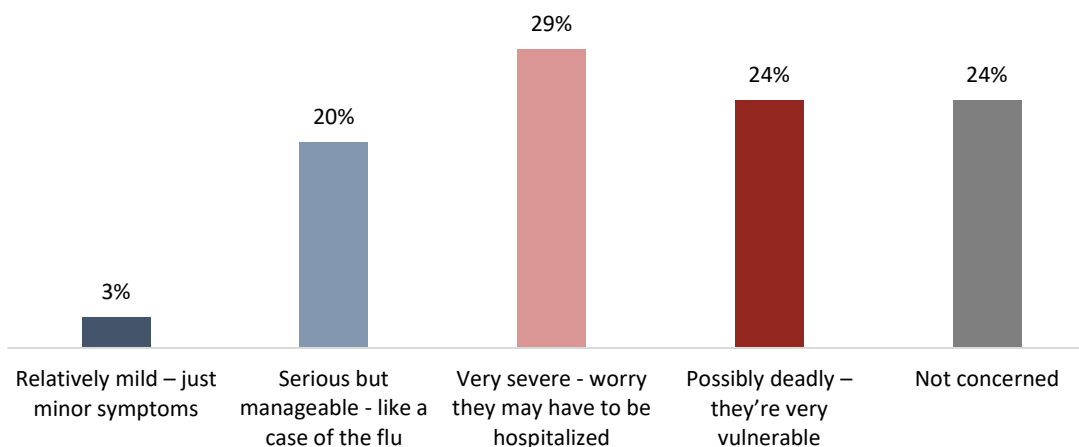
Net: Fear they would face a very severe/possibly deadly situation if they contract COVID-19



Half are concerned about risk for a close friend or family member

Canadians are more worried about friends and family than they are about themselves. Asked to think about the person they know who is most at risk, one-quarter (24%) say that they are worried about the prospect of death while three-in-ten (29%) say that person could be hospitalized:

**Thinking of the person that you know who may be most at risk, how serious do you feel this would be for them?
(All Respondents, n=1593)**



Part Two: Real life effects of the outbreak

Dramatic increase in personal financial anxiety

Beyond health concerns, the financial fallout of COVID-19 is becoming clearer for many Canadians. Two-thirds (65%) now say that they are worried that their personal finances may be hurt. Concerns about the

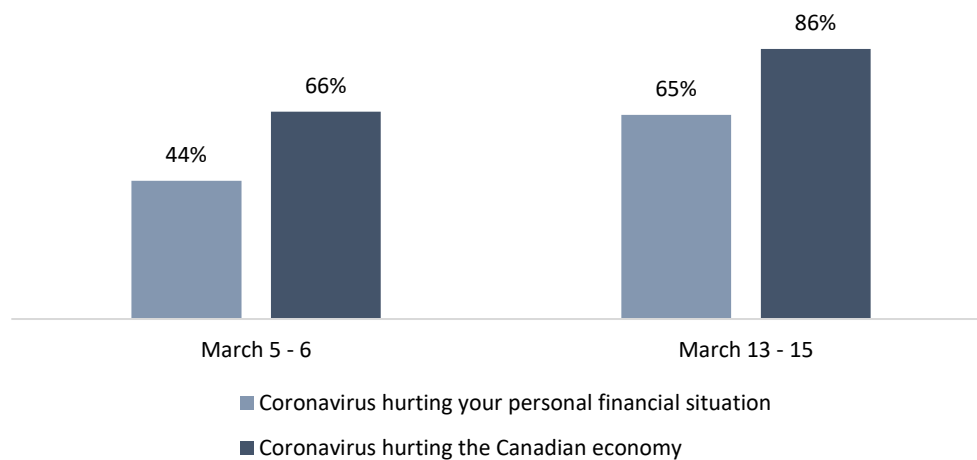
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national economy has jumped as well. In addition to two interest rate cuts by the bank of Canada, the federal government recently [announced](#) financial aid and a forthcoming multi billion dollar stimulus package in order to combat the hard times people are anticipating:

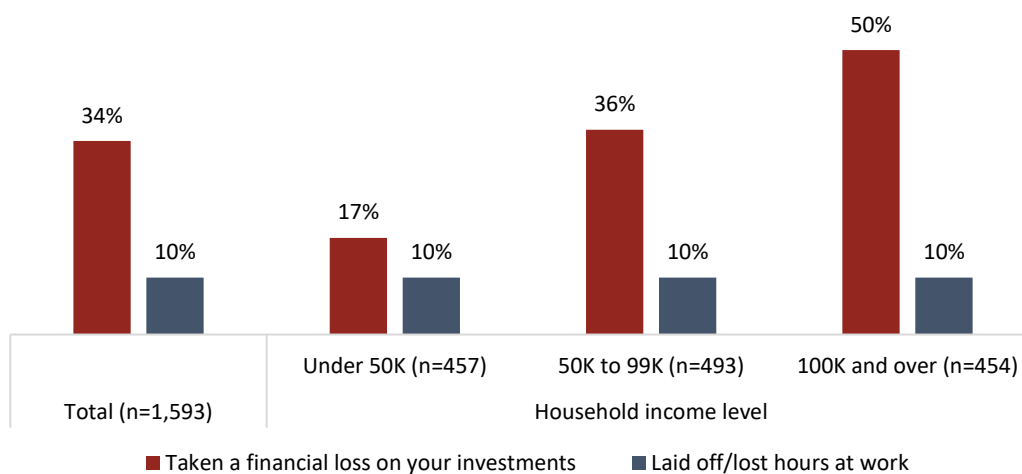
Concern with respect to each of the following:



One-in-three have already taken financial loss

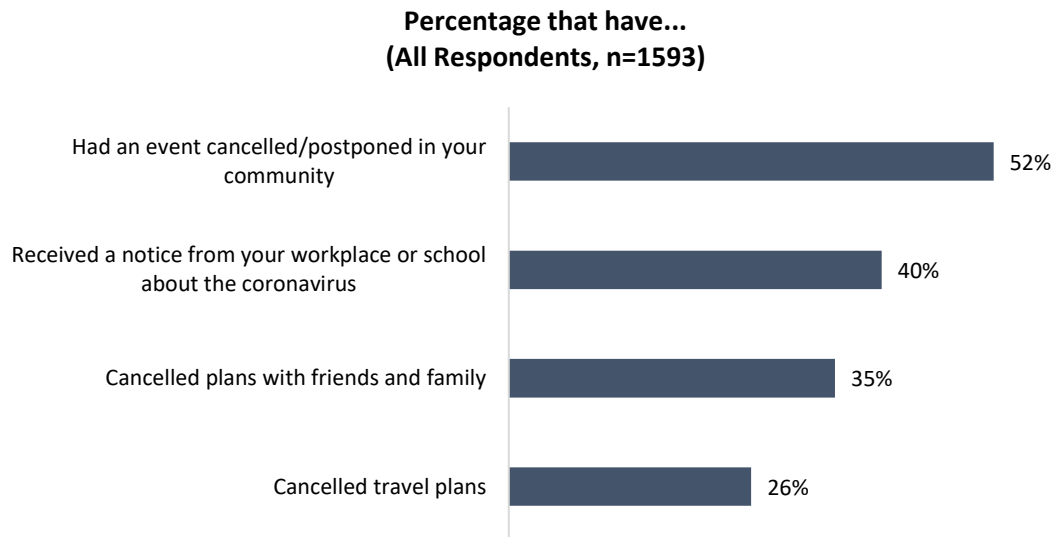
As the outbreak has worsened, so too have financial markets, experiencing some of their [worst days ever](#). It is perhaps, then, unsurprising that half of higher income Canadians report their investments have taken losses. In addition to this, one-in-ten, regardless of income report having lost hours at work, a number that is sure to rise as stores shutter industries retrench:

Percentage that have...

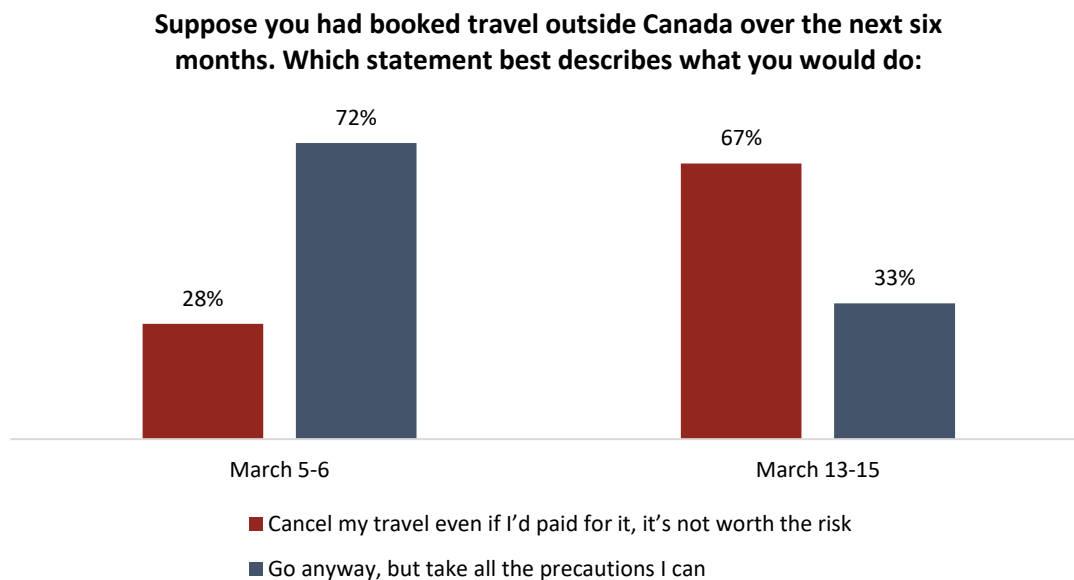


Cancelling plans

COVID-19 has affected nearly all Canadians. The most common interruption to daily life has been the cancellation of community events. This is something half of Canadians have experienced (52%), while significant numbers have cancelled plans with friends or family or cancelled travel plans:



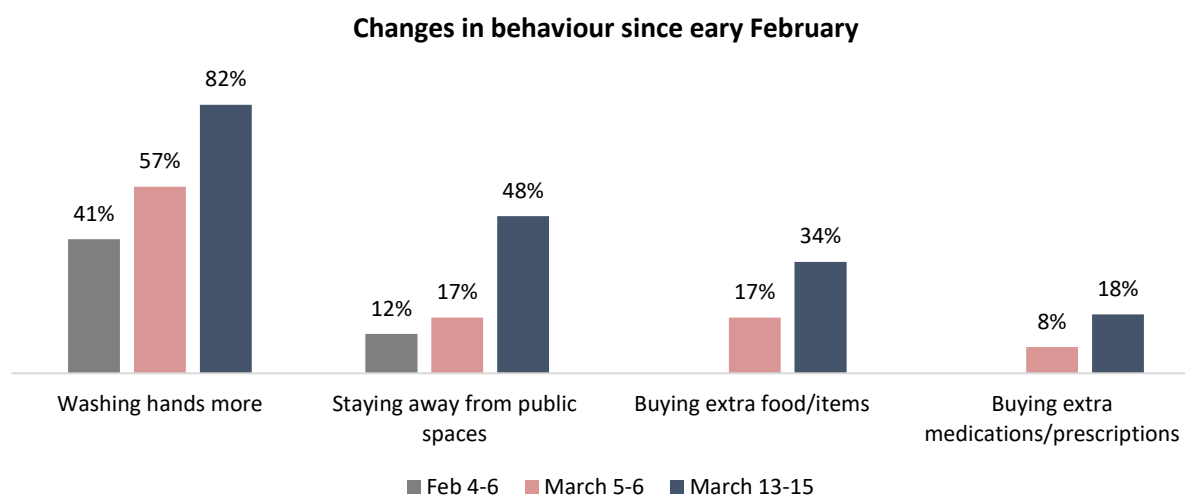
While one-quarter say they have already cancelled plans to travel, the survey data reveal this trend is likely to continue. Asked whether they *would* cancel a planned trip in the next six months, the percentage who would has increased more than twofold since March 6. Two-thirds (67%) would now not go on said trip. The federal government has advised Canadians to do just that – [cancel their travel plans](#) – and has asked those travelling abroad currently to [return home](#) as soon as possible:



Part Three: Changing behaviours

Half now avoiding public spaces, handwashing spikes

Since the outbreak began, public health officials have asked Canadians to take extra precautions, with one action at the forefront of spread mitigation: hand washing. The uptake on that action may have started slow, but four-in-five (82%) are now heeding that advice. They are also far more likely now to be avoiding public spaces and loading up on extra household items. In each case, the number doing so has at least doubled in the past 10 days.



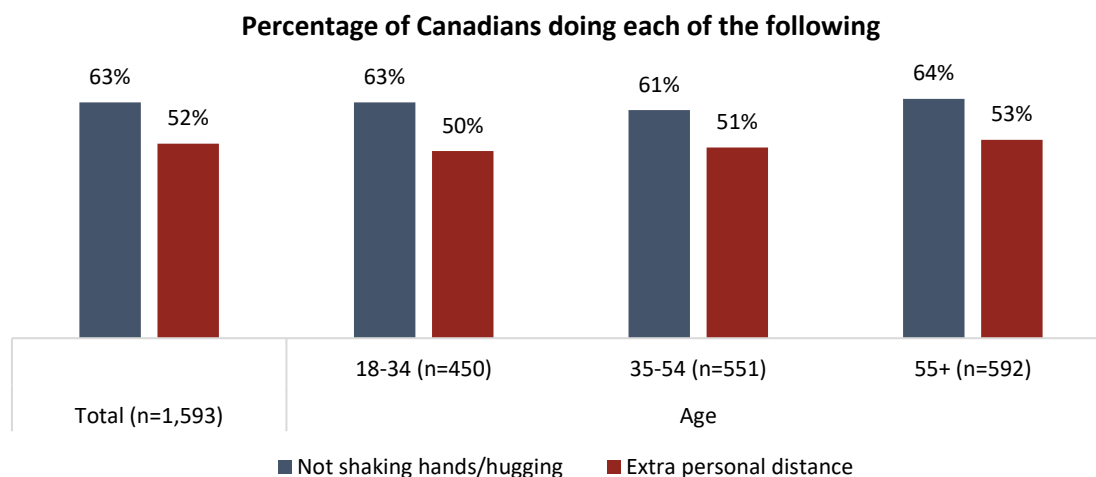
Avoiding contact, keeping distance

Canadians have also been advised to 'social distance'. That is, not only avoiding large crowds, but minimizing contact with other people and keeping some space between them and others if they do go out in public. These changes have been identified as key in 'flattening the curve' – a term public health officials are using to describe the flattening of the spread within populations.

As noted, half of Canadians (48%) are avoiding public spaces. In addition, at least half are engaging in these social distancing practices as well:

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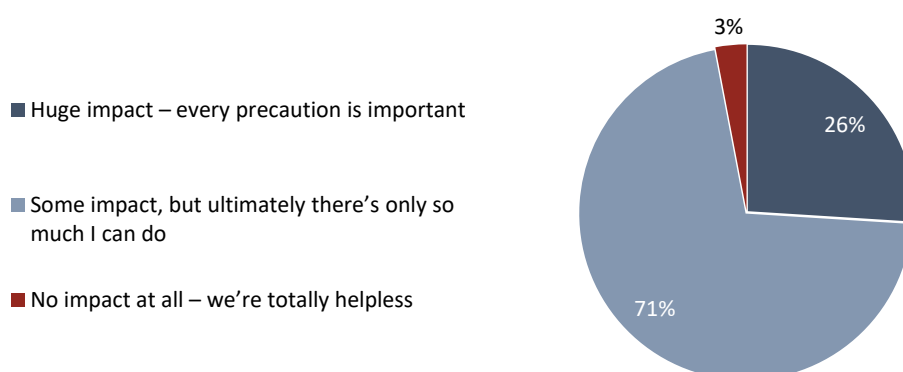
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How much faith do Canadians have that it will help?

Those who have changed some aspect of their behaviour adjustments were further asked whether they feel these changes are ultimately valuable, and it appears that many are lukewarm about what they can accomplish by doing their part. Seven-in-ten (71%) say they feel it will have at least some impact, while one-quarter (26%) say the impact will be huge. That said, almost no one believes that these efforts are entirely in vain:

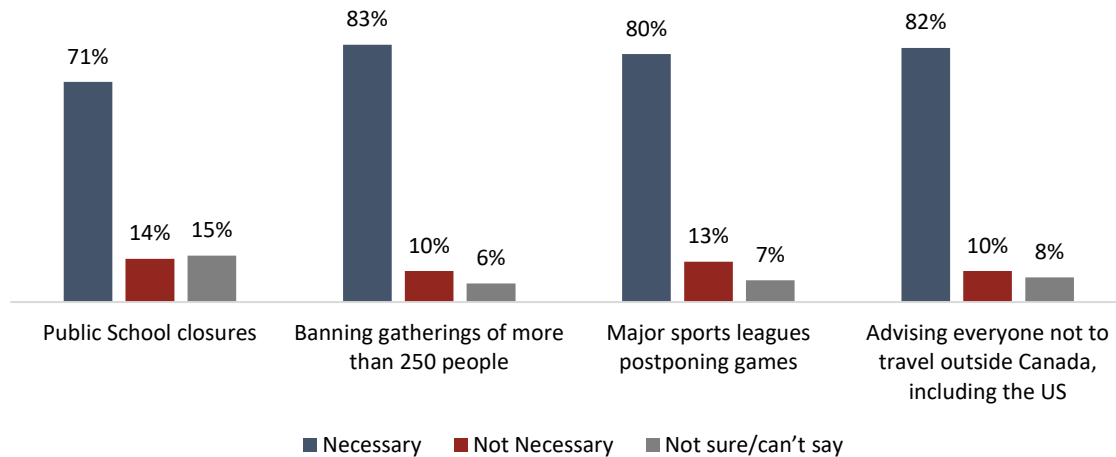
**And how much do you think these changes in your own personal behavior will have any impact on reducing the spread of the coronavirus?
(Among those who have changed behaviour, n=1466)**



Canadians favour banning large gatherings, suspending sports

Greater restrictions on gatherings have been announced across the country over the past two weeks. Provinces have closed schools, travellers have been told to stay in the country, and large public gatherings have been advised against. In each case, the Canadian public has been largely receptive ([see detailed tables](#)):

**For each, please tell us whether you think they are
(All Respondents, n=1953)**

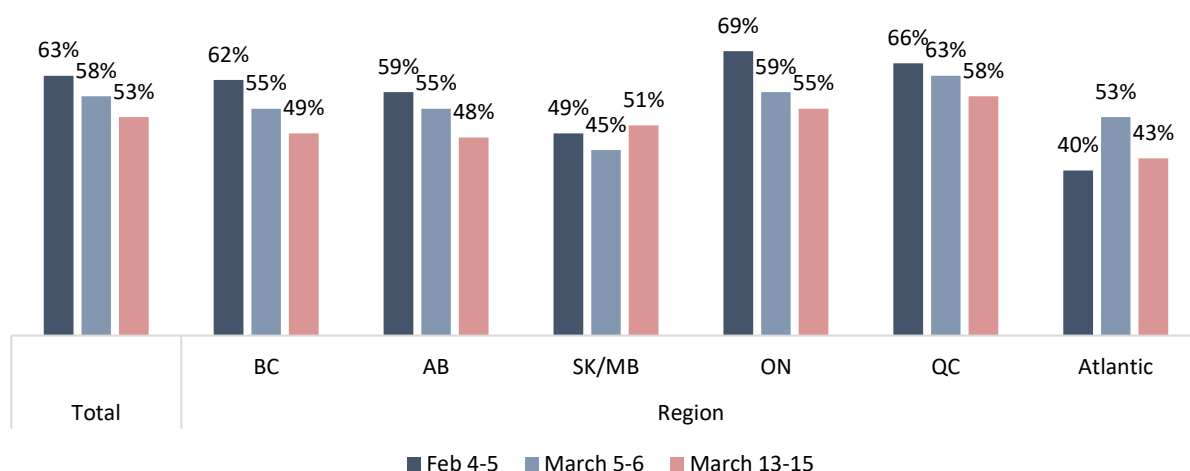


Part Four: Performance of government and health care

Confidence in community health systems slips

It would appear that watching the COVID-19 spread globally and cases increase at home is having an effect on Canadian confidence in their own local health care systems. As news of the coronavirus in Canada first made headlines at the beginning of February, nearly two-thirds (63%) professed confidence in hospitals and clinics to cope with what might come. Nationally, that hovers at the halfway mark now:

Confidence in community healthcare system's preparedness to deal with new cases of coronavirus



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Provincial performance

While confidence in community healthcare is wanes and anxiety grows, Canadians appear quite satisfied that their provincial governments are doing all they can to manage the situation. In a period where many provincial governments have been politically unpopular, a firm majority of residents in every region of the country give their provincial leadership kudos for the work done thus far. In Quebec, an overwhelming 89 per cent say Premier Francois Legault’s government has done a good job, while 73 per cent say this of the Horgan government in B.C.:

[Your provincial government] And, do you think the following are doing a good or bad job handling this whole issue regarding the coronavirus?							
	Total	Region					
		BC	AB	SK/MB	ON	QC	ATL
Net: Good job							
March 5-6	51%	62%	40%	42%	46%	60%	52%
March 13-15	69%	73%	61%	62%	59%	89%	68%
Net: Bad job							
March 5-6	26%	20%	32%	26%	32%	19%	22%
March 13-15	21%	14%	30%	26%	29%	6%	27%

Federal performance

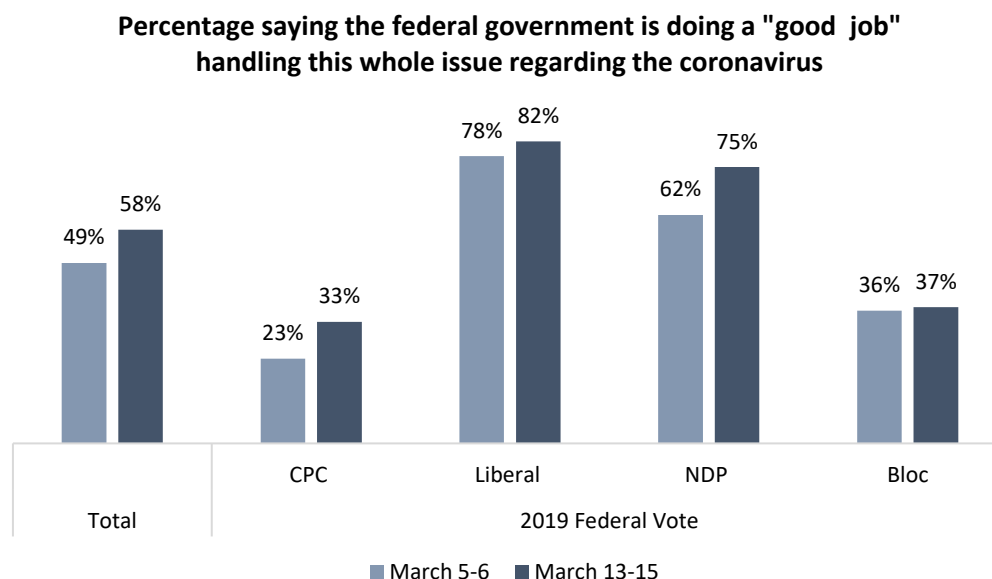
At the federal level, the number of those saying the Trudeau Liberal government has done a good job of handling the outbreak has risen, while the number saying it has done a poor job remains at one-third:

[The federal government] And, do you think the following are doing a good or bad job handling this whole issue regarding the coronavirus?							
	Total	Region					
		BC	AB	SK/MB	ON	QC	ATL
Net: Good job							
March 5-6	49%	57%	38%	44%	49%	51%	52%
March 13-15	58%	67%	45%	54%	62%	52%	68%
Net: Bad job							
March 5-6	34%	25%	45%	40%	33%	32%	34%
March 13-15	34%	23%	47%	37%	29%	43%	26%

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Notably, the assessment of a “good job” done by the Trudeau government had increased even among those who voted for the CPC in October. One-in-three past Conservatives (33%) now say this, up ten points from the first week of March:



Part Five: Information

Who do Canadians trust?

The response to the outbreak and communicating it has taken on unprecedented importance in the last weeks. Every day, various levels of government have updated Canadians based on guidance from public health officials in this country, and from the World Health Organization. At this stage, Canadians appear to be more trusting of the information they are receiving than they were 10 days ago. Local health officers are most trusted, as nine-in-ten Canadians (87%) express moderate to high levels of trust in them:

[Trust a great deal/ a fair amount] When it comes to information about the coronavirus, how much do you personally trust the information that you are seeing from each of the following:

	March 5-6	March 13-15
The news media	49%	55%
Your local health authority/medical health officer	79%	87%
The World Health Organization	76%	83%
The federal government	58%	67%
Your own provincial government	61%	73%

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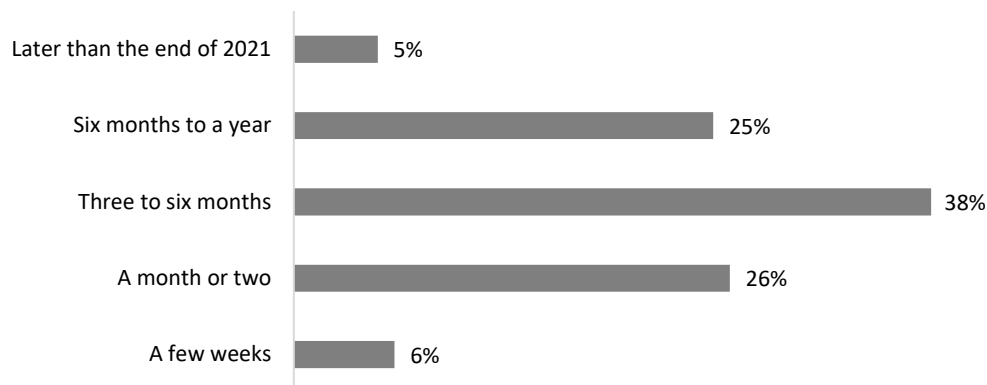
Part Six: When will it end?

How long until 'back to normal'?

The forecast for just how long the COVID-19 outbreak will last and how many people will be affected remains in flux. The Centre for Disease Control [has recommended](#) that groups of 50 or more people not convene for at least eight weeks in the United States, and Canadian officials are monitoring the situation day-by-day.

When Canadians are asked how long they anticipate it will be before things are back to what they consider to be normal in Canada, the most common response is three to six months. Two-in-five (38%) feel this is the timeline. One-quarter feel it will be a month or two (26%) and the same number anticipate it taking six months to a year (25%):

Based on whatever you've read, seen or heard, when do you anticipate things will be "back to normal" in Canada?



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)

For detailed results by age, [click here.](#)

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