

COVID-19 & return to normal: when restrictions lift, most would wait at least two weeks before resuming routines

Parks and workplaces top the list of places Canadians would like to see re-opened first

April 20, 2020 – As debates simmer over how to continue to squash the spread of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 without completely depriving the economy of oxygen, most Canadians are girding themselves up for at least another four to eight weeks of social distancing – if not longer.

The latest public opinion survey from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians have a palpable sense of apprehension at the prospect of their own provincial governments lifting the restrictions that have all but ended most public contact over the last six weeks. Indeed, three-quarters (77%) say it is too soon to begin relaxing social distancing requirements and business closures.

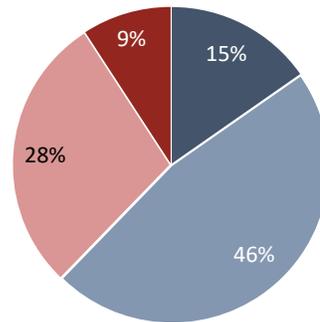
And while a significant segment of Canadians (39%) say both the impacts of the shutdown on the protection of public safety and on businesses and the economy should carry equal weight with policy makers, the tilt towards erring on the side of reducing infection risk remains (52% would give this factor the most weight). As well, majorities in each part of the country say their own province should lift restrictions either between one to two months from now (46%) or three to six months from now (28%).

Further, the prospect of an officially sanctioned relaxing of distancing rules would prompt very few Canadians to resume former routines immediately. Most say they would wait, for a couple of weeks, or until the number of new COVID-19 known cases in their provinces had declined significantly, before ending self-isolation.

More Key Findings:

- Nearly half of Canadians (46%) say restrictions in their own province should lift sometime in May or June, with another 28 per cent saying that they should stay in place until between July and October

When should your provincial government start lifting restrictions on businesses, institutions, and places that have been closed since the outbreak began?



- A few weeks - Late April
- A month or two – May/June
- Three to six months – between July and October
- After October/when we get a vaccine

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from April 15 – 17, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,912 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 +/- 2.2 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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- Concern about personally contracting the virus has fallen for the first time since early March, dropping from 73 per cent two weeks ago to 61 per cent. Canadians are primarily concerned about spreading the virus to others (70%) rather than becoming sick themselves (30%)
- Two-thirds of Canadians (67%) say that the federal government has done a good job of handling the COVID-19 outbreak. Slightly fewer, but still a majority (62%) say this of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

About ARI

*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.*

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Part One: Concern about COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak continues to dominate the lives of Canadians, affecting their incomes and their stress levels as public health officials implore individuals to maintain social distancing guidelines and government’s attempt to bridge the economic chasms between previously expected income and new realities for households.

Angus Reid Institute has been tracking levels of anxiety at the personal and family level for several weeks now and finds that for the first time since early February concern levels have dropped, rather than risen.

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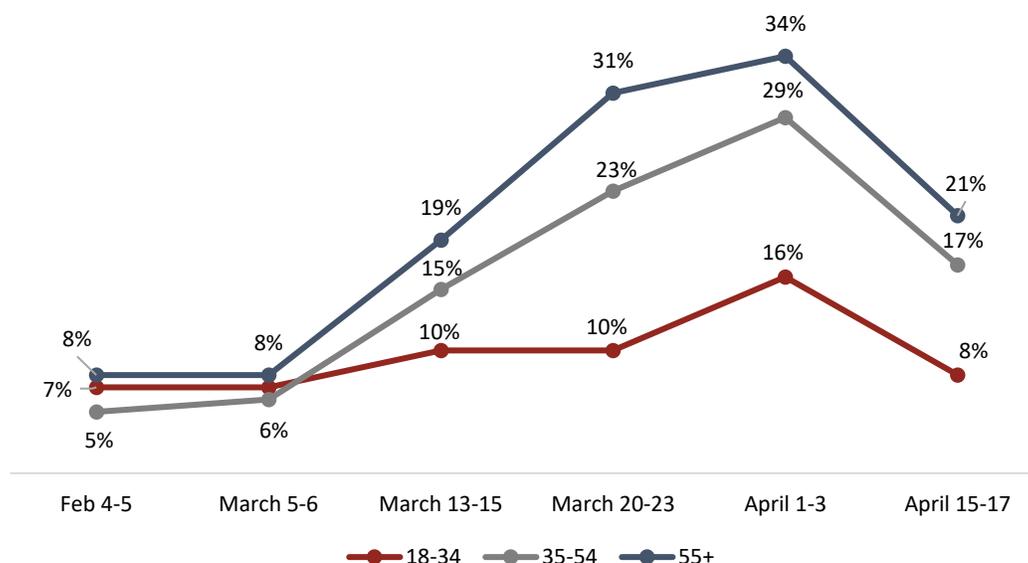
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Three-in-five (61%) are now concerned about their personal risk, while 85 per cent are still worried about the risk outside of their household:

[Very/Moderately Concerned] How concerned are you about each of the following...?						
	Feb 4-5	March 5-6	March 13-15	March 20-23	April 1-3	April 15-17
Personal	7%	7%	15%	70%	73%	61%
Someone in your household	-	-	-	77%	79%	70%
Other family or friends, not in household	-	-	-	88%	91%	85%

As mentioned, a smaller, but nonetheless significant portion of Canadians say they are very concerned about the risk of contracting the illness personally. Notably, the number of Canadians who hold this view has dropped considerably over the past two weeks:

"Very concerned" about personally contracting COVID-19 by age



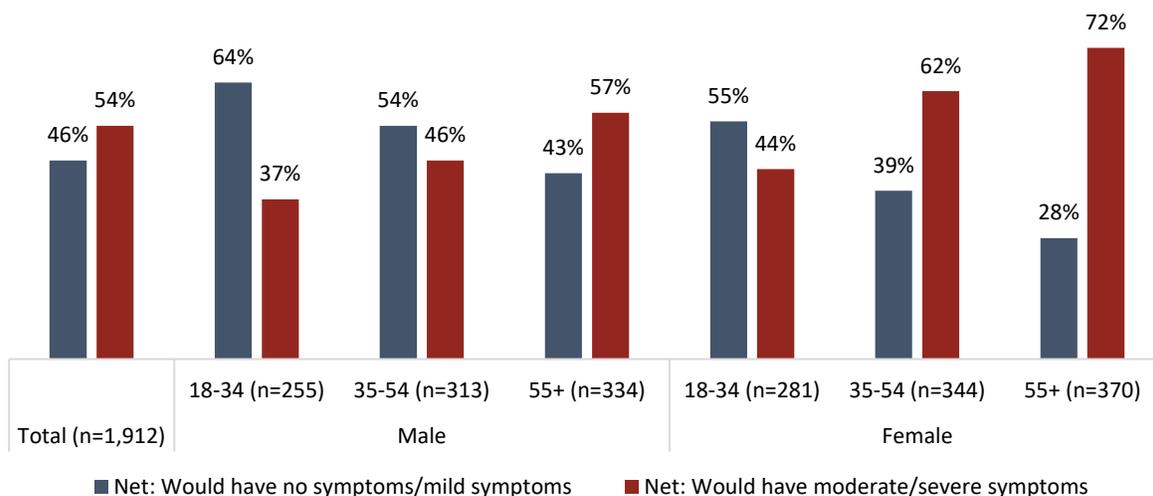
Anticipated severity of illness

With more understanding of the novel coronavirus emerging each day, but many questions still unanswered, the anticipated effects of becoming sick are different across the population. Men are generally less concerned about the potential severity of personally contracting the virus, but anxiety about just how difficult the illness would be to overcome rises with age across both genders, as seen in the graph below:

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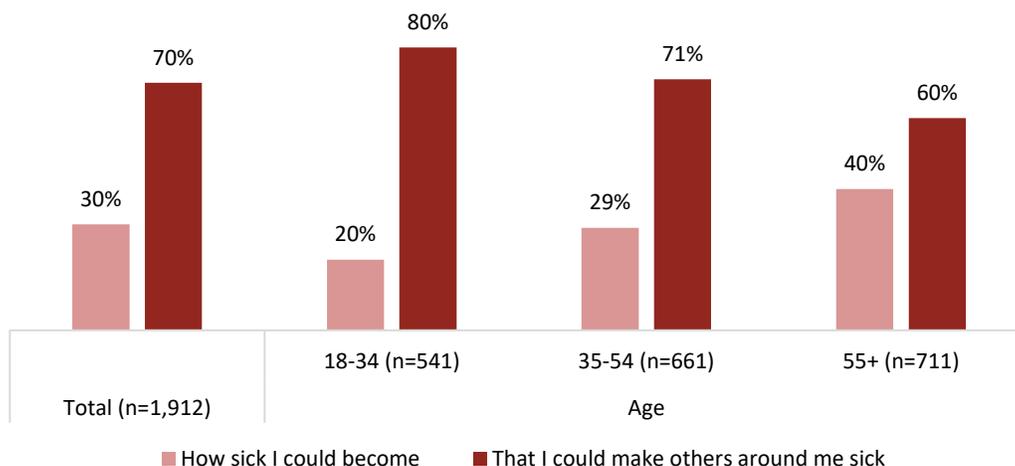
Thinking about yourself, if you were to become infected with the coronavirus, how severe would your illness be? (All respondents)



Primary concern is infecting others

When it comes to COVID-19 risk, Canadians are concerned more so about how they may affect others, rather than themselves. That said, these data have a generational tilt. Just one-in-five of those in the 18 to 34 age category say they are worried more about their own health than others, but this doubles to 40 per cent among those 55 years of age and over:

When you think of the possibility of contracting COVID-19 what, if anything, concerns you more? (All respondents)

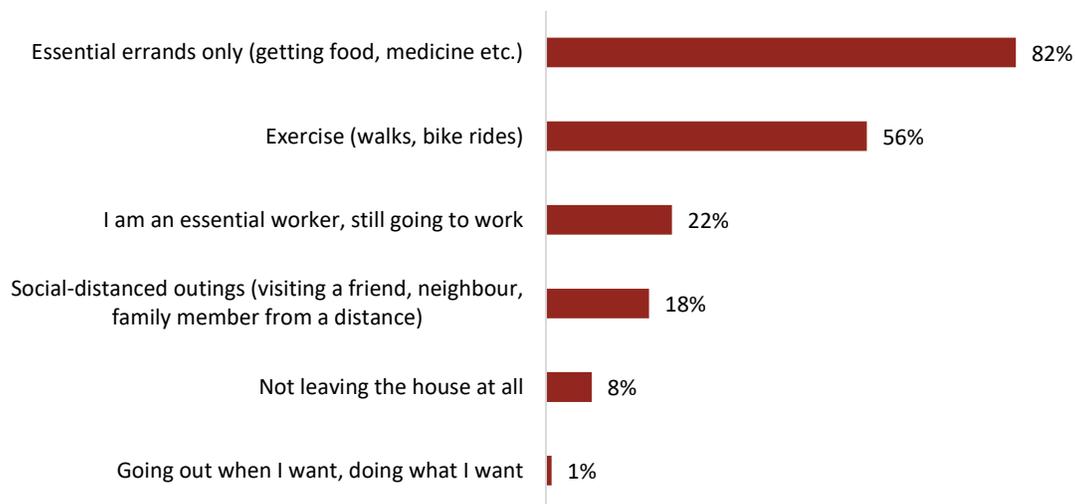


Part Two: Behaviour today and a future “return to normal”

The last two months have seen unprecedented changes in activity around the globe. Flights have been shut down, mobility restricted, and masks have become normal attire. Public health officials have asked Canadians to limit their trips outside the house to only essential activities like grocery shopping, and to stay a safe distance from others if they do go out for a walk.

While Canadians generally say they are doing as asked, few are entirely housebound. Four-in-five say they have been limiting their trips to stores for essential errands only. Meanwhile, more than half say they are exercising outside the house. Notably, nearly one-in-five are looking for ways to keep up in-person social connections – visiting friends and family from a distance. There has been confusion recently whether such behaviour constitutes “following the rules” – and while public health officials are not encouraging it, enforcement has been mixed.

Which of the following, if any, have you been doing? (All respondents, n=1,912)



When should government lift restrictions?

As the lockdown grinds through its sixth week, conversations among political leaders, public health officials and the public have turned with increasing frequency to a timeline for lifting the most stringent restrictions on society. In America, few voices have influenced this discussion more than President Donald Trump, who has been discussing “opening the country up” for weeks now.

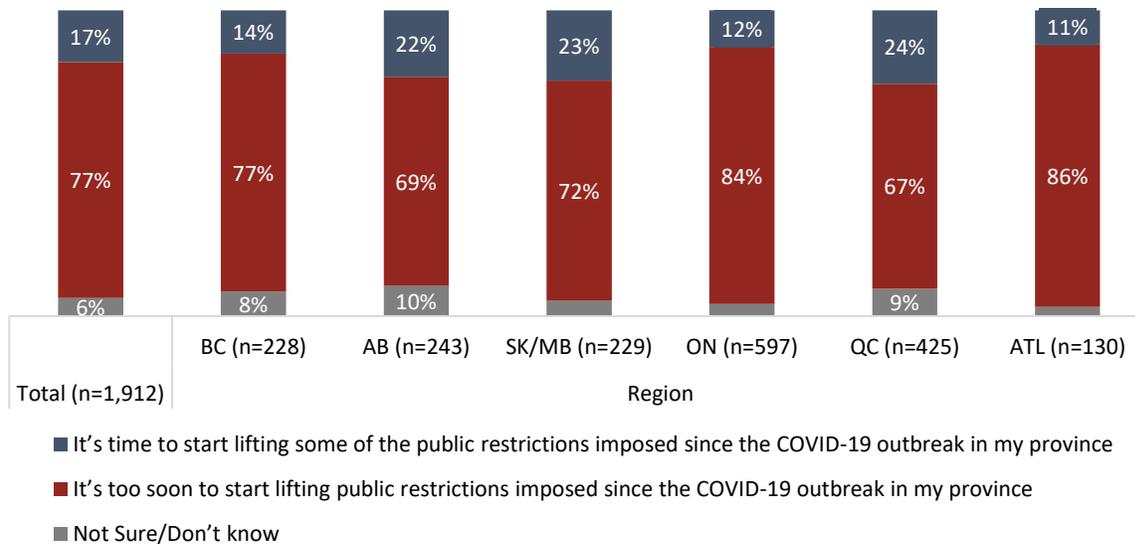
But beyond the political rhetoric, Canadian leaders know the country cannot stay home indefinitely. Statistics Canada, for instance, reported more than one million jobs lost last month. Angus Reid Institute polling indicates 45 per cent of households across the country have lost work.

As they consider the risk-reward calculation, most in this country say now is not the time to lift public restrictions. Canadians who want to lift restrictions now are most likely to be found on the Prairies and in Quebec:

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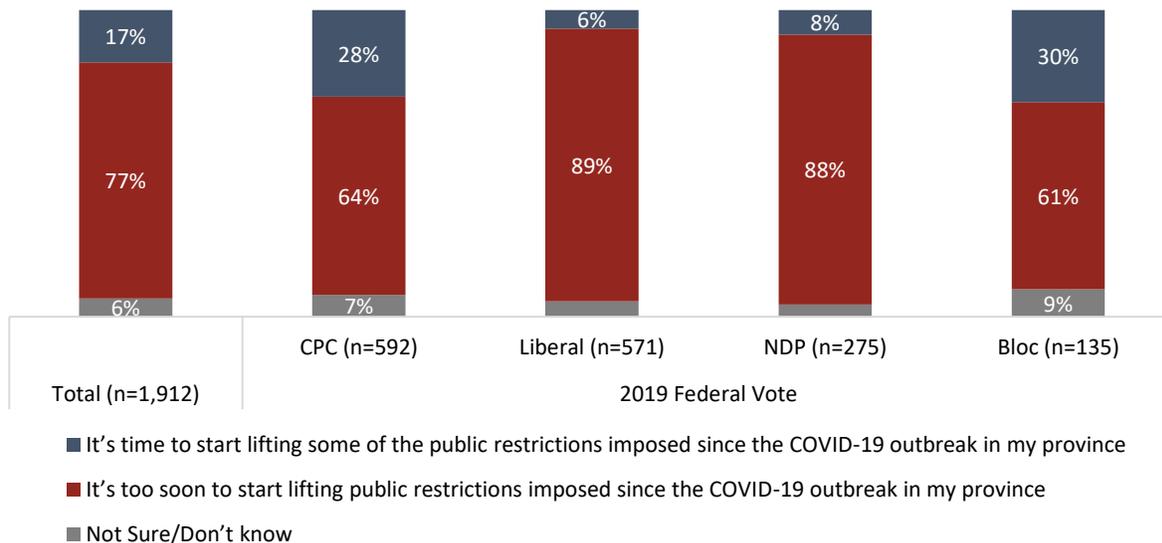
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Which is closest to your own point of view? (All respondents)



Those most likely to support a more immediate lifting of restrictions include past Conservative Party voters along with those in Quebec who cast ballots for the Bloc Quebecois in the October general election:

Which is closest to your own point of view? (All respondents)



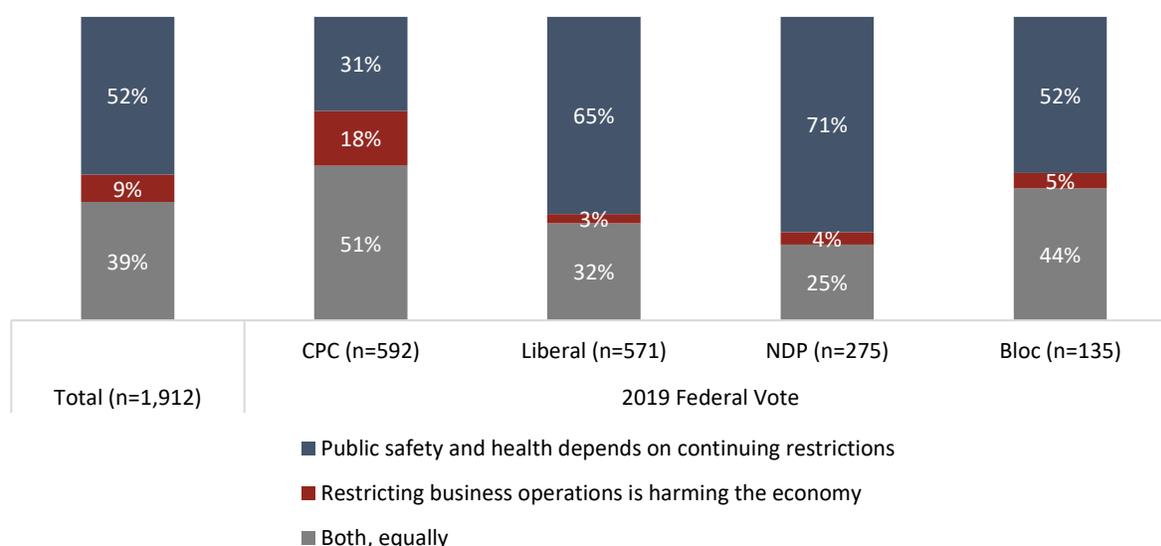
Health outweighs economy as priority, but many concerned about both

For some more insight into the calculus of Canadians when it comes to the question of opening things up or sustaining a more conservative approach, the Angus Reid Institute asked respondents to share their

priority assessment. What is more important in this discussion, is it health, the economy, or do both play an equal part?

For half of Canadians (52%), there is a clear priority for public health, while nine per cent say the economic harm that is being done to businesses must be the guiding argument (9%). That said, a significant number of residents say that both arguments must be considered equally (39%). This is a debate that runs along partisan lines. Past CPC supporters are far more likely to frame the debate with economic damage in mind, or at the very least, say that it has an equal claim to importance alongside the health of Canadians:

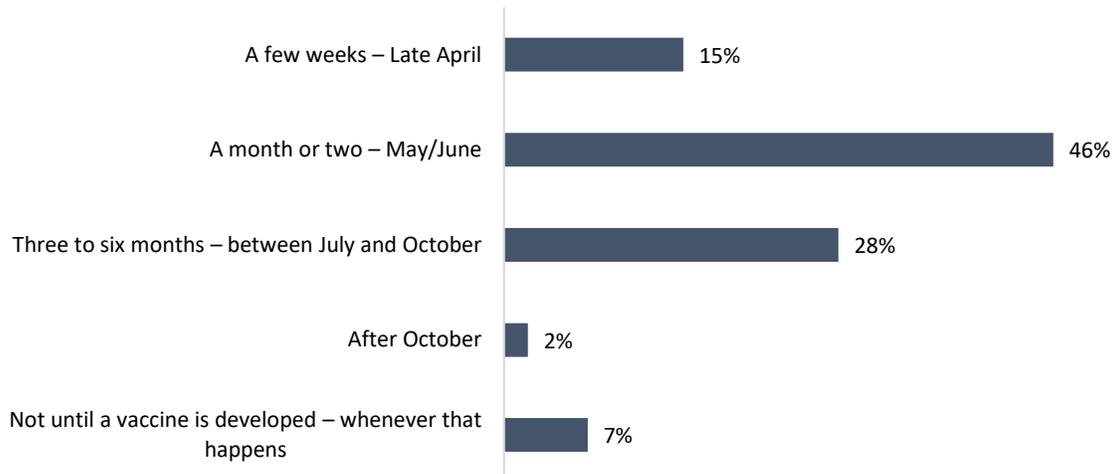
If you were a government decision maker, which point of view would carry more weight? (All respondents)



Nearly half say restrictions should lift over the next 4-8 weeks

In a recent announcement, Prime Minister Trudeau cautioned that it will be “weeks still” before COVID-19 restrictions in Canada are lifted. For their part, most Canadians agree with this timeline, with 61 per cent saying restrictions should be lifted somewhere between late April and June:

**When do you think your own provincial government should start lifting restrictions on businesses, institutions, and places that have been closed since the outbreak began?
(All respondents, n=1,912)**



Likewise, this sentiment is shared by a majority of residents in each region. There are, however, significant portions of the population that would favour a slower approach. In Ontario, for instance, one-in-three say the timeline should be three to six months. Furthermore, around one-in-ten residents in all provinces except Quebec say restrictions should not be lifted until a vaccine is developed – whenever that happens:

When do you think your own provincial government should start lifting restrictions on businesses, institutions, and places that have been closed since the outbreak began?

Responses 30% and higher highlighted

	Total (n=1,912)	Region					
		BC (n=228)	AB (n=243)	SK/MB (n=229)	ON (n= 597)	QC (n=425)	ATL (n=130)
A few weeks – Late April	15%	12%	23%	30%	11%	19%	9%
A month or two – May/June	46%	48%	46%	46%	45%	50%	43%
Three to six months – between July and October	28%	27%	22%	17%	34%	25%	32%
After October	2%	3%	2%	1%	3%	2%	2%
Not until a vaccine is developed – whenever that happens	7%	10%	7%	7%	8%	4%	14%

When restrictions lifted – most would “wait and see” before returning to society

Early on, some speculated that a return to work and normal life might evoke images of VE-Day in Times Square, or at least Canada Day on Parliament Hill. It would seem though, that faced with the prospect of rejoining society and resuming our old lives, Canadians are more circumspect.

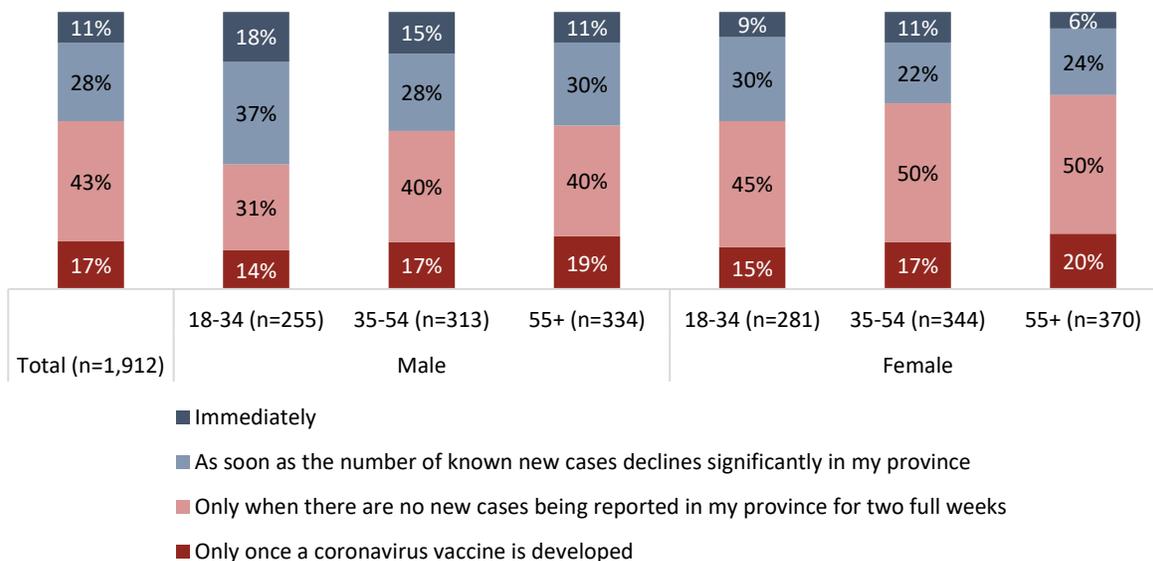
Very few (one-in-ten) say they would pick up former routines “immediately”. The rest are far more cautious, with a plurality (43%) saying they would wait until there were no new cases for two weeks. Others say they would not reintegrate into public life until a vaccine was developed. Notably, caution diminishes among men more than women of the same age:

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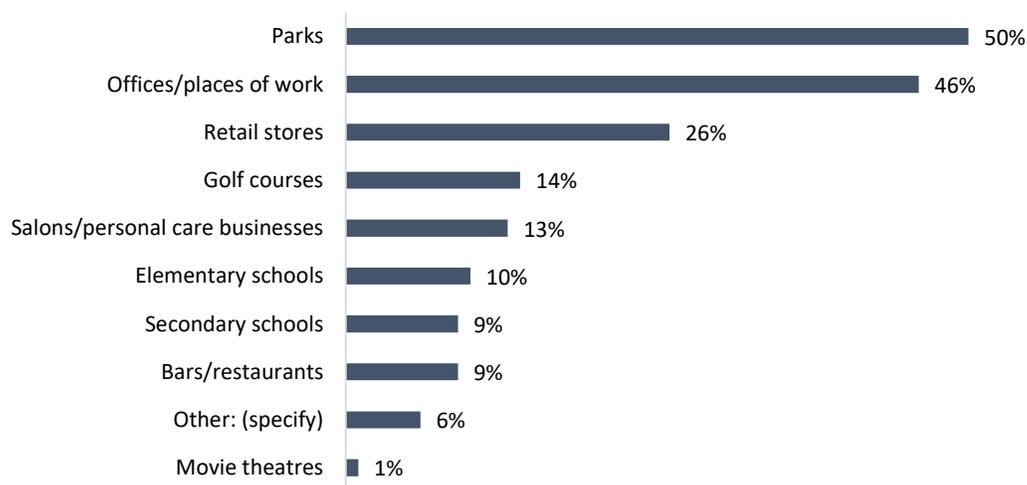
Views on how soon household would return to normal, day to day activities, including public interactions, if COVID-19 restrictions were lifted



Canadians say parks and workplaces should open first

If and when provinces do begin to loosen restrictions and open up more of their municipalities to regular activity, there is a clear – and some might say profoundly Canadian – preference for where to start. An equal number of Canadians say that parks (50%) and offices or workplaces (46%) should be first on the list, well ahead of any other choice:

**If your local governments were to lift restrictions gradually, instead of all at once, where should restrictions be relaxed first?
(All respondents, n=1,912)**



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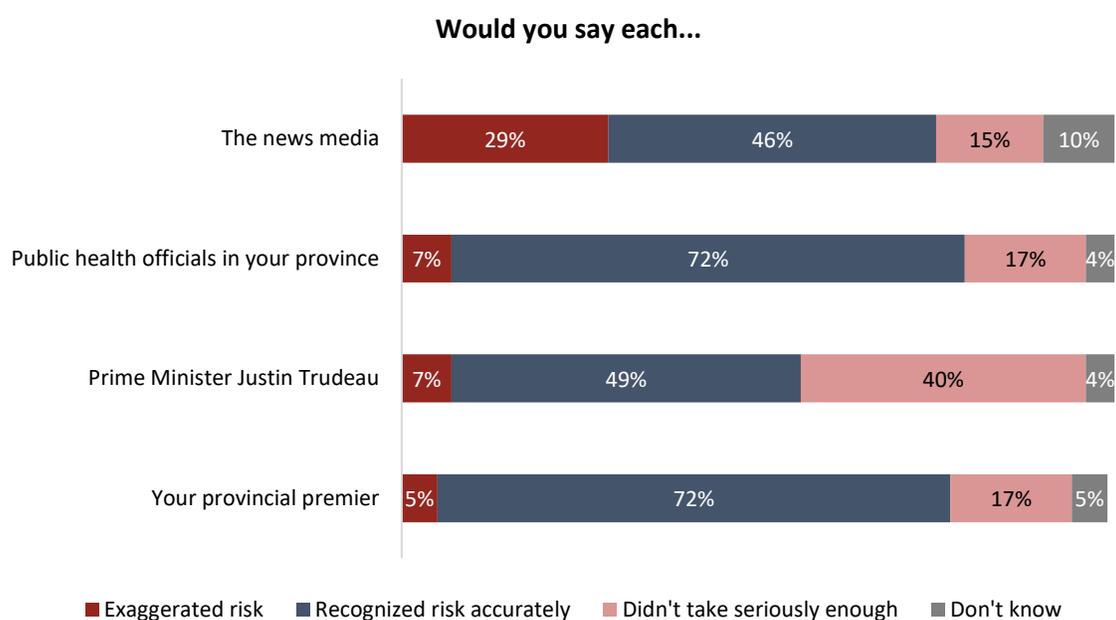
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Part Three: Government performance

Canadians rate initial response of leaders, media

In the days and weeks following the initial outbreak in Wuhan, China, many observers were not sure what risk the novel coronavirus would pose to this nation or others. The World Health Organization has defended itself from attacks it misled people about the risk of the virus in the early days of January, while some in Canada have said that the federal government did not act quickly enough.

In terms of the Canadian response, most residents praise their provincial leadership. There is, however, a sense that the Prime Minister was slower to take the issue seriously among 40 per cent of the population. Some also feel that the media has exaggerated the risk in Canada (29%):

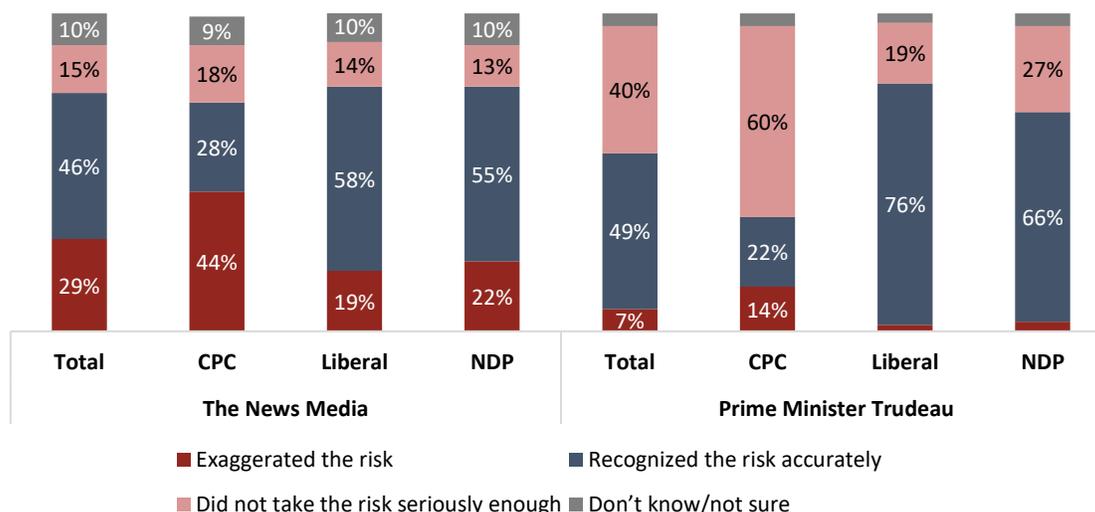


There are considerable variations in assessments of each of these groups or individuals. Albertans are least likely to trust that the media responded accurately, while Quebec residents are most likely. Meanwhile, Justin Trudeau receives his most positive assessments in B.C. and Atlantic Canada:

Percentage that say each "recognized the risk [of the coronavirus outbreak] accurately" by province							
	Total (n=1,912)	Region					
		BC (n=228)	AB (n=243)	SK/MB (n=229)	ON (n= 597)	QC (n=425)	ATL (n=130)
The news media	46%	49%	30%	43%	46%	52%	49%
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau	49%	60%	33%	52%	53%	40%	60%
Your provincial premier	72%	73%	63%	67%	68%	84%	73%
Public health officials in your province	72%	79%	75%	74%	64%	77%	81%

The response on these two items in particular are largely shaped by political preference. Those who supported the CPC in the last federal election are much more likely to say that the media exaggerated the risk, while the Prime Minister underplayed it. That said, they are not totally alone. In each case around one-in-five past Liberal and NDP voters agree with these past Conservatives:

**How did each of the following respond to COVID-19 outbreak?
By federal vote 2019 (All respondents, n=1,912)**



Federal, provincial performance

While there has evidently been some criticism of response time from some Canadians, both Prime Minister Trudeau and the federal government receive generally high ratings for their overall handling of

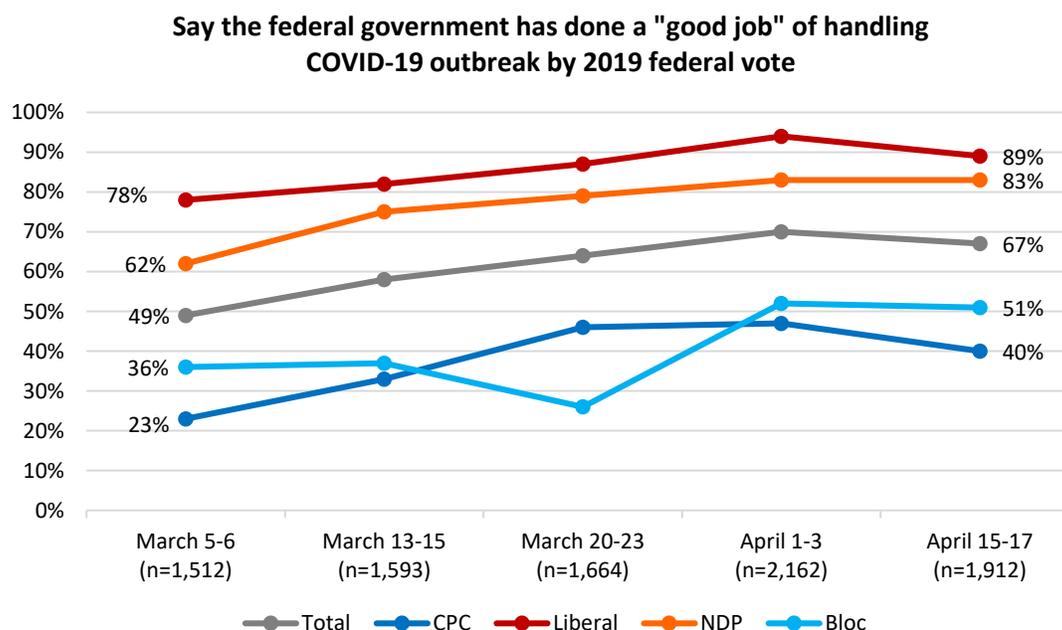
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the outbreak in Canada. Three-in-five (62%) say Trudeau has done a good job, while two-thirds (67%) say this of the federal government. The most overwhelming praise is reserved for front-line health care workers. More than nine-in-ten (94%) say that this group has done a good job:

Do you think the following are doing a good or bad job handling this whole issue regarding the coronavirus? (All respondents, n=1,912)							
	Prime Minister Justin Trudeau	Your provincial premier	The chief public health officer in your province	Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Teresa Tam	The federal government generally	Your provincial government generally	Front-line health care, i.e. hospitals and doctors' clinics etc.
Net: Good job	62%	85%	85%	69%	67%	86%	94%
Net: Bad job	35%	11%	8%	21%	29%	11%	2%
Don't know/ Can't say	4%	4%	8%	10%	4%	3%	4%

The percentage of Canadians saying the federal government has done a good job in dealing with COVID-19 has risen from 49 per cent to 67 per cent since the beginning of March. Liberal supporters and New Democrats offer substantial praise, while half of Bloc voters (51%) and two-in-five Conservatives (40%) do the same:



Provincially, each regional government now receives commendation from at least 70 per cent of residents.

Percentage that say their provincial government has done a 'good job' of handling the COVID-19 outbreak by province							
Responses 80% and higher highlighted							
	Total	Region					
		BC	AB	SK/MB	ON	QC	ATL
March 5-6 (n=1,512)	51%	62%	40%	42%	46%	60%	52%
March 13-15 (n=1,593)	69%	73%	61%	62%	59%	89%	68%
March 20-23 (n=1,664)	79%	71%	76%	78%	74%	93%	78%
April 1-3 (n=2,162)	85%	81%	70%	75%	86%	94%	85%
April 15-17 (n=1,912)	86%	86%	70%	79%	87%	93%	83%

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