

COVID-19 Compliance: One-in-five Canadians making little to no effort to stop coronavirus spread

'Cynical Spreaders' disregard most safety precautions, view public health officials negatively

August 17, 2020 – Canadians enter their sixth month of the COVID-19 pandemic with the lived experience of the spring and summer behind them, and the uncertainty of flu season, fall weather, and back to school looming ahead.

Against this backdrop, messages aimed at reducing community spread of the coronavirus are being followed as scrupulously as ever by some and falling almost entirely on the deaf ears of others.

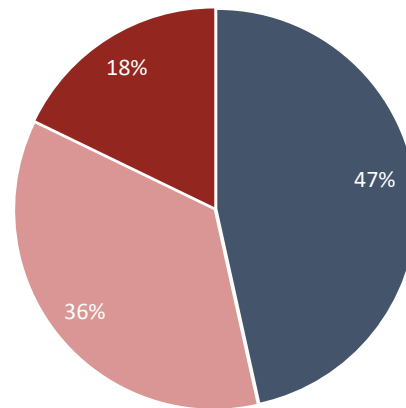
Analysis of the latest public opinion data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute places Canadians into three broad categories in a measure of their behaviors and mindset, known as the COVID Compliance Index.

The Infection Fighters follow virus suppression behaviours carefully and comprise nearly half the population (47%). The Inconsistent represent just over one-third of Canadians (36%) and take a more half-in, half-out approach to flattening the curve. The remaining one-in-five (18%) are Cynical Spreaders who have expanded their social circles, don't physically distance and are ambivalent towards hand washing and mask wearing. This last group also professes a clear dislike for the way public health officials and political leaders have handled the pandemic.

More Key Findings:

- Age is among the most significant factors in the COVID-19 Compliance Index. The younger Canadians are the less likely they are to follow recommended protocols.
- Political affiliation is also correlated with a person's categorization in the Index. Past CPC voters are four-times more likely to be Cynical Spreaders than those who voted for the Liberal Party or New Democratic Party in 2019.

Angus Reid Institute COVID Compliance Index



■ Infection Fighters ■ The Inconsistent ■ Cynical Spreaders

METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from August 5 - 8, 2020 among a representative randomized sample of 1,511 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 than nine-in-ten Infection Fighters are regularly wearing a mask when in contact with non-family members indoors. This drops to 63 per cent among the Inconsistent and just 15 per cent among the Cynical Spreaders.
- Of 10 different COVID-19 spreading behaviours (not washing hands, not social distancing, not wearing a mask, etc.) Infection Fighters are engaged in either one or zero. Three-quarters of Cynical Spreaders are engaged in five or more of these activities.

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.*

INDEX:

Part One: Three Mindsets towards Covid-19

- **The COVID-19 Compliance Index**
- **Who are the Infection Fighters, the Inconsistent and the Cynical Spreaders?**
- **Where do they live?**
- **Age and Gender**
- **Vote and Education**

Part Two: Attitudes

- **Cynical Spreaders more critical of leadership**
- **Mindsets not driven by emotional state**
- **Are Restrictions too tight or too loose?**

Part Three: Behaviours - Preventing versus spreading

- **Hygiene and distancing**
- **Social Bubbles**
- **Travel**
- **Behavioural analysis**

Notes on Methodology

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Part One: Three Mindsets towards COVID-19

The COVID-19 Compliance Index

After a start to the summer that showed reduced cases of COVID-19 across most of Canada, new infections are rising again in many places. In British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, public health officials have urged residents to comply with social distancing and maintain a policy of seeing fewer faces in open, outdoor spaces. A looming return to school for thousands of children across the country, and the soon-to-follow return of flu season has other parts of the country on edge too.

In order to better understand the dynamics of coronavirus prevention among the Canadian population, the Angus Reid Institute created an index based on variables related to day to day life in the time of COVID-19. Respondents were scored on measures such as washing their hands, wearing a mask, avoiding public spaces, socializing with people in a larger bubble, etc. This index yielded three groups: The Infection Fighters, The Inconsistent and The Cynical Spreaders.

For more, see the notes on methodology at the end the report.

Who are the Infection Fighters, the Inconsistent and the Cynical Spreaders?

As seen in the infographic below, Infection Fighters are regimented about their COVID-19 safety precautions the are more likely to be older than 54 years and far more inclined to see the status quo held or tightened when it comes to public health restrictions.

The Inconsistent are – as their name suggests – defined by their reliability on some infection-control behaviours such as handwashing and physical distancing but less so on staying home and keeping their social circles small.

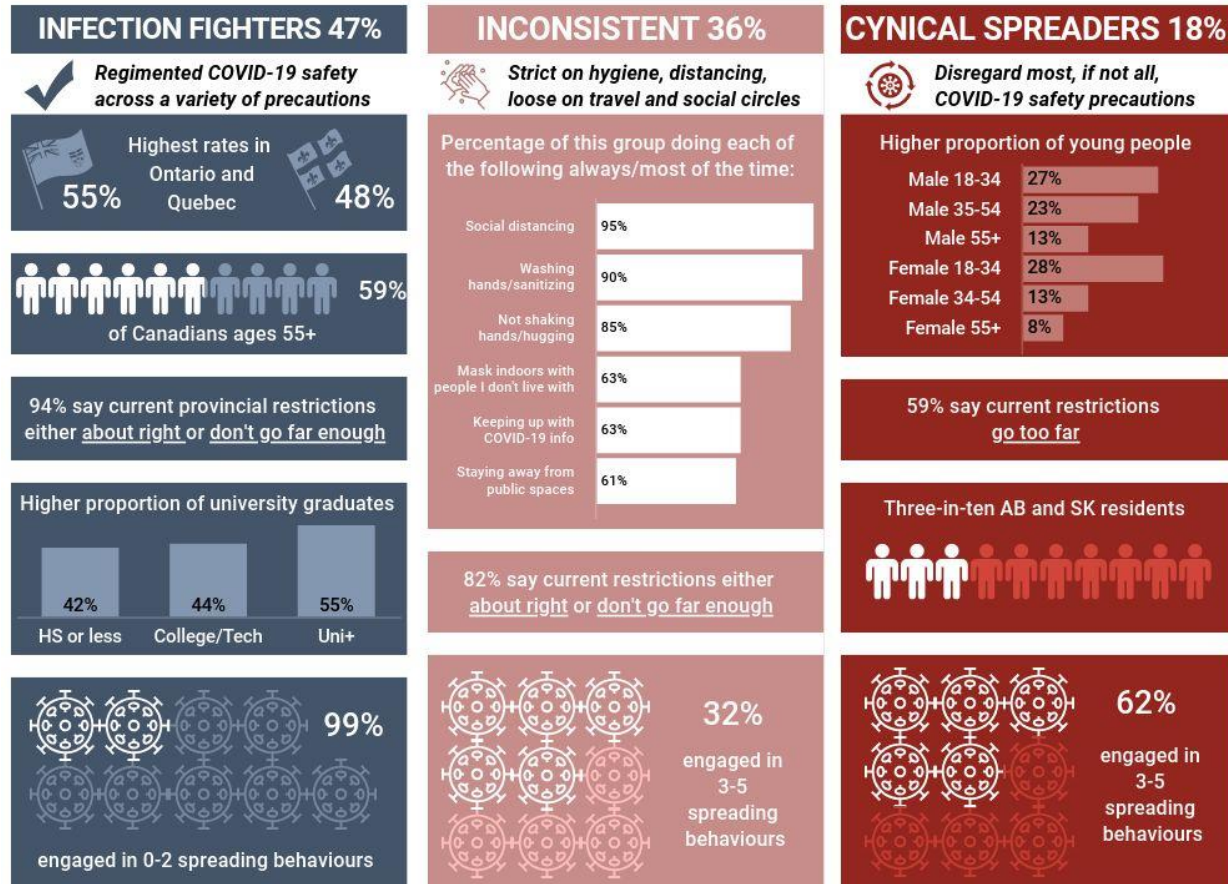
Cynical Spreaders have been and continue to be the primary concern of public health officials. This group flouts guidelines, socializes with larger groups (including strangers) and shuns mask usage.

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ANGUS REID INSTITUTE
COVID-19 COMPLIANCE INDEX



[For full size image click here.](#)

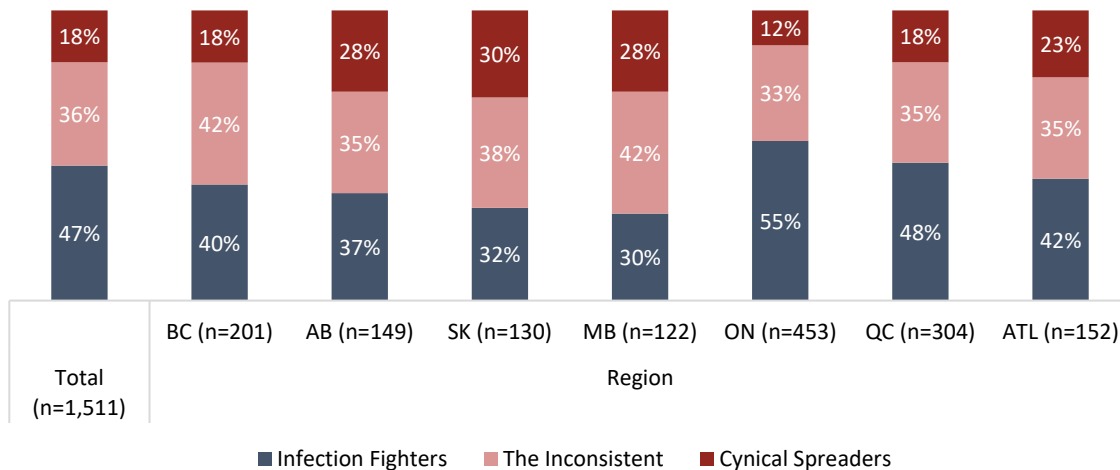
Where do they live?

After suffering some of the worst effects of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country, Ontario residents self-report more adherence to preventative behaviours, and are most likely to fall into the Infection Fighter segment of the population on the COVID-19 Compliance Index. More than half of Ontarians are in this most vigilant group. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba are home to the highest percentages of Cynical Spreaders, with three-in-ten residents in each province falling into this segment, based on their own self-reported behaviours:

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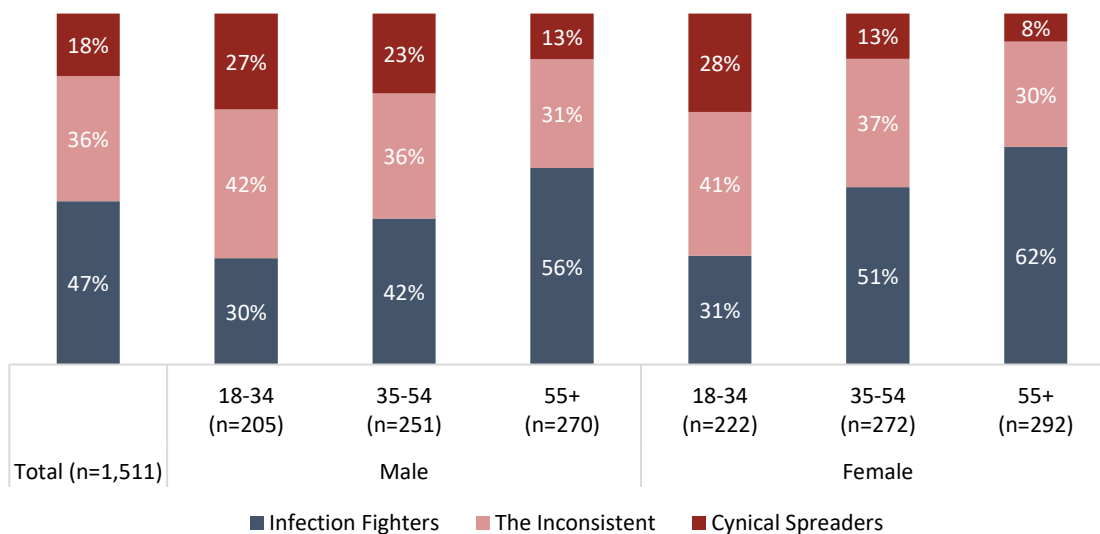
Index by region



Age and Gender

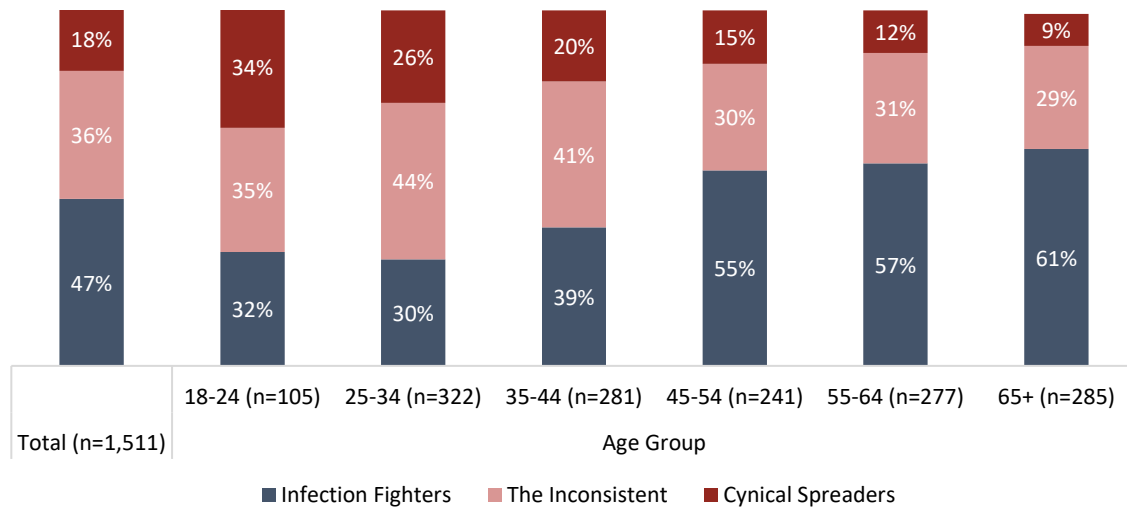
Young people have been driving the rise in COVID-19 cases in most of the country and these data suggest why. Both men and women under the age of 35 are least likely to be following COVID-19 protocols, avoiding travel, and minimizing their social bubbles. Men and women 55 years of age and older are acting most cautiously:

Index by age and gender



Breaking this down along finer age brackets, the distinction is even more stark. Younger Canadians are four times as likely as those aged 65+ to be ignoring preventative behaviours:

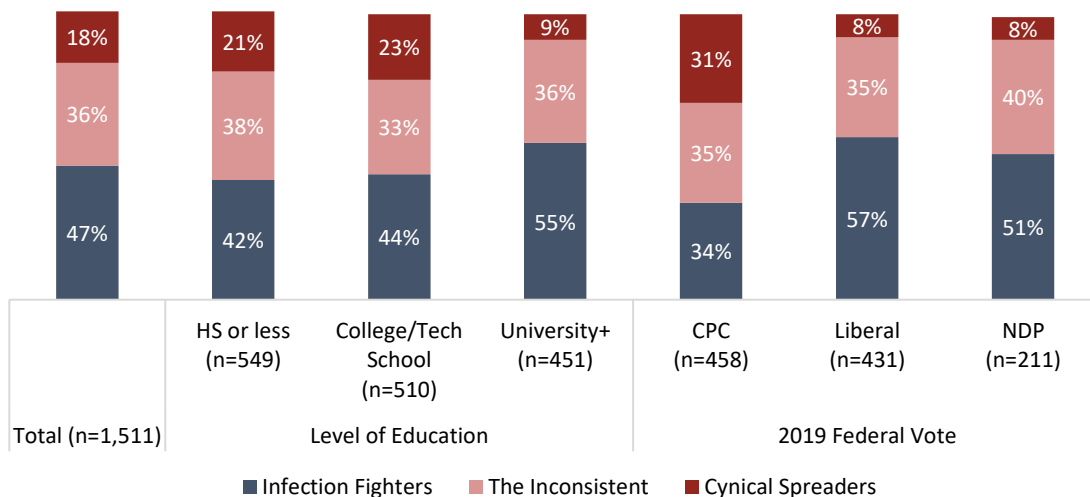
Index by Age Fine



Vote and Education

Educational attainment and political preference also delineate the COVID-19 Compliance Index. University educated Canadians are particularly unlikely to be among the Cynical Spreaders. Those who voted for the Liberal or New Democratic Parties in the last federal election are four-times less likely than past Conservative voters to be in this least adherent group:

Index by level of education and 2019 federal vote



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Part Two: Attitudes

Cynical Spreaders more critical of leadership

While Cynical Spreaders acknowledge and praise the efforts of front-line health workers throughout the pandemic, this is as far as it goes. Just half of this group (52%) say their provincial chief public health officer or premier have done a good job, while closer to one-quarter say the same of Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer, Teresa Tam, and the Prime Minister. This stands in contrast to those in the other segments, who say all official actors (including the Prime Minister, by a narrow margin) have done a good job handling this file.

Percentage saying each of the following is doing a good job in handling the COVID-19 outbreak				
	Total (n=1,511)	COVID Compliance Index		
		Infection Fighters (n=704)	The Inconsistent (n=537)	Cynical Spreaders (n=270)
Front-line health care, i.e. hospitals and doctors' clinics etc.	92%	95%	93%	81%
The chief public health officer in your province	76%	83%	78%	52%
Your provincial premier	71%	75%	75%	52%
Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Teresa Tam	63%	76%	64%	28%
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau	56%	67%	56%	27%

Mindsets not significantly driven by emotional state

It might stand to reason that the emotional and mental state of Canadians may play a defining role in the extent to which they engage in infection prevention behaviours. This is apparently not the case. As seen in the table below, Infection Fighters, the Inconsistent and Cynical Spreaders are feeling neither significantly more nor less worn out, happy or “normal” than one another.

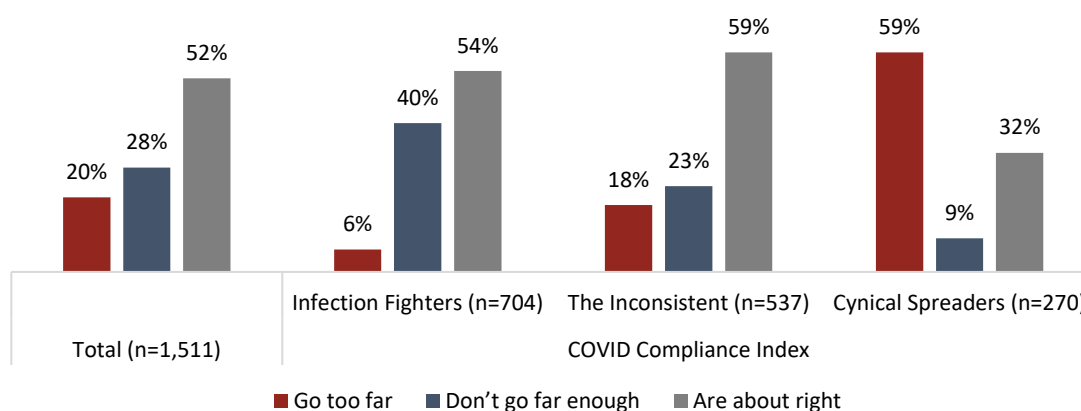
Cynical Spreaders, however, are notably angrier than other segments, and less grateful than the Infection Spreaders. The Inconsistent parallel the Infection Fighters in their anxiety.

How Canadians say they have been feeling over the past few weeks				
	Total (n=1,511)	COVID Compliance Index		
		Infection Fighters (n=704)	The Inconsistent (n=537)	Cynical Spreaders (n=270)
Worn out/Fatigued	37%	34%	40%	40%
Anxious	26%	29%	26%	20%
Grateful	22%	26%	19%	15%
Normal	21%	20%	22%	24%
Happy	15%	16%	14%	17%
Bored	14%	14%	16%	12%
Lonely	11%	11%	11%	11%
Angry	9%	7%	7%	17%

Are Restrictions too tight or too loose?

Among Infection Fighters, two-in-five (40%) would like to see greater governing access to public spaces, physical distancing, and mask policies, likely in order to bring the behaviours of others in line with their own. The Inconsistent are most likely to say that the restrictions are currently hitting the right mark and do not need to be changed (59%), while exactly the same number of Cynical Spreaders say the opposite, that restrictions are too strict:

Overall, thinking about restrictions that have been put in place in your area to prevent the coronavirus from spreading, do you think these restrictions go too far, don't go far enough, or are about right?



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Part Three: Behaviours - Preventing versus spreading

Hygiene and Distancing

One of the factors that separates Infection Fighters from the other segments is their unyielding commitment to personal hygiene practices and social distancing. Among this group, nearly all have made this a regular part of their life, as seen in the table below:

How often would you say you are doing each of the following:				
	Total (n=1,511)	COVID Compliance Index		
		Infection Fighters (n=704)	The Inconsistent (n=537)	Cynical Spreaders (n=270)
Washing hands/sanitizing				
Always/Most of the time	89%	98%	90%	62%
Sometimes	10%	2%	10%	29%
Not very often/Not at all	2%	-	1%	9%
Keeping extra personal distance from people / social distancing				
Always/Most of the time	88%	100%	95%	45%
Sometimes	8%	-	5%	36%
Not very often/Not at all	3%	-	-	19%
Not shaking hands or hugging people in your life				
Always/Most of the time	83%	99%	85%	38%
Sometimes	10%	1%	12%	31%
Not very often/Not at all	7%	-	3%	30%

Divergence truly occurs around three other behaviours: staying away from public spaces, wearing a mask, and keeping up with COVID-19 information from provincial health officials.

While 91 per cent of Infection Fighters are not spending time in public spaces, this drops to 61 per cent among the Inconsistent and just 25 per cent in the Cynical Spreaders. Half (47%) of the latter group say they are rarely avoiding public places, if ever.

The same disparity is noted among mask use. Two-thirds of Cynical Spreaders say they rarely, if ever, use a mask when they are indoors around people they do not live with. For comparison, 94 per cent of Infection Fighters say this is a part of their regular practice:

How often would you say you are doing each of the following:				
	Total (n=1,511)	COVID Compliance Index		
		Infection Fighters (n=704)	The Inconsistent (n=537)	Cynical Spreaders (n=270)
Staying away from public spaces				
Always/Most of the time	69%	91%	61%	25%
Sometimes	21%	8%	35%	29%
Not very often/Not at all	10%	1%	5%	47%
Wearing a mask indoors around people I don't live with				
Always/Most of the time	69%	94%	63%	15%
Sometimes	13%	5%	20%	19%
Not very often/Not at all	19%	1%	18%	66%
Keeping up with COVID-19 information from experts in your province				
Always/Most of the time	71%	94%	63%	25%
Sometimes	18%	5%	28%	31%
Not very often/Not at all	11%	*%	9%	44%

Social Bubbles

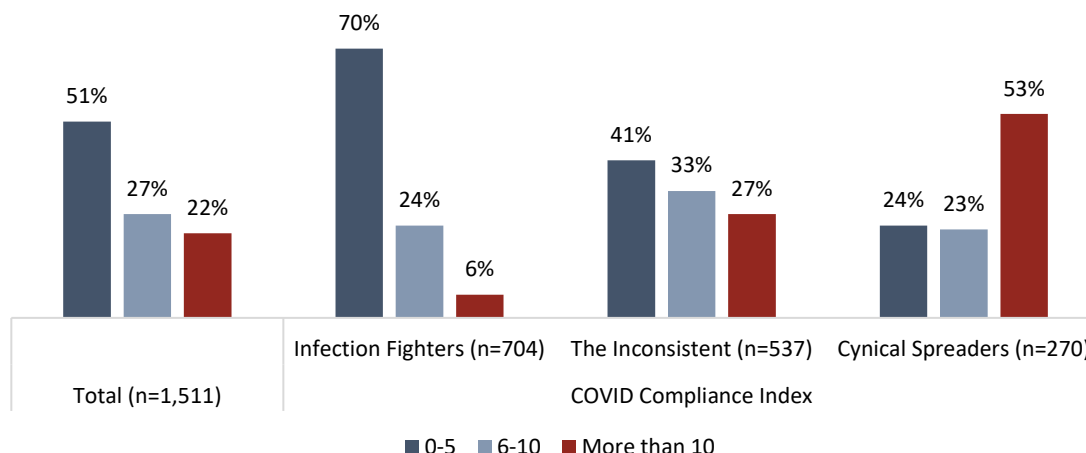
Guidelines for how many people Canadians should interact with are varied across the country. One message, however, has been offered consistently: fewer is better. The Angus Reid Institute asked respondents specifically about “discretionary or ‘fun’ interactions” rather than the interpersonal contact that comes through essential activities such as work, grocery shopping or medical appointments, in order to gauge the size of Canadian “bubbles” ([for more information see detailed tables](#))

As one might expect, the three groups of the COVID-19 Compliance Index vary widely on this measure. The majority of Infection Fighters (70%) are seeing five or fewer people while half of Cynical Spreaders (53%) are seeing more than 10:

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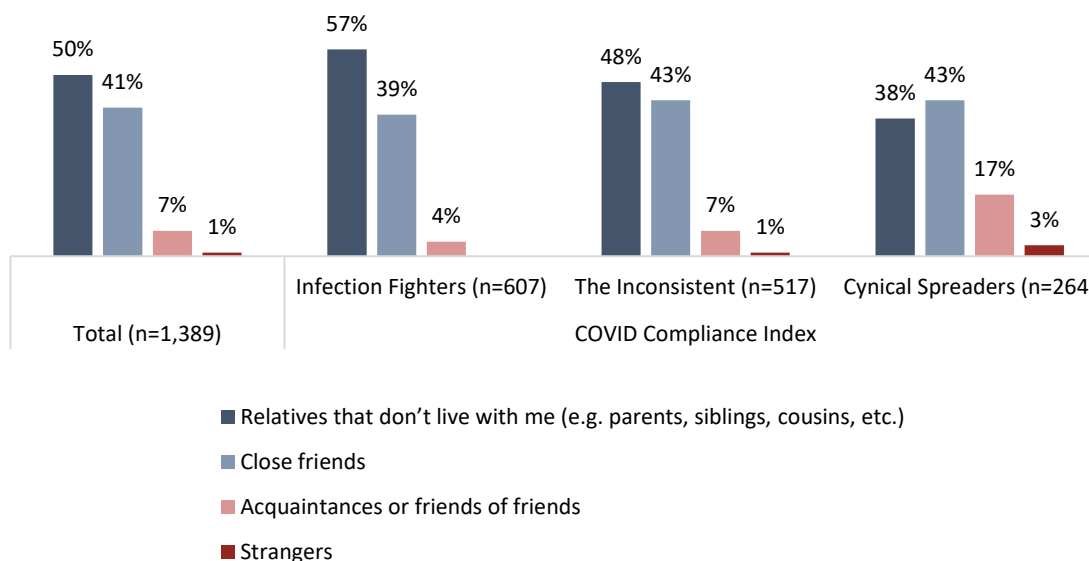
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Thinking about the last month or so, about how many people outside your own household have you socialized or spent time with (if at all)?



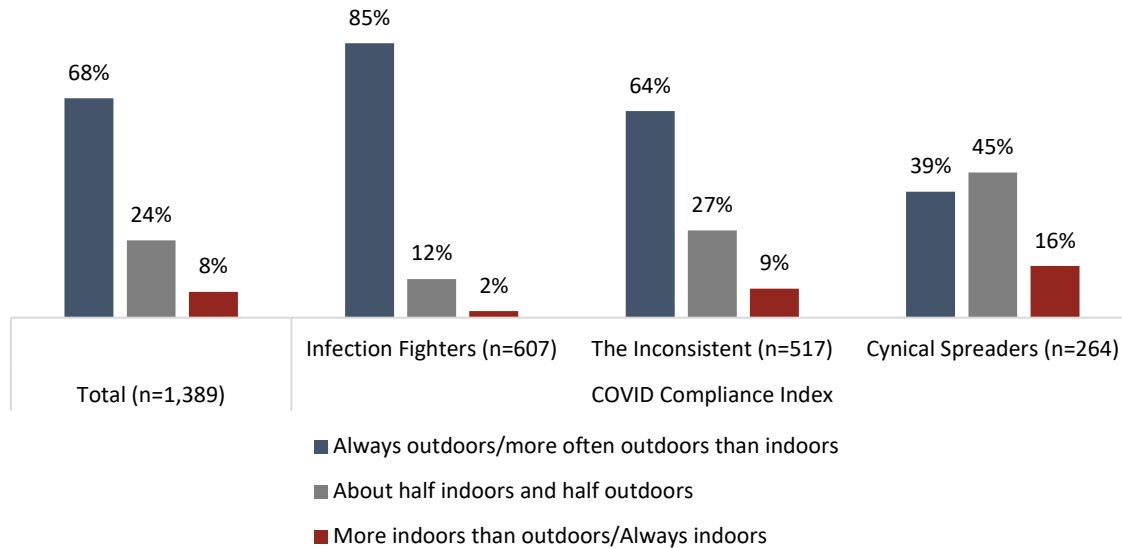
The good news is that the vast majority of all Canadians, regardless of which group they fit in, are seeing mostly friends and family members. One-in-five (20%) Cynical Spreaders, however, are extending their social circles to people they do not know well:

**And thinking about who these folks are mostly, would they be:
(Among those have socialized with someone outside immediate household)**



Among those who are seeing people outside of their immediate household, two-thirds (68%) say they are outdoors more often than not. Infection Fighters are most vigilant in ensuring their interactions are outdoors, while the subsequent groups are progressively less careful:

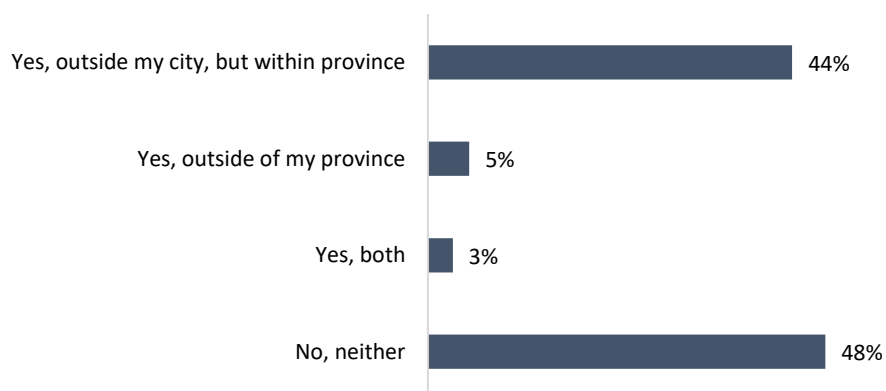
**Which of the following best describes where you are spending your time:
(Among those have socialized with someone outside immediate household)**



Travel

Half of Canadians (48%) have been heeding the calls from their public officials to avoid travel, while half say that they have travelled outside of their city for fun. Few, however, are leaving their province; just eight per cent say this is something they have done:

**Over the past month or so, have you travelled outside of
your city or community for fun/to get away?
(All respondents, n=1,511)**

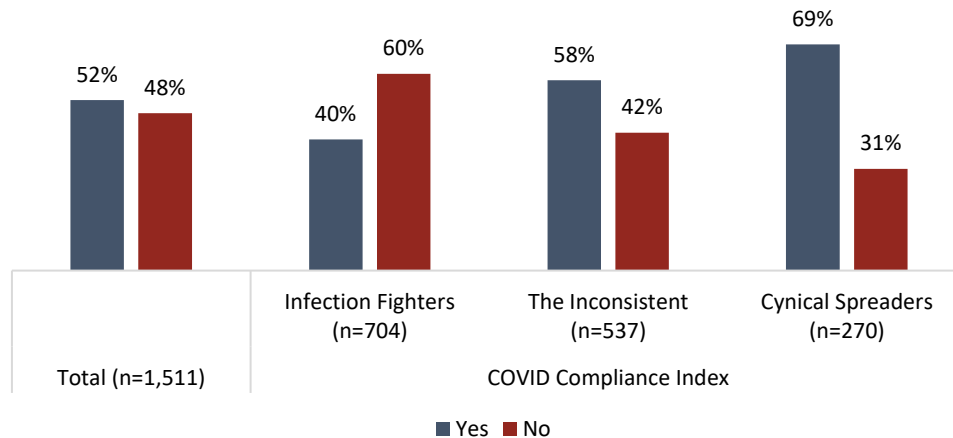


While a considerable number of Canadians from all three groups say that they have travelled outside of their city, this number is higher among Cynical Spreaders when compared to Infection Fighters:

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Over the past month or so, have you travelled outside of your city or community for fun/to get away?



Note: Percentages of “Yes” responses is an aggregate of those that travelled outside their city, but within their province; outside their province; and both. [See detailed tables for more information.](#)

Behavioural analysis

The Angus Reid Institute is able to isolate which behaviours each segment does more often, and which less. There are nine key behaviours measured as part of this index:

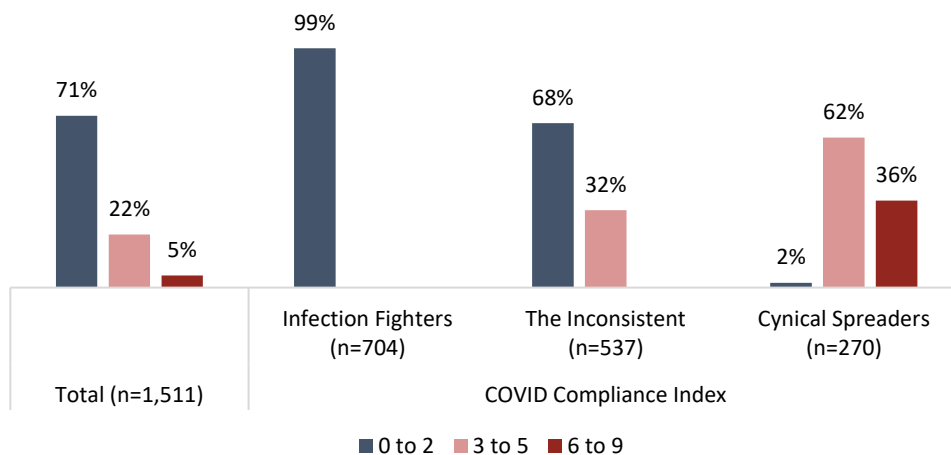
- Not washing hands regularly
- Not keeping extra personal space from others
- Not wearing a mask indoors with those outside their household
- Shaking hands, hugging, or touching others
- Not avoiding public spaces
- Seeing people outside of close friends and family
- Spending time with 10 or more people outside of their household
- Spending at least half of their time with others indoors
- Not social distancing when in groups of friends

These measures show just how careful the Infection Fighters are. All of them are engaged in two or fewer behaviours from the aforementioned list. Among the Inconsistent, one-in-three are being less careful, engaging in three to five COVID-19 spreading behaviours. Among the Cynical Spreaders, all of them, representing one-in-five Canadians across the country, are engaged in at least three spreading behaviours, and many are doing even more than that:

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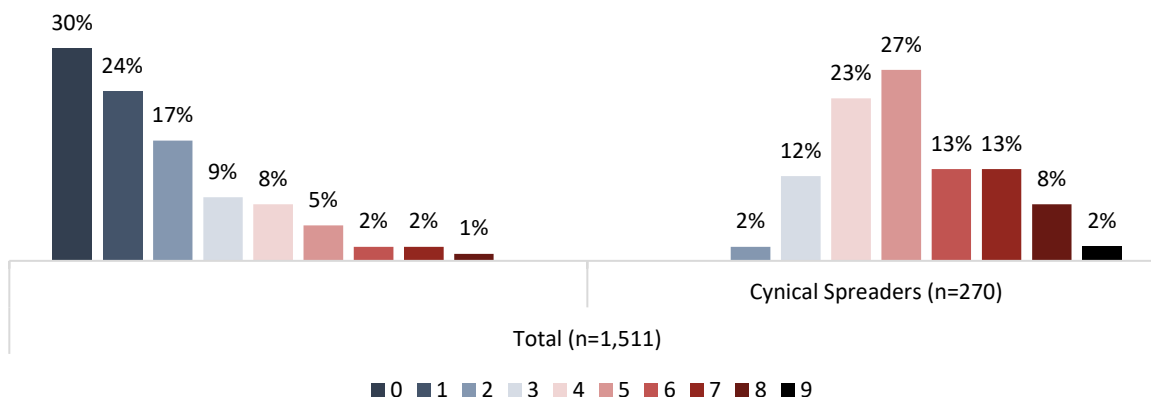
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Number of COVID spreading behaviours each group is engaged in



For even greater detail see the graph below. More than half of Canadians (54%) are engaging in zero or one COVID-19 spreading behaviours. Three-quarters of Cynical Spreaders are engaged in five or more of these activities:

Number of COVID spreading behaviours each group is engaged in



Notes on Methodology

The COVID-19 Compliance Index is based on responses to nine questions. Respondents were scored first on five items, based on how often they:

- Wear a mask indoors around people who are not in their immediate household
- Keep extra person distance from others
- Avoid public spaces
- Avoiding contact with others (shaking hands, hugs etc.)
- Wash their hands

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Additionally, respondents were scored on four more questions related to:

- How many people they have socialized with this summer
- Who those people are: friends, family, acquaintances, strangers
- Whether they spend time indoors or outdoors
- How much social distancing they follow with these groups

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

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

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