

## COVID & Border Crossings: Little consensus over dropping molecular test for returning travellers – but two-in-five want rapid tests at the border

*Plurality support switch to rapid antigen tests; 1/3 would drop all testing for fully vaccinated travellers*

**November 23, 2021** – Border communities and fully vaccinated travellers may be cheering [a federal announcement](#) that as of next week, fully vaccinated Canadians taking trips abroad lasting less than 72 hours will no longer require proof of a negative COVID-19 test to return home. Not all are convinced this is the right move, however.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadians divided about how to handle border testing, but largely ready to move past molecular tests such as the PCR. While one-quarter say that this type of test should remain the standard, the largest group would switch to rapid antigen tests currently used by the United States.

Notably, 27 per cent say there should be no testing for fully vaccinated travellers, and one-in-ten (9%) would drop testing entirely regardless of vaccination status.

Those who travelled frequently prior to the pandemic are most eager to drop restrictions. Among Canadians who say they travelled to the United States five or more times per year before pandemic restrictions took effect, half (48%) would drop testing for fully vaccinated travellers. Another 14 per cent would drop testing completely. Meanwhile, the most infrequent travellers are the most inclined to keep molecular tests in place.

### **About ARI**

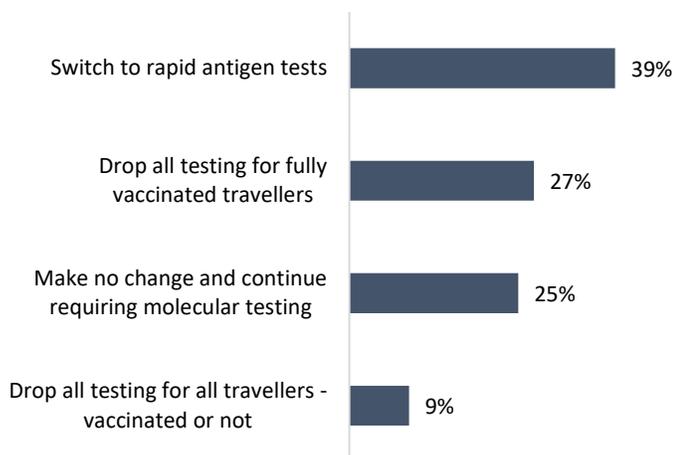
*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and 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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**Suppose you were advising public health officials – which option would you recommend?**

**(All respondents, n=1,514)**



### **METHODOLOGY:**

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Nov. 16-17, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 1,514 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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**Part One: Molecular testing requirement big factor in Canadians' trip planning**

In August, Canada opened its border to fully vaccinated Americans for the first time since March 2020. The U.S. followed suit at the beginning of November. The reopening on both sides brought an end to the longest border restriction in the two countries' shared history. The travel bans caused non-commercial land border crossings to drop by up to 95 per cent at times during the pandemic, causing significant economic pain to towns on both sides of the border which rely on cross-border traffic.

Cross-border travel continues to lag far below pre-pandemic levels. In August of this year, after Canada welcomed Americans tourists back into the country for the first time since March 2020, Canadian land borders saw 900,000 vehicles cross, a 75 per cent drop from August 2019. This has caused many, including the Premier of British Columbia, John Horgan, and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, to ask that the flow of fully vaccinated travellers be made easier by dropping restrictions and testing requirements.

B.C. government officials also asked for the 72-hour testing exemption to be implemented earlier than planned to allow for British Columbians to cross the U.S. border for fuel, food and other essential supplies that may be running short due to supply problems caused by the recent flooding. The federal government didn't accelerate the planned change – which won't take effect until Nov. 30 – but instead said there will be no testing or quarantine requirements for those who cross the border to shop for essential goods.

More than half (55%) of Canadians travelled to U.S. at least once per year prior to the pandemic. One-in-five (19%) say they are currently planning a trip in the next six months.

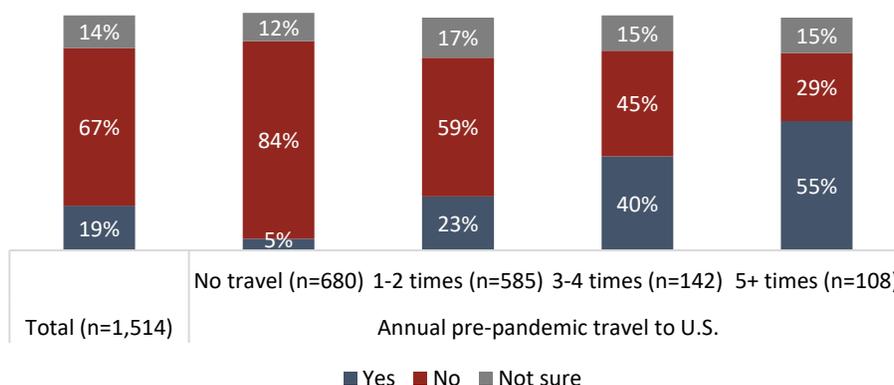
Regular travellers are the most likely to be planning a trip south of the border. A majority (55%) of those who visited Canada's southern neighbour five or more times in a year before the pandemic say they are planning to return in the next six months, but there are still three-in-ten (29%) of these frequent travellers who say a trip south is not in their calendar for the next six months:

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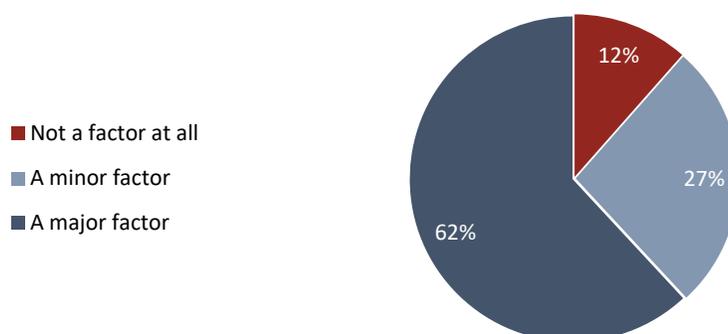
**Thinking about the next six months ahead – do you have any plans to travel to the U.S.?**



Though the borders are open for fully vaccinated travellers, currently, Canadians – even fully vaccinated ones – must show proof of a negative “molecular test” for COVID-19 – such as the PCR test – to return to Canada from the United States. Those tests can range in price from \$150 to \$300.

Three-in-five Canadians who are planning to travel to the U.S. in the next six months say the test requirement is a major factor in their trip planning, while one-in-ten say it is not a factor at all.

**How much is this test requirement a factor in deciding whether you are planning a trip in the next six months?  
(Those planning to travel to U.S. in next six months, n=284)**



**Part Two: Plurality support swap to rapid antigen test**

Starting Nov. 30, the Canadian government won't require any sort of negative test from fully vaccinated Canadian citizens and permanent residents for trips outside of the country of less than 72 hours. Those who stay abroad for longer than 72 hours will still need to source an expensive molecular test to return to Canada.

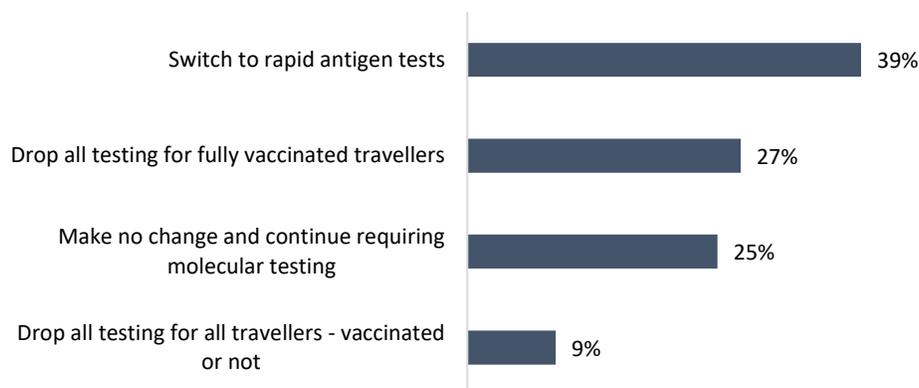
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Some experts have called on Canada to scrap the molecular test requirement entirely, arguing instead for the use of less expensive – as little as \$20 – rapid antigen tests. Though the antigen tests are less sensitive, experts say it makes more sense since the test is done much closer to the time of crossing. Results from molecular tests such as PCR can take up to 24 hours or longer to receive; the results from antigen tests are available in as little as 15 minutes.

A plurality (39%) of Canadians support a swap to antigen tests, while one-third (36%) would drop the testing requirement entirely for fully vaccinated travellers, including one-in-ten who say unvaccinated travellers also shouldn't be tested. One-quarter prefer keeping the molecular testing requirement.

**Suppose you were advising public health officials – which option would you recommend?  
(All respondents, n=1,514)**



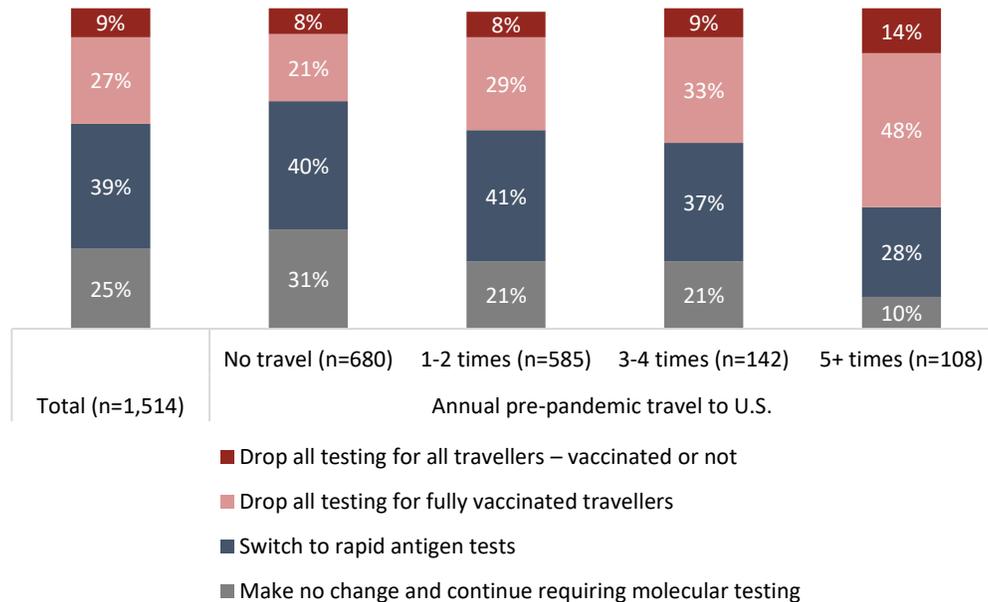
Frequent travellers to the U.S. prefer testing requirements be scrapped entirely. Three-in-five (62%) of those who visited the country five or more times per year pre-pandemic would drop testing requirements for fully vaccinated travellers, including 14 per cent who would prefer even unvaccinated travellers were not tested.

A plurality of less frequent travellers to the U.S. would prefer a switch to rapid antigen tests. For those who never travelled to the U.S. before the pandemic, three-in-ten (31%) would prefer to keep the molecular testing requirement, the largest share of any group.

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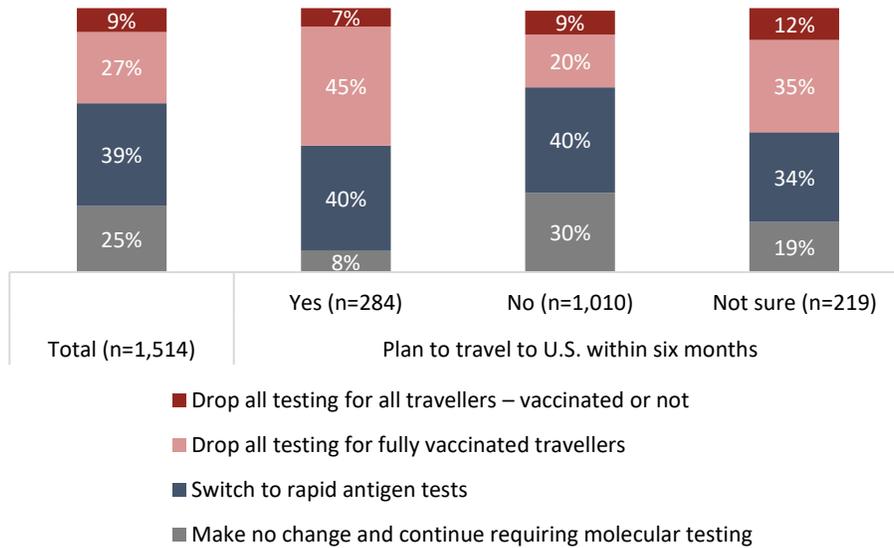
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**Suppose you were advising public health officials – which option would you recommend?**



A majority (52%) of those who plan to travel to the U.S. in the next six months say they would recommend dropping testing requirements for fully vaccinated travelers. Seven-in-ten of those with no plans to travel to the U.S. in the next six months say they would prefer vaccinated travelers still get tested, including three-in-ten who want the molecular testing requirement to continue:

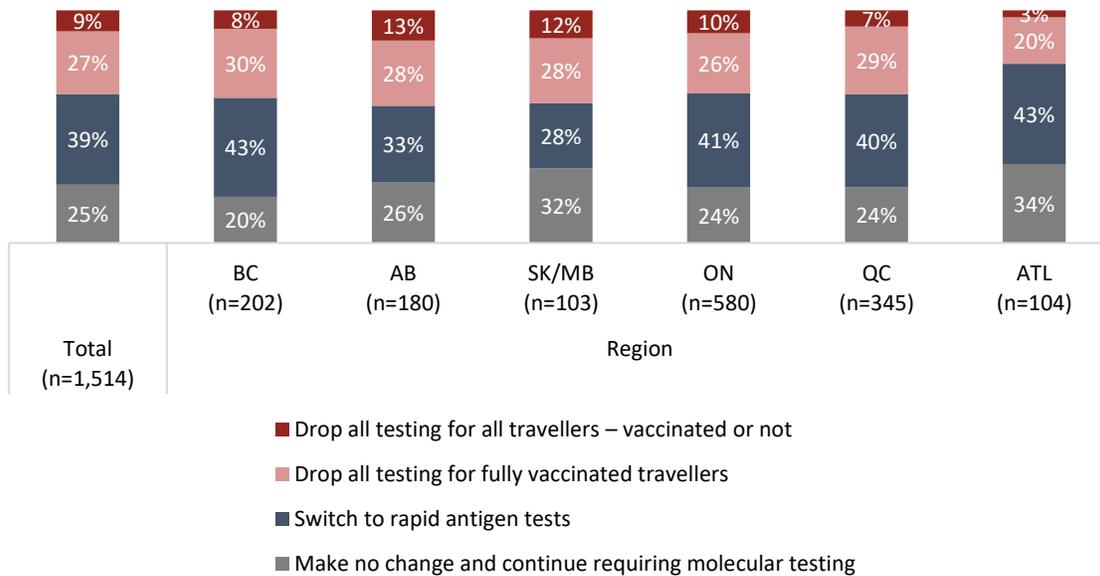
**Suppose you were advising public health officials – which option would you recommend?**



The desire for antigen tests is lowest in the Prairies, where three-in-ten say they'd recommend public health officials swap to the rapid tests. Two-in-five in the Prairies would instead drop all testing requirements for fully vaccinated travellers, including one-in-eight who would remove testing requirements for everyone regardless of whether or not they've been vaccinated at all.

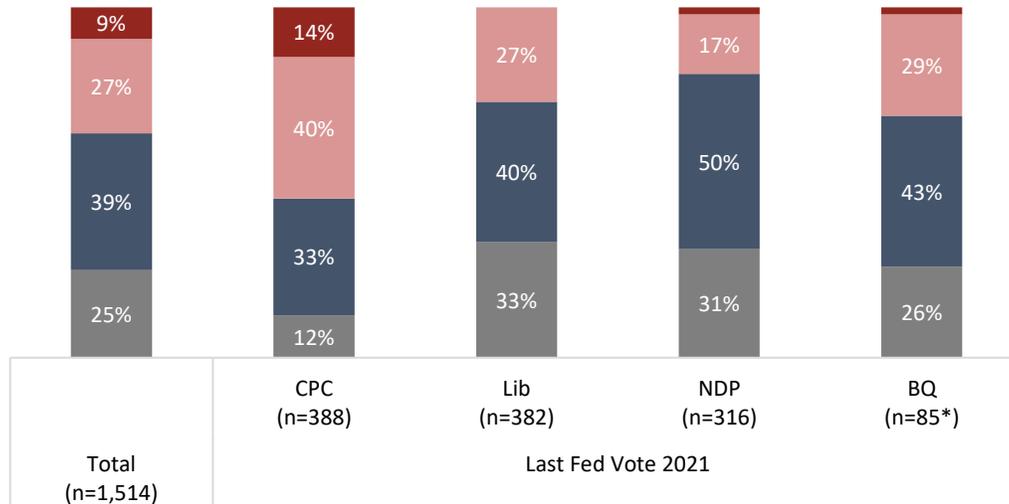
That stands in contrast to Atlantic Canada, where one-quarter (23%) would remove testing requirements for fully vaccinated travellers:

**Suppose you were advising public health officials – which option would you recommend?**



A majority of those who voted for the Conservative party in the last federal election would remove all testing requirements for the fully vaccinated, including 14 per cent who would remove them for the unvaccinated as well. Meanwhile, a plurality of Liberal (40%) and Bloc (43%) voters – and half of NDP voters – would prefer a switch to rapid antigen tests at the border:

Suppose you were advising public health officials – which option would you recommend?



- Drop all testing for all travellers – vaccinated or not
- Drop all testing for fully vaccinated travellers
- Switch to rapid antigen tests
- Make no change and continue requiring molecular testing

*\*Small sample size, interpret with caution*

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