

## Omicron Unease: Worry over contracting COVID-19 rises on news of new variant; hopes for 'normal' holidays in question

*Rebound in plans for festivities linked to spending time with only those who are vaccinated*

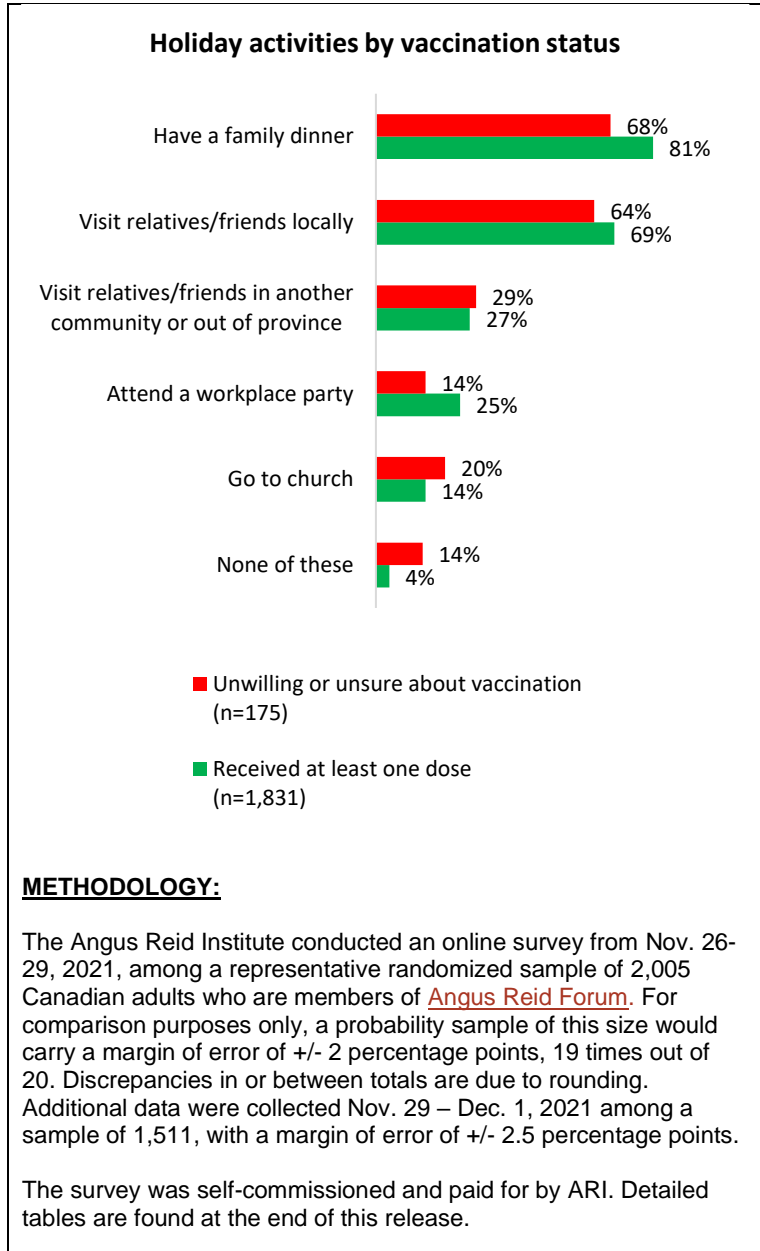
**December 6, 2021** – Like the ghost of Christmas past, the stress of another holiday season during the COVID-19 pandemic is presenting itself in many Canadian homes against the backdrop of questions about the Omicron variant, its spread, and the efficacy of previously administered vaccines on this strain of the virus.

The latest data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds Canadian concern over contracting the virus rebounding after a decrease in November. Three-in-five Canadians now say they are concerned about becoming sick and three-quarters (73%) say they are worried their friends or family will be infected by COVID-19.

As people around the world wait to better understand the way Omicron behaves, a majority of Canadian parents say they are ready to get their young children vaccinated. Half (54%) of those with children five to 11 years old say they will be inoculating their child as soon as possible, while another one-in-seven (16%) say they will wait but will ultimately do so.

That said, the early days of this age group's vaccine rollout have done little to sway parents on the fence about having their child vaccinated. These data are largely unchanged since the Angus Reid Institute first canvassed parents in October.

Uncertainty over Omicron notwithstanding, the still-dominant Delta variant appears to be having a significant impact on how families handle family dinners and friendly festivities as the holidays begin in earnest. With **76 per cent** of the population fully vaccinated, the number of people planning to attend workplace parties, visit friends locally, and have holiday dinners is rebounding closer to pre-pandemic levels. That said, a firm majority (61%) say they will only be spending time with those who are vaccinated.



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### More Key Findings:

- Concern about becoming sick from COVID-19 is highest among those 55 years of age and older. Two-thirds (66%) in this group are worried about the possibility.
- Four-in-five Canadians (80%) say they plan to have dinner with their family this year to celebrate the holidays – a 22-point increase over 2020, but still not at 2019 levels.
- Two-in-five (38%) say vaccination should be mandatory in their child's school.

### 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: A new variant, an increase in concern

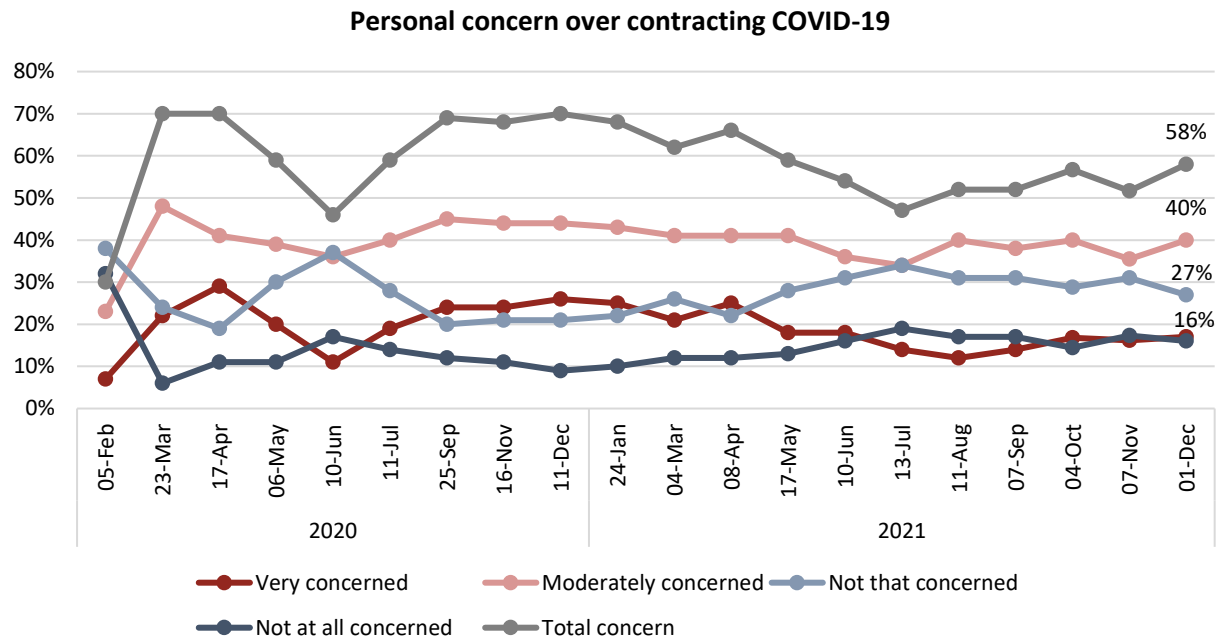
Global health experts are on high alert after a new strain of COVID-19, known as Omicron, was identified as [a variant of concern](#) by the World Health Association (WHO) on Nov. 26. Multiple cases have since been confirmed [across Canada](#).

The Omicron variant has many mutations, [according to the WHO](#). [Scientists have expressed](#) concerns that, due to these mutations, the variant may be able to evade antibodies generated from vaccinations and previous infections.

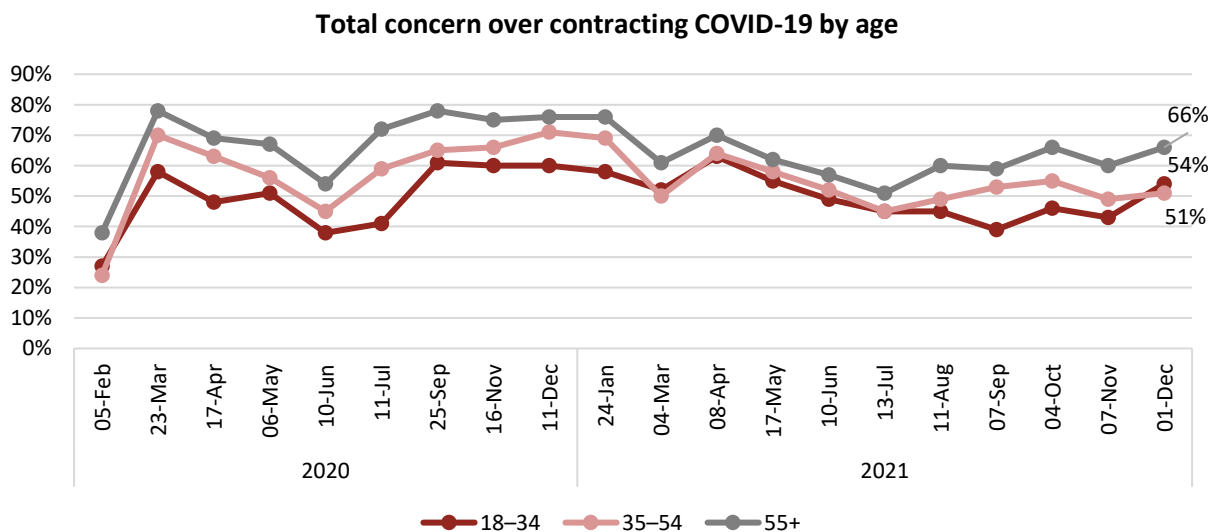
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News of the variant has elevated Canadian concern over contracting COVID-19. Three-in-five (58%) Canadians are “very” or “moderately” concerned that they will be infected by the virus, the highest number since May this year when half of Canadians had received their [first dose of vaccine](#) and few were fully vaccinated:



As has been the case throughout the pandemic, those over the age of 54 are most worried. Two-thirds of Canadians aged 55 and older say they are “very” or “moderately” concerned they will contract COVID-19:



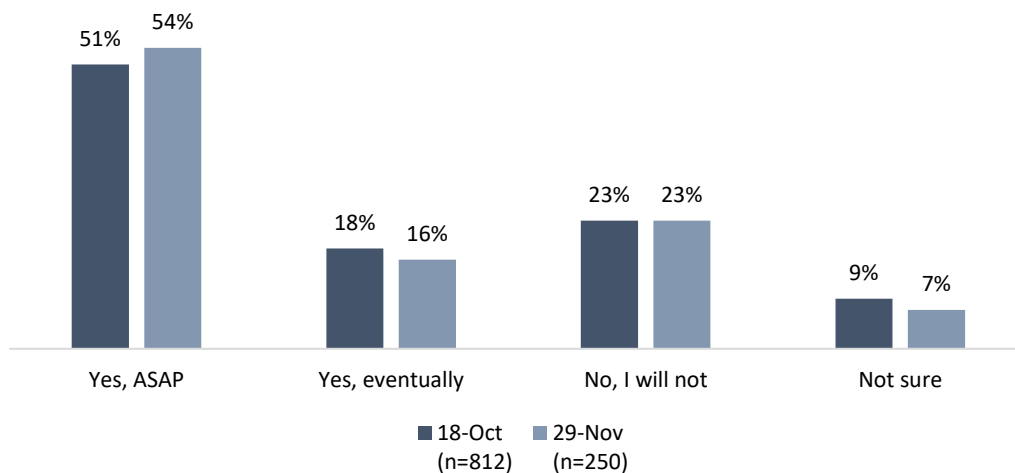
Three-quarters (73%) of Canadians say they are concerned that friends or family will be infected by COVID-19, including three-in-ten (32%) who are very concerned ([see detailed tables](#)). Both of those numbers have increased [in the last month](#).

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**Part Two: Parents’ willingness to vaccinate younger children remains static**

Health Canada authorized the use of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine in children between the ages of five and 11 on Nov. 19. And while jabs are going into the arms of little ones, parents are no more willing to vaccinate their five- to 11-year-olds as they were one month ago. Half (54%) say they will get their eligible children vaccinated as soon as possible, 16 per cent say they will do it eventually, and one-in-five (23%) say they will not get their child inoculated against COVID-19:

**Will you have your child(ren) aged five to 11 vaccinated or not?  
(Among parents/guardians of children in that age group)**



**Majority of parents of young children say mandatory vaccination at school a bridge too far**

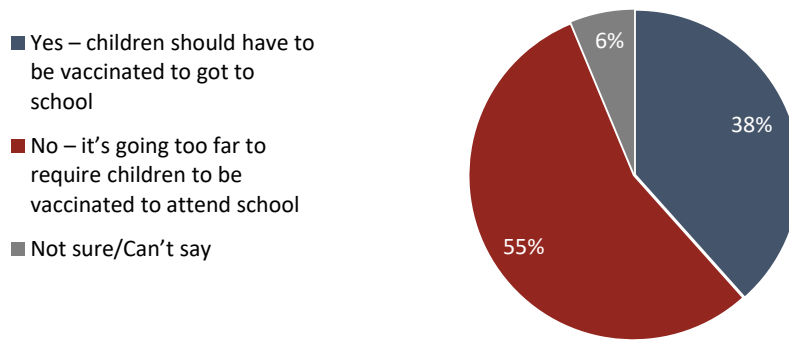
Before kids under 12 were eligible, the head of the Toronto District School Board called for the COVID-19 vaccine to be added to the list of required shots to attend school in Ontario, which already includes inoculations against polio, diphtheria, tetanus, and measles. In October, California made it mandatory for K-12 students to be vaccinated against COVID-19 when they become eligible.

A majority (55%) of Canadian parents with young children believe such measures go too far. Two-in-five (38%) disagree and believe the COVID-19 vaccine should be required for children to attend school:

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**Thinking about the school(s) your child(ren) attend(s), should students have to be vaccinated to attend school, or not?  
(Parents/guardians with kids aged 5-11, n=250)**



It is worth noting that vaccinated parents – nearly 90 per cent of the respondent base – are evenly divided on the question ([see detailed tables](#)).

**Part Three: After last year’s pause, many Canadians resuming holiday festivities**

Compared to this time one year ago, vaccines have put Canadians in a better place regarding COVID-19. Total cases are [significantly lower](#) than they were heading into the holidays in 2020; three-quarters of the population is fully vaccinated against the still-dominant Delta variant.

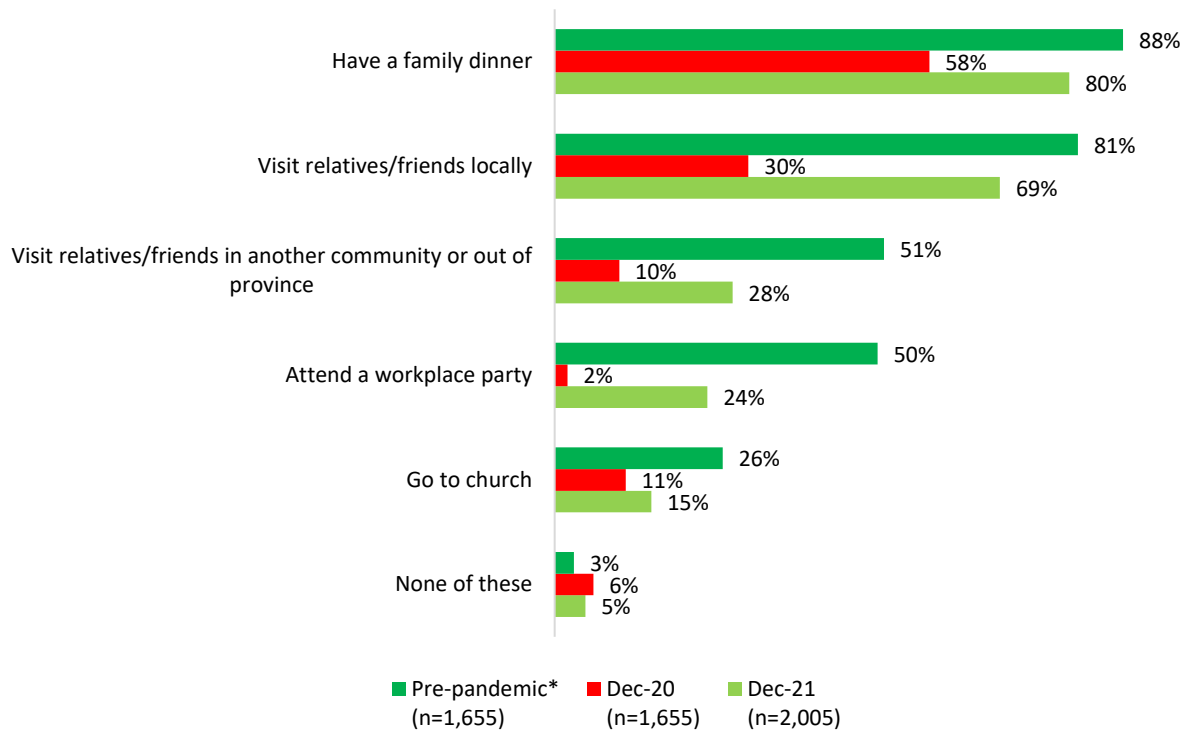
As a result, Canadians face fewer restrictions than last year in terms of holiday celebrations. Last year [many gathered despite restrictions](#), but fewer Canadians said they would be participating in various holiday activities than in pre-pandemic times.

This year, many more say they will be having family dinners (80%), visiting friends and family locally (69%) and in other communities (28%), and attending workplace parties (24%) than last year. Still, Canadians aren’t doing as many holiday activities as they were [before COVID-19 spread](#) throughout the world:

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**Holiday activities, pre-pandemic\* vs. 2020 and 2021**



*\*Respondents were asked in 2020 how often they did these activities before the pandemic*

Religion is an important part of the holidays for some, and 15 per cent of Canadians say they plan to attend a place of worship. Participating in that activity ranges from a high of one-in-five Manitobans (23%) to a low of one-in-ten Quebecers (9%):

Will you do any of the following this year?								
(Unweighted sample sizes)	Total (n=2,005)	Region						
		BC (n=252)	AB (n=186)	SK (n=161)	MB (n=151)	ON (n=565)	QC (n=502)	ATL (n=188)
Have a family dinner	80%	80%	77%	83%	81%	82%	77%	79%
Visit relatives/ friends locally	69%	71%	66%	73%	74%	69%	67%	71%
Visit relatives/ friends in another community or out of province	28%	21%	32%	35%	22%	31%	24%	27%
Attend a workplace party if COVID restrictions allow	24%	24%	25%	24%	27%	23%	23%	23%
Go to a place of worship if COVID restrictions allow it	15%	15%	19%	18%	23%	16%	9%	15%
None of these	5%	3%	5%	2%	6%	5%	6%	4%

### **Older Canadians have fewer events on their holiday calendar**

Holiday plans vary by age, with older Canadians saying they are planning fewer activities than their younger counterparts. Canadians aged 55 and older are less likely to be attending a family dinner and visiting friends and family locally ([see detailed tables](#)). As detailed above, they are also the age group with the highest concerns about being infected by COVID-19.

### **Part Four: Most are only visiting with the vaccinated this year**

While the holidays are often a time to come together with family and friends to celebrate, Canadians will have to navigate the complexities of hosting social events against the backdrop of the pandemic. Questions of where to celebrate – and with who – may take on new meaning as concerns mount about the [Omicron variant's](#) transmissibility and potential to cause breakthrough infections.

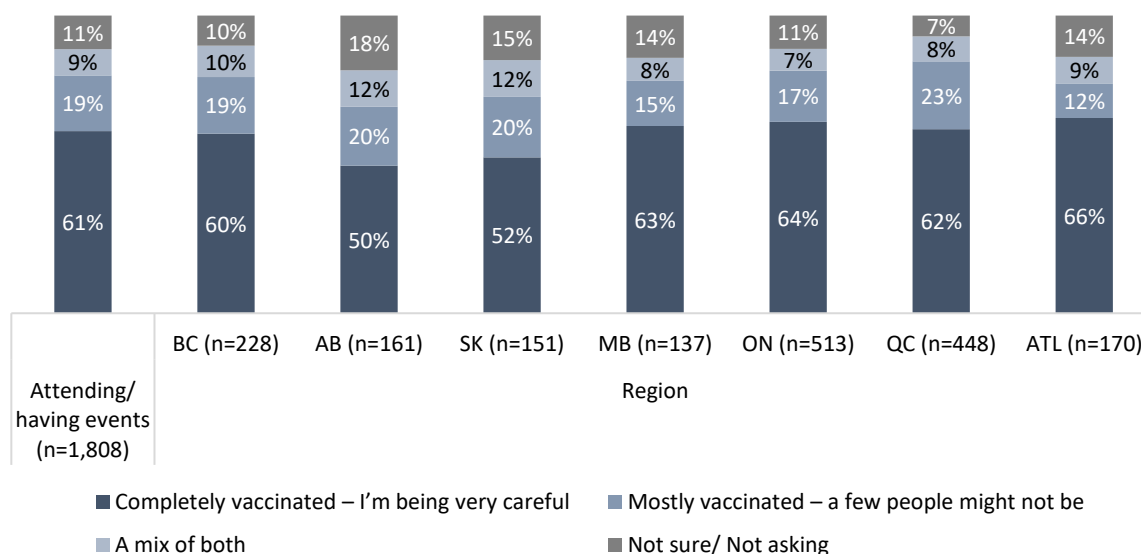
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When asked about their festive plans, three-in-five (61%) Canadians say their scheduled holiday events will only be attended by those who are completely vaccinated. Another one-in-five (19%) say that they will be at events where most people will be vaccinated while another 11 per cent say they won't be asking.

At two-thirds, those in the Atlantic provinces are most likely to say that they will attending events only with fully vaccinated friends and family. In contrast, and perhaps reflective of the [lower vaccination rates](#) in these provinces, only half of those in Alberta (50%) and Saskatchewan (52%) say their holiday plans will be exclusively with the fully vaccinated. These provinces also have the highest rates of those responding that they are either not sure or wouldn't be asking about vaccination status at 18 and 15 per cent respectively:

**Thinking about the dinners/events you are going to have this holiday season, will those attending be vaccinated or not?**



### **Older Canadians most stringent about vaccinated guests**

Against the backdrop of debates about whether booster shots should be [accelerated in Canada due to Omicron](#), Canadians over the age of 55 are the least likely to be taking any chances and are the most likely to say that those at their holiday events will be fully vaccinated. This is true of three-quarters (76%) of women and two-thirds (67%) of men over the age of 55.

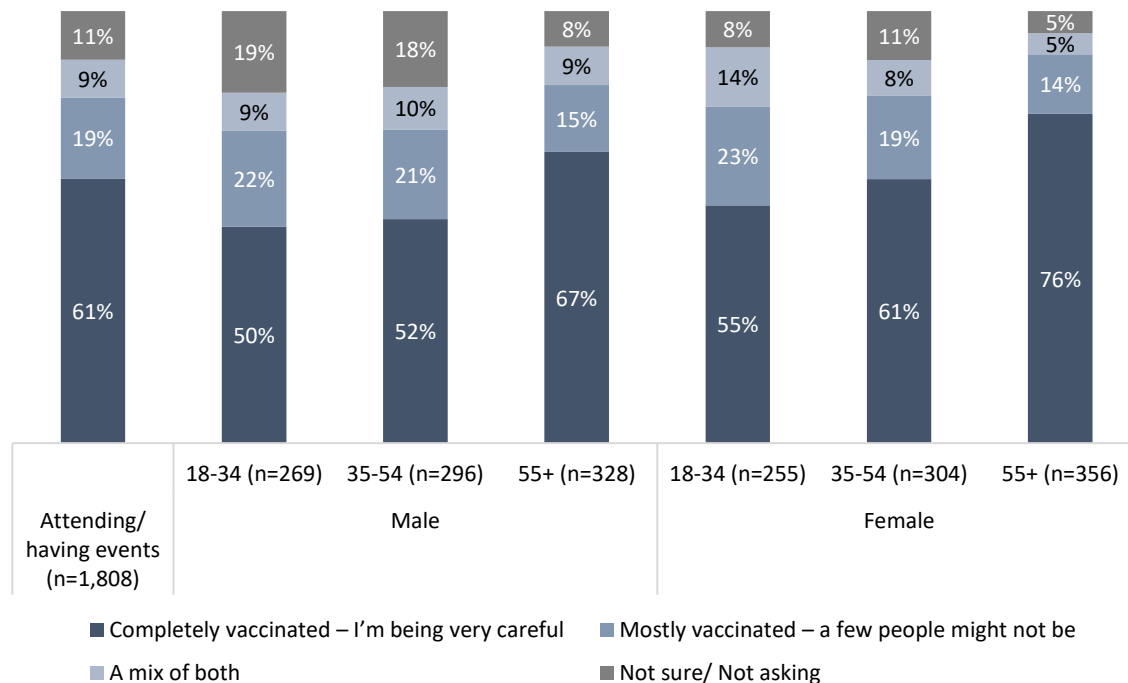
While younger Canadians are less cautious in their approach than those over 55, female respondents are on average more likely to say they would be attending events with only the fully vaccinated than men of the same age:

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**Thinking about the dinners/events you are going to have this holiday season, will those attending be vaccinated or not?**



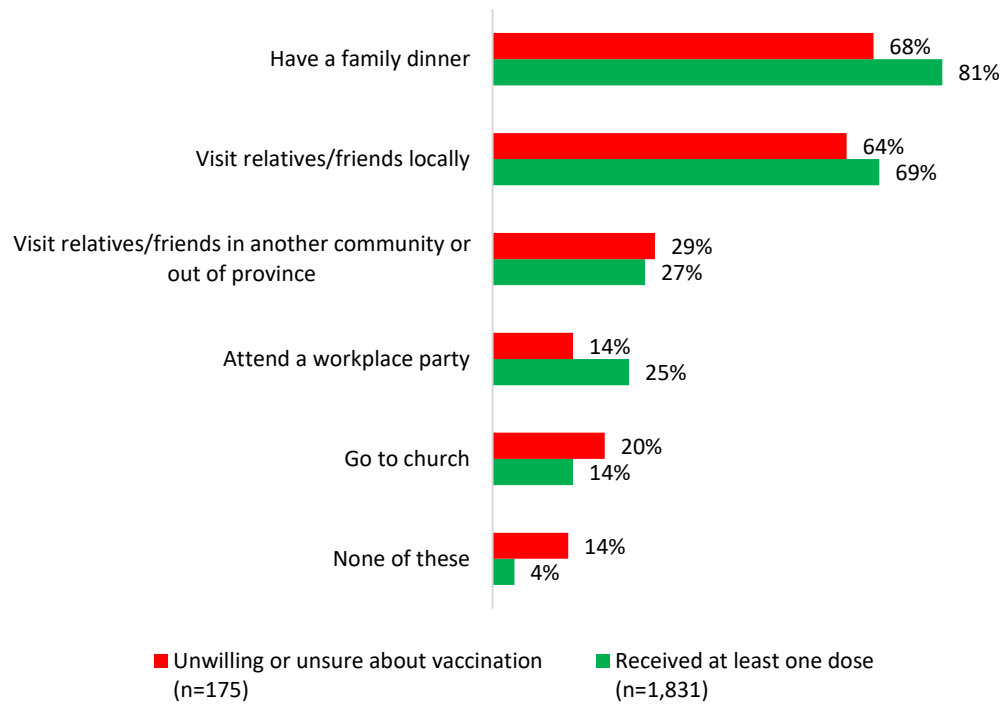
**Unvaccinated less likely to be attending holiday events than the vaccinated**

Many of the unvaccinated are still planning on attending holiday activities, but perhaps because others are being cautious and not inviting them, fewer unvaccinated Canadians say they will be attending family dinners (68%), visiting friends and family locally (64%) and attending workplace parties (14%) when compared with the vaccinated. In fact, 14 per cent of the unvaccinated say they will be doing none of the holiday activities listed, triple the number of the vaccinated (4%) who say the same:

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**Holiday activities by vaccination status**



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

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

*For detailed results by vaccination status, [click here](#).*