

Omicron Inevitability? 55% say they'll be infected regardless of precautions; two-in-five would end all restrictions

Parents stress balance of physical and mental health for children, lean toward keeping schools open

January 13, 2022 – The latest tranche of government restrictions aimed at curbing the unrelentingly virulent spread of COVID-19's Omicron variant is a provincial patchwork that is reflective of Canada's status as a federation.

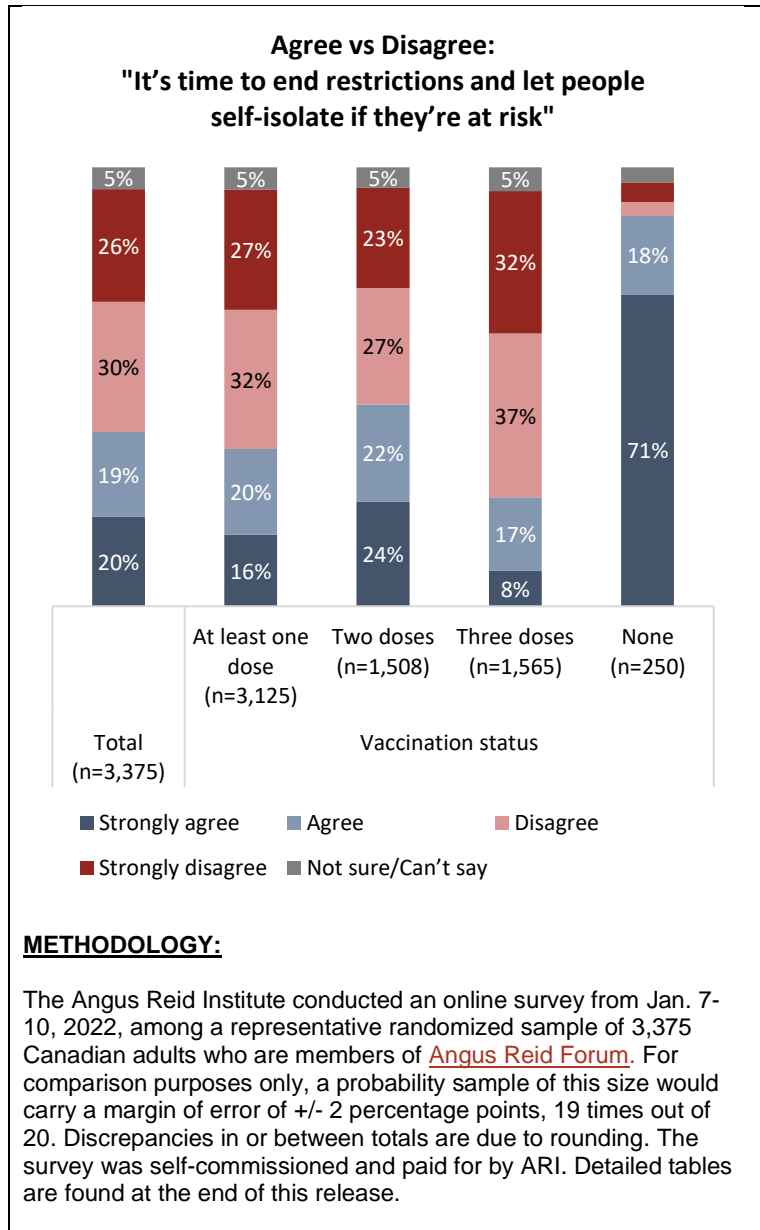
While Quebecers are under curfew from 10 p.m. until 5 a.m., Saskatchewan residents are free to gather as they please at all times.

Now, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute show nationally a slim majority resigned to the inevitability of being infected with this latest strain of the coronavirus. More than half of Canadians (55%) say regardless of the precautions they take, they expect to contract Omicron. Notably, this sentiment rises to at least three-in-five among parents who have children in grade school.

Still, those who feel they can't avoid an Omicron infection are split on whether it's time to remove all public health restrictions. Among those who feel that they will be infected with the latest variant no matter what they do, half (48%) say that public health measures should be removed completely, and half (48%) disagree.

The widespread transmissibility of Omicron does not appear to be changing the calculus for parents when it comes to whether schools should be open for in-person learning, however.

While they are more likely than those without children in school to say that they will contract Omicron, parents of elementary and secondary students lean toward the benefits of having children in-class, rather than online learning. Asked to weigh these two aspects of the debate, 46 per cent say both are equivalent in their priority, while 38 per cent say that the mental health and social development of children from



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being in school is primary. Far fewer (16%) say limiting the spread of COVID-19 in schools should be the government's higher concern during the pandemic.

More Key Findings:

- Half of men aged 54 and under would like to see the end of restrictions. For all other age-gender groups, a majority wouldn't end restrictions, including two-thirds (66%) of women aged 55-years-old and older.
- A plurality in Saskatchewan (44%) and Manitoba (42%) believe restrictions should be stricter in their province. As many in Quebec believe restrictions are too strict (36%) as believe they are about right (38%).
- In Newfoundland and Labrador, three-in-five (60%) believe infection by Omicron is inevitable regardless of what they do. Notably, that province's chief medical officer said at the beginning of the month [she believed](#) most people in the province would catch the variant.
- Few (23%) believe 2022 will be the final year of the pandemic. Women aged 18- to 34-years-old (61%) are the most likely to believe we'll be dealing with widespread COVID-19 infection into 2023 at least.

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: Restrictions: a balancing act

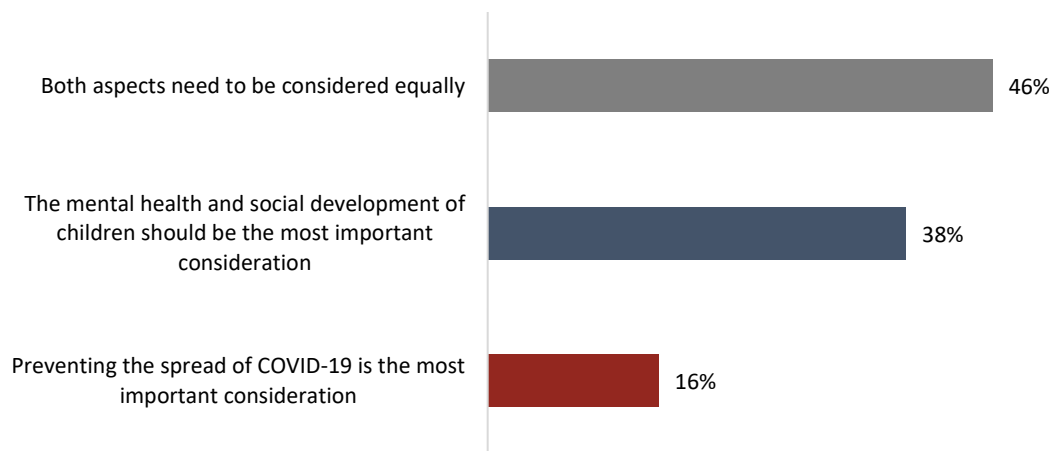
Parents concerned about consequences of keeping kids out of school

Return to the winter session for schools across the country has been complicated by the surge in COVID-19 cases and differs from province to province. Public school students in British Columbia and Alberta returned to school on Monday, after a week’s delay. By contrast, Quebec and Ontario plan to have students back in public schools on Jan. 17. As parents have scrambled to find care, and concerns about staffing abound, the debate about in-class learning continues.

The Angus Reid Institute asked parents with school-aged children to weigh in. Some have suggested that the mental health and social development of students is at risk if in-person learning is restricted, while others say that this is necessary to stop the spread of the Omicron variant.

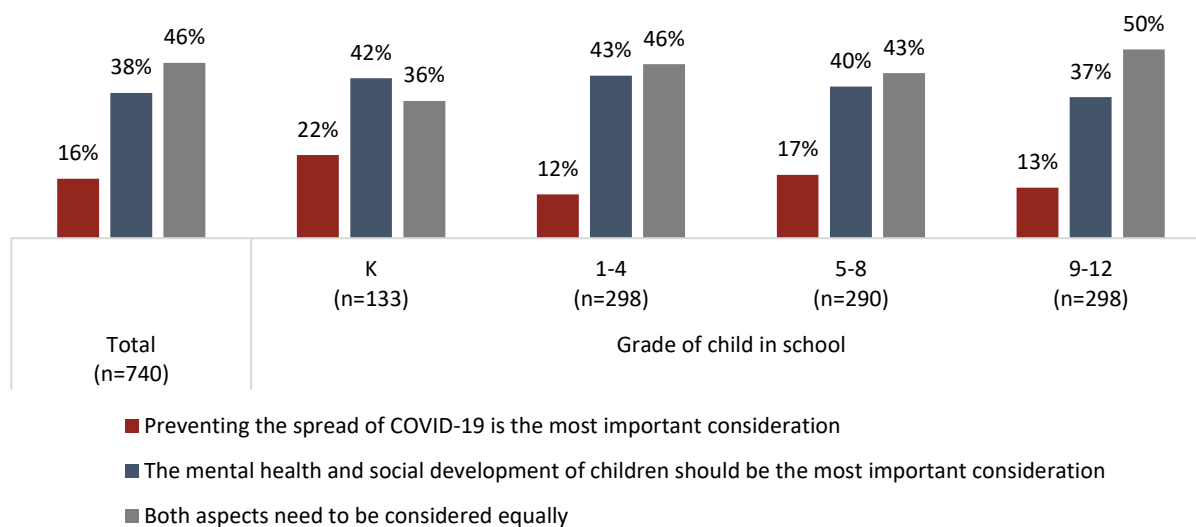
Nearly half of parents of school-aged children say their provincial government must consider both aspects equally. That said, two-in-five (38%) say that the risks of being out of school should be the primary consideration. This represents a group more than double the size of those saying that COVID-19 spread is the most important factor in the equation:

**When it comes to the government’s priorities when it comes to school-aged children during the pandemic, what do you believe?
(Has children in K-12, n=740)**



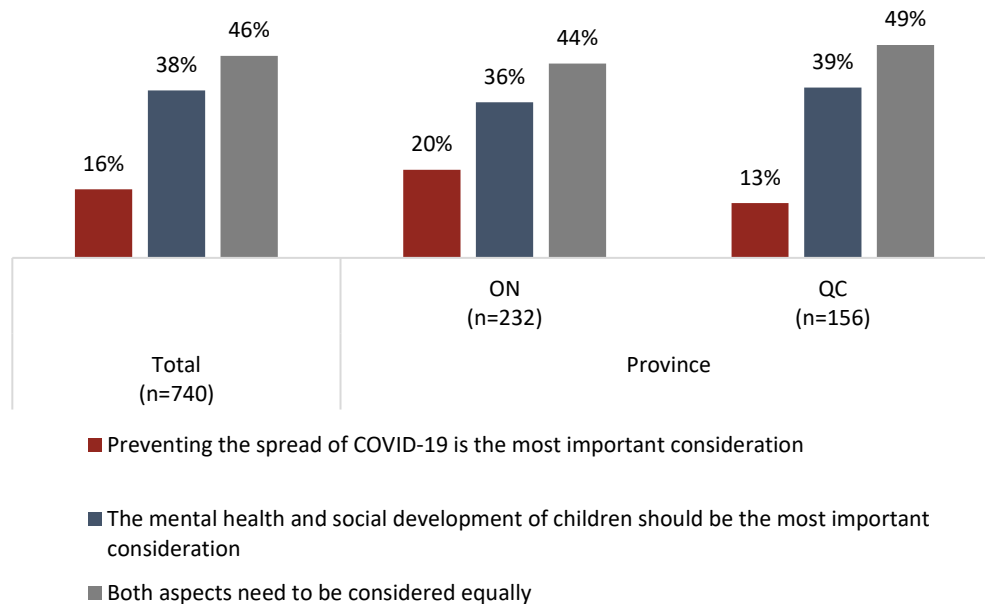
The relative importance of keeping schools open is evident for parents regardless of the age of their children. Each group is close to evenly divided between giving priority to in-class learning, or saying that both factors need to be weighed equally:

**When it comes to the government’s priorities when it comes to school-aged children during the pandemic, what do you believe?
(Has children in K-12)**



There is some variation in thought among Canada’s two most populous provinces. Parents in Ontario are more likely to believe preventing the spread of COVID-19 is the more important consideration at one-in-five. In Quebec, three times as many parents believe mental health and social development need to be the more important priority as preventing COVID-19 infection. Both provinces currently plan to have kids back in classrooms on Jan. 17.

When it comes to the government’s priorities when it comes to school-aged children during the pandemic, what do you believe? (Has children in K-12)



**Note, data from other provinces not reported due to small sample sizes.*

Diverging regional opinions of restrictions

After nearly two years of shifting, evolving and sometimes boomeranging health restrictions that have ebbed and flowed with the virus, Canadians may be forgiven for fatigue and frustration. In Quebec, residents are subject to a curfew that restricts them from leaving their homes from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. In Ontario, indoor gatherings are limited to five people, workers are mandated to work from home unless not viable, and restaurants are closed. Conversely, in Saskatchewan, no gathering restrictions or measures are in place.

This has led to a Canadian public near evenly divided on their community restrictions. The largest group (by a slim margin) say that the restrictions where they live are “about right” (37%). This opinion surpasses two-in-five in B.C. (42%), and all three Atlantic provinces canvassed.

One-in-three Canadians (32%) say that the restrictions currently in place go too far. This sentiment exceeds one-in-three in Quebec (36%), Alberta (35%) and Manitoba (35%).

A nearly identical number, 31 per cent, say that restrictions should be stricter to curb the spread of COVID-19. Saskatchewan (44%) and Manitoba (42%) residents are most likely to want their governments to do more:

Thinking about your community, where you live, do these restrictions – or the lack of them: (Change since Dec. 20 noted; for Atlantic provinces, change from Atlantic average noted)										
(Unweighted sample sizes)	Total (3,375)	Province								
		BC (384)	AB (365)	SK (201)	MB (215)	ON (1,005)	QC (694)	NB (141)	NS (221)	NL (114)
Go too far/ too strict	32% (+6)	26% (+4)	35% (-1)	22% (-8)	35% (+11)	33% (+8)	36% (+10)	21% (0)	24% (+3)	23% (+2)
Don't go far enough/ should be stricter	31% (-2)	31% (+3)	38% (+6)	44% (+19)	42% (+6)	30% (-11)	26% (-2)	38% (+17)	31% (+10)	20% (-1)
Are about right	37% (-4)	42% (-8)	27% (-5)	34% (-11)	24% (-16)	37% (+3)	38% (-8)	41% (-17)	45% (-13)	57% (-1)

**Because its small population precludes drawing discrete samples over multiple waves, data on Prince Edward Island is not released.*

Debate over ending restrictions runs along political lines

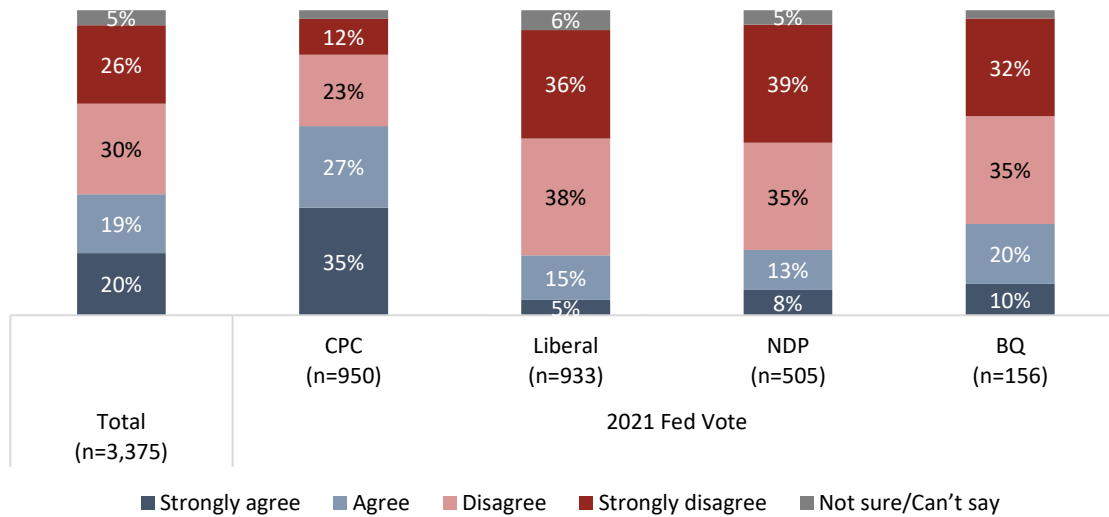
One approach, which has been suggested by some, is ending all restrictions and allowing people who are at risk to manage themselves. Many U.S. states – including two of the most populous, Florida and Texas – are currently without any public health restrictions. (In both states, daily cases have reached new highs and hospitalizations are climbing.)

Public health officials have noted that reducing group sizes and activities that spread the virus is the only way to ensure that overwhelming pressure on hospitals is eased. Still, the former position receives significant minority support in Canada. Two-in-five (39%) say that it is time to end restrictions. This view is held at a far higher level among past Conservative Party voters, where it reaches three-in-five (62%):

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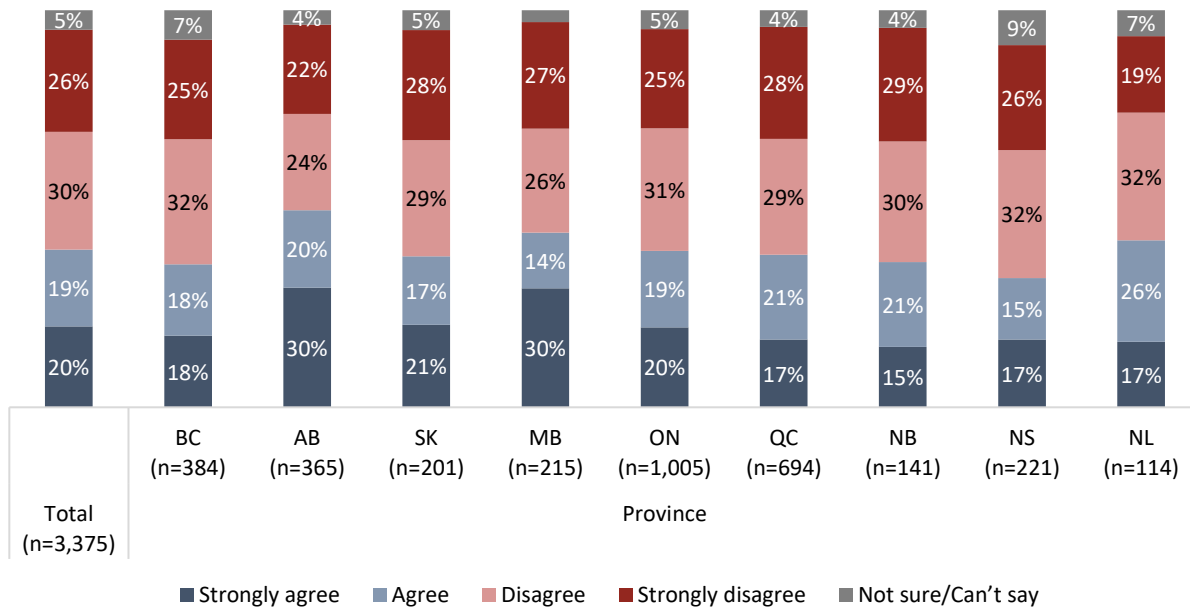
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**Agree vs Disagree -
"It's time to end restrictions and let people self-isolate if they're at risk"**



The contingent of Canadians who would do away with restrictions entirely reaches at least one-in-three in every province canvassed, representing a significant minority in every region of the country. That appetite is strongest in Alberta (50%), Manitoba (44%), and Newfoundland and Labrador (43%). That said, only in Alberta is this a plurality view:

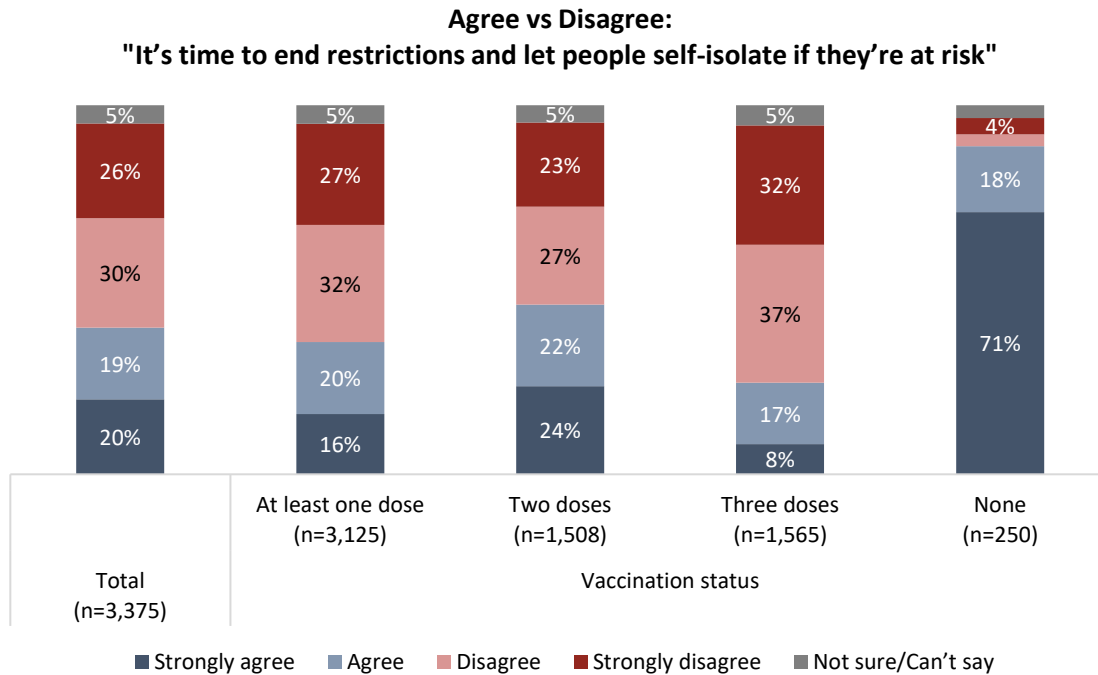
**Agree vs Disagree -
"It's time to end restrictions and let people self-isolate if they're at risk"**



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Men younger than 55 years of age are most likely to support the idea of doing away with restrictions, though they remain relatively divided amongst themselves. Women over the age of 54, meanwhile, are most likely to oppose this concept ([see detailed tables](#)).

What may be more concerning to public health officials is sentiment among the unvaccinated. This small group, which nonetheless represents [a disproportionate number of hospital admissions](#) for COVID-19, is overwhelmingly in favour of doing away with all restrictions:



Part Two: Majority say it's inevitable they're going to be infected

The rapid spread of the Omicron variant has prompted many to wonder if everyone becoming infected by COVID-19 [is inevitable](#). Even [some public health officers across the country](#) believe most will catch the virus at some point.

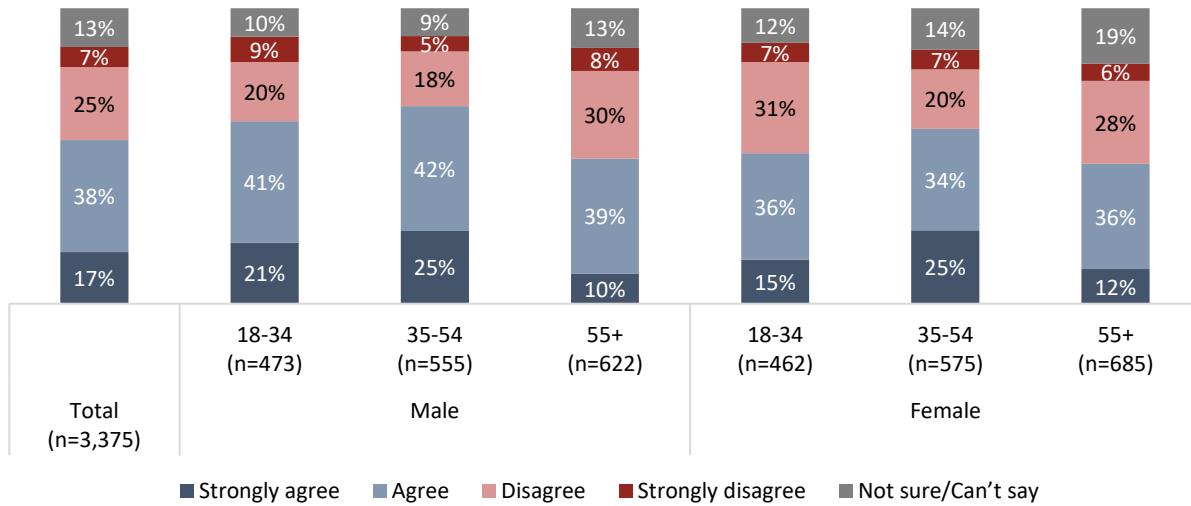
A majority of Canadians agree – more than half (55%) say they believe they will be exposed and infected by Omicron no matter what they do.

Men are more likely than women to believe there's nothing that can stop them from getting Omicron at this point. For both genders, the resignation to infection is highest among those aged 35 to 54, notably the age group [more likely to have children living at home](#):

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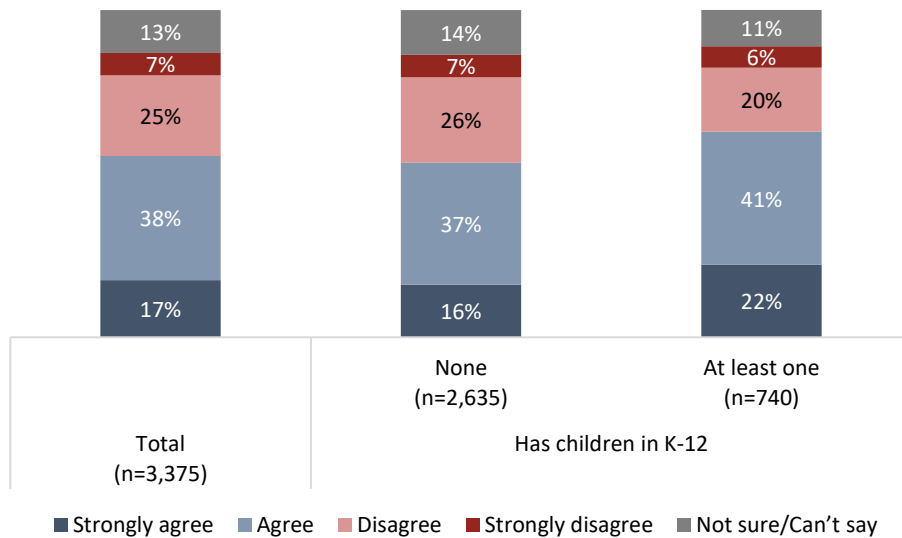
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**Agree vs. Disagree -
"I will be exposed to and infected with Omicron no matter what I do"**

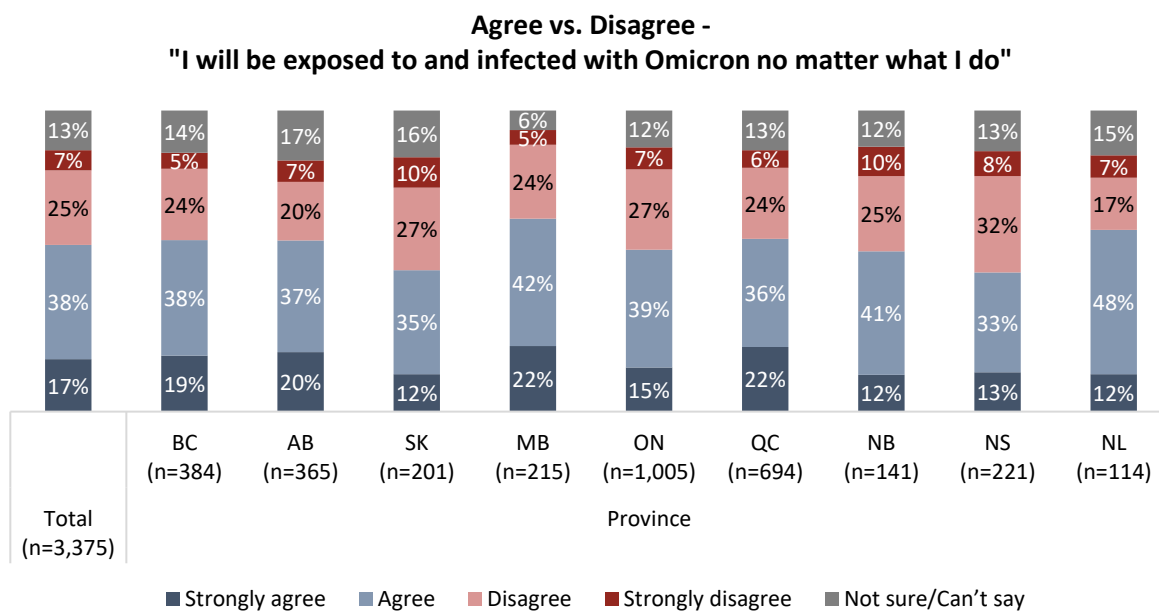


Indeed, those with children in K-12 school are more likely to agree that they won't be able to avoid COVID-19 infection. Three-in-five Canadians (63%) with at least one child in grade school believe a bout with Omicron is inevitable, while half (53%) of those without say the same:

**Agree vs. Disagree -
"I will be exposed to and infected with Omicron no matter what I do"**



The belief that infection is inevitable is strongest in Manitoba (64%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (60%), where chief medical officer of health Dr. Janice Fitzgerald **told the province as much** at the beginning of the month. Those in Nova Scotia (40%) and Saskatchewan (37%) are the most likely to believe they can still take steps to avoid exposure to Omicron:



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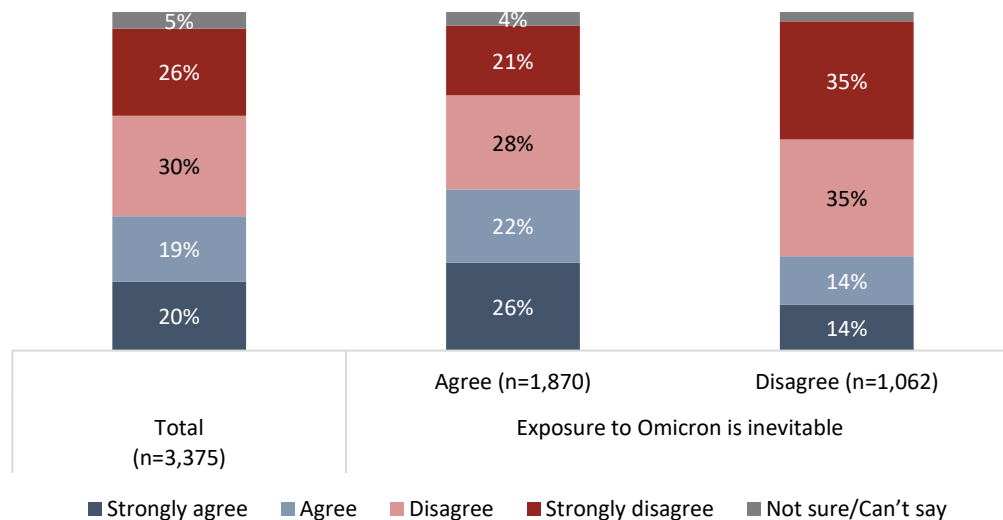
Despite believing they can't avoid Omicron, half (48%) of those who believe a COVID-19 infection is inevitable still think it's too soon to end all public health restrictions, as many (48%) who believe restrictions need to end. Meanwhile, three-in-ten (28%) of those who still believe it's possible to avoid the virus think the time for restrictions is over:

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**Agree vs. Disagree -
"It's time to end restrictions and let people self-isolate if they're at risk"**



Part Three: Few convinced this will be the last year of the pandemic

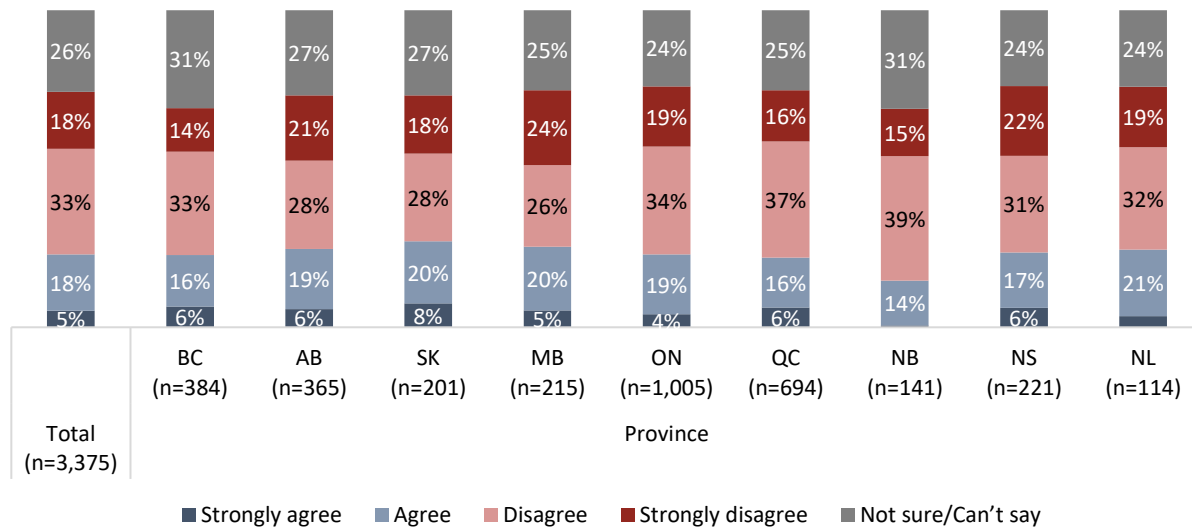
Few believe Omicron will be the final wave of COVID-19. Half (51%) don't believe 2022 will be the last year of the pandemic; one-in-five (23%) are more optimistic we'll be clear in 2023.

A plurality in every province believes the pandemic will continue past this calendar year, while optimism is at its highest in Saskatchewan, where one-quarter (27%) believe the pandemic will conclude in the next 12 months:

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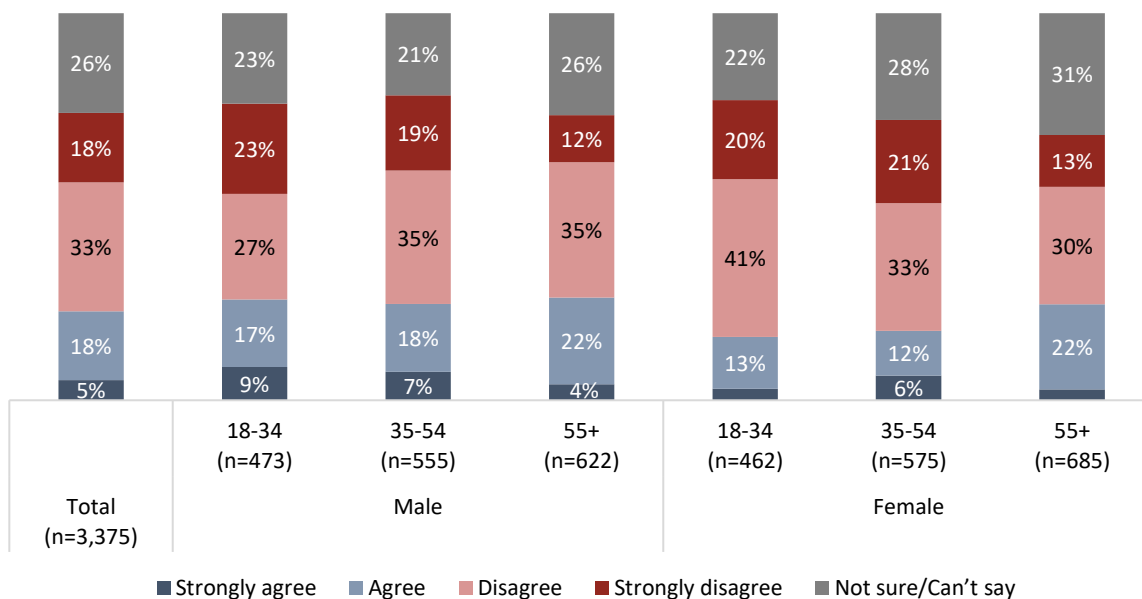
**Agree vs. Disagree -
"2022 will be the last year of the pandemic"**



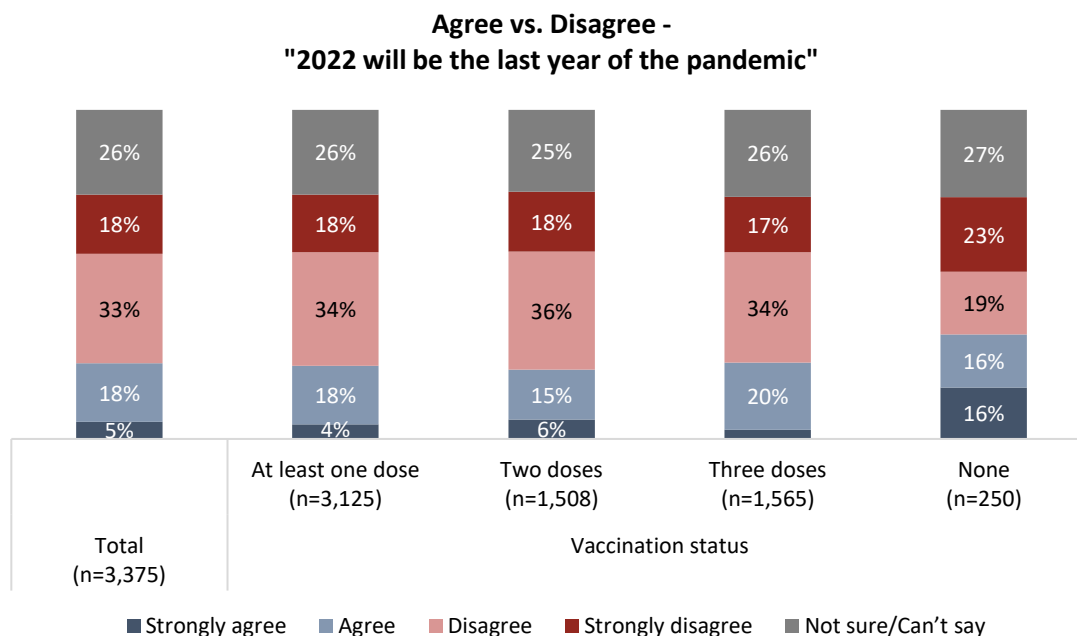
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Three-in-five (61%) women aged 18- to 34-years-old believe we'll be dealing with rampant COVID-19 infections past 2022, the most of any demographic. Men over the age of 55 (27%) are the most likely to believe these are the final days of the pandemic, but still half (47%) say it will continue beyond this year:

**Agree vs. Disagree -
"2022 will be the last year of the pandemic"**



A third (32%) of those who remain unvaccinated believe the pandemic is close to the end, making them the most likely group to say so, compared to those with other vaccination statuses:



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

For detailed results by vaccination status, grade of child in school, or whether or not respondents believe Omicron infection is inevitable, [click here](#).