

Unconcerned about Omicron: More than four-in-five now believe a COVID-19 infection would be mild, manageable

For the first time, plurality want Canada to shift its vaccination efforts to focus on less wealthy countries

January 26, 2022 – Even as public health officials call for caution from Canadians as [the Omicron wave peaks](#), new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds many believing a personal infection by COVID-19 would be “like a case of the flu.”

Indeed, half (49%) believe if they caught the virus, they would have serious but manageable symptoms while a further one-third (36%) think their infection would be mild.

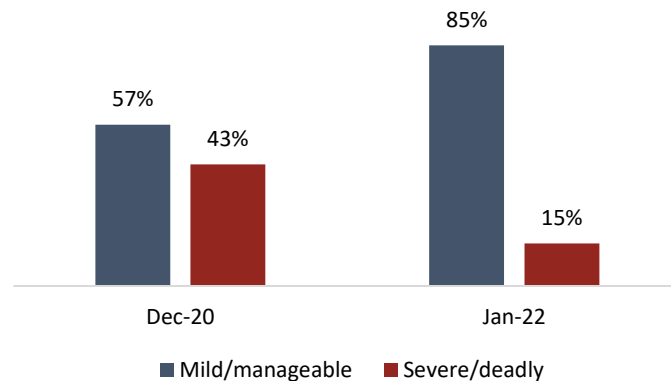
These data stand against a backdrop of warnings from many health experts that though Omicron may be causing less severe outcomes than the previous Delta variant, [it should not be referred to as “mild.”](#)

Still, relatively few Canadians worry that if they were infected, they would have to be hospitalized (12%) or worse – an infection for them could be fatal (3%). For comparison, in both the summer and winter of 2020, nearly three times as many said that contracting COVID-19 would have these serious consequences.

[As Omicron begins to ebb](#), there remain global concerns that [more variants](#) are possible in the future as long as there are large pockets of unvaccinated people in less wealthy countries. [Almost 40 per cent](#) of the world's population has yet to receive one dose of COVID-19 vaccine, including many in Africa, where Omicron was first identified.

Notably then, far more Canadians say they'd prefer this country shift its vaccination focus outside of its own borders. Approaching half (46%) of Canadians want Canada to focus on vaccinating people in less wealthy countries, while two-in-five (39%) prefer the efforts stay locally. That represents a significant change in the opinions of Canadians from the summer, when [seven-in-ten opposed sharing vaccines globally](#) until vaccinations here were complete.

Suppose you did get sick from COVID-19. How serious do you feel this would be for you, personally?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Jan. 7 – 12, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 5,002 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 +/- 2.0 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 Key Findings:

- Parents with children in kindergarten (44%) and Grades 1 to 4 (45%) are more likely to want the vaccination effort to be prioritized at home than respondents without any children in grade school (37%).
- A majority of past Conservative voters (54%) want Canada to continue to focus the vaccination effort within its border, the only partisan group where that's the case.
- Almost all (94%) of the unvaccinated believe a COVID-19 infection for them would be mild or manageable. Meanwhile, one-in-five (18%) of those with a booster shot worry an infection for them would be serious or deadly, more than the number of those with two doses who believe the same.

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.*

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

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Part One: Most think they could handle a COVID infection

When the World Health Organization [first identified](#) Omicron as a COVID-19 variant of concern, there was much alarm over [how many mutations the variant had](#) and how quickly it was spreading in South Africa, where it was [initially discovered](#).

As Omicron spread across the globe, data from South Africa offered hope that the variant was [causing less severe outcomes](#) than the previous Delta variant. Though that was the case, the [WHO issued a warning](#): it should still not be described as “mild” given the pressure rising infections was putting on healthcare systems worldwide.

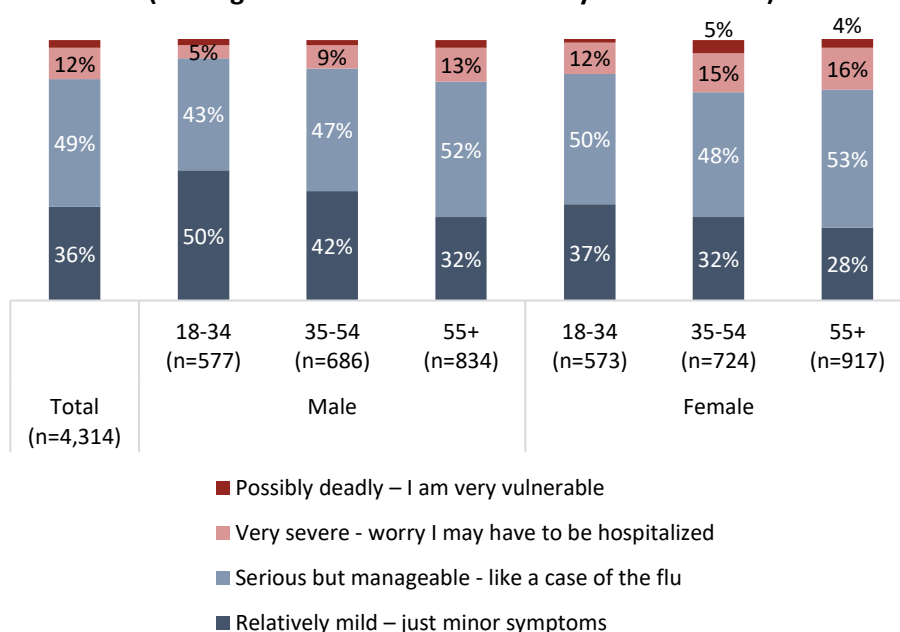
For Canadians, most believe they could survive a bout with COVID-19 with relative ease. One-third (36%) say if they were infected by the virus, it would be mild with minor symptoms. Half (49%) say it would be like the flu – serious, but manageable. One-in-eight (12%) fear they will be hospitalized if they were infected, while three per cent say they are very vulnerable and think it could possibly kill them.

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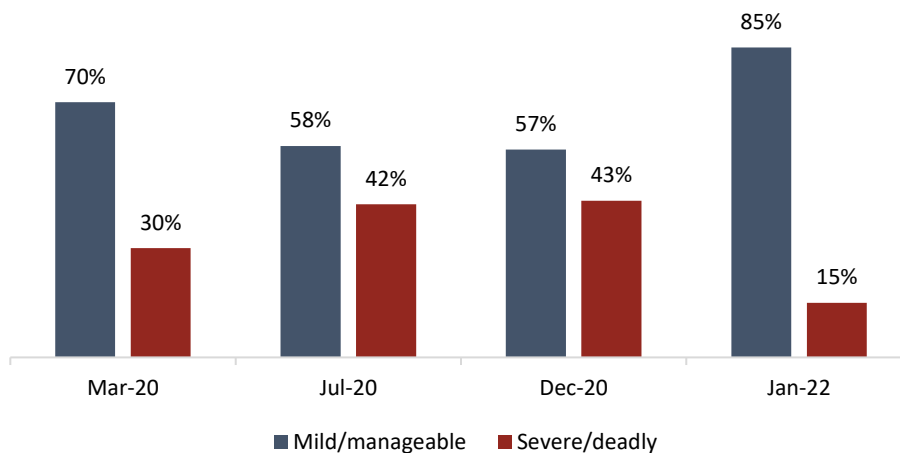
Women are more likely to believe they will have a severe outcome if they were infected by COVID-19 than men. For young men, half (50%) believe they would only have minor symptoms, the only demographic where that is the plurality opinion. Conversely, 12 per cent of women aged 18- to 34-years-old worry they would have to be hospitalized if they caught COVID-19, more than twice the number of men that age:

**Suppose you did get sick from COVID-19. How serious do you feel this would be for you, personally?
(Among those who have not already been infected)**



When ARI last asked Canadians to predict how they'd be able to handle a COVID-19 infection, it was in December 2020, near [the height of the second wave](#). That was before any variant had made a significant impact in the country and the vaccination effort was only beginning. Canadians were much more concerned: two-in-five (43%) worried they would have a severe outcome if they were to be infected by the virus, nearly three times as many who say the same now:

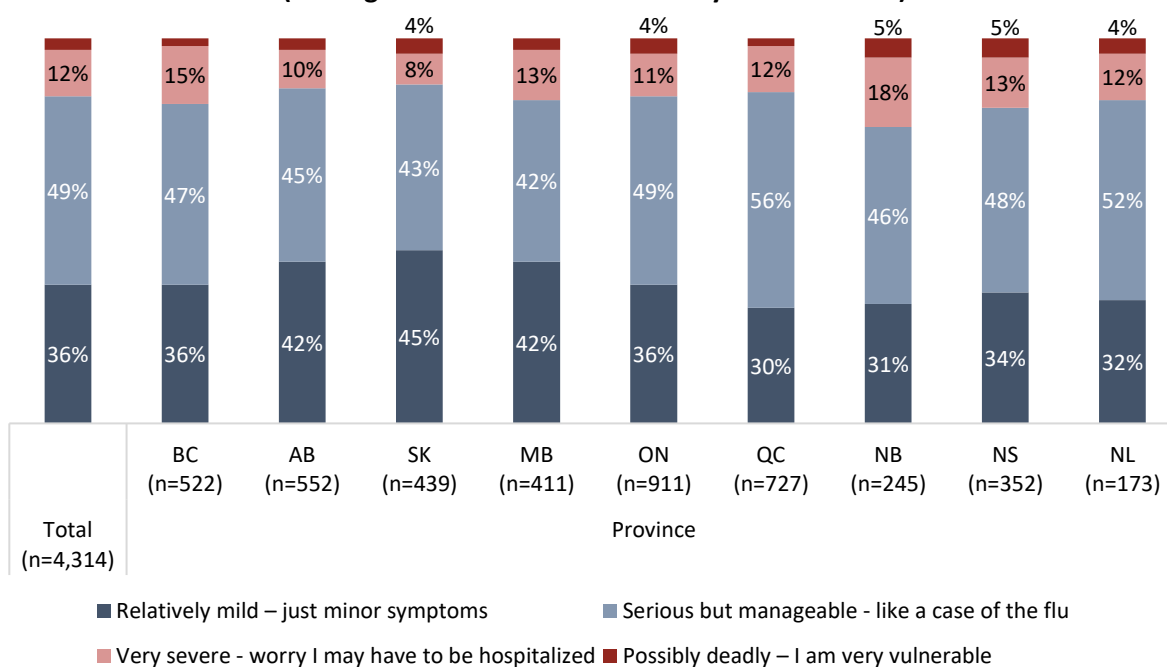
Suppose you did get sick from COVID-19. How serious do you feel this would be for you, personally?



Across the country, those on the Prairies are more likely to believe that they could be infected by COVID-19 and only experience mild symptoms. Two-in-five in Saskatchewan (45%), Manitoba (42%) and Alberta (42%) say this. Meanwhile, one-in-five (18%) in New Brunswick worry they would have to be hospitalized if they caught the virus, the highest number in the country:

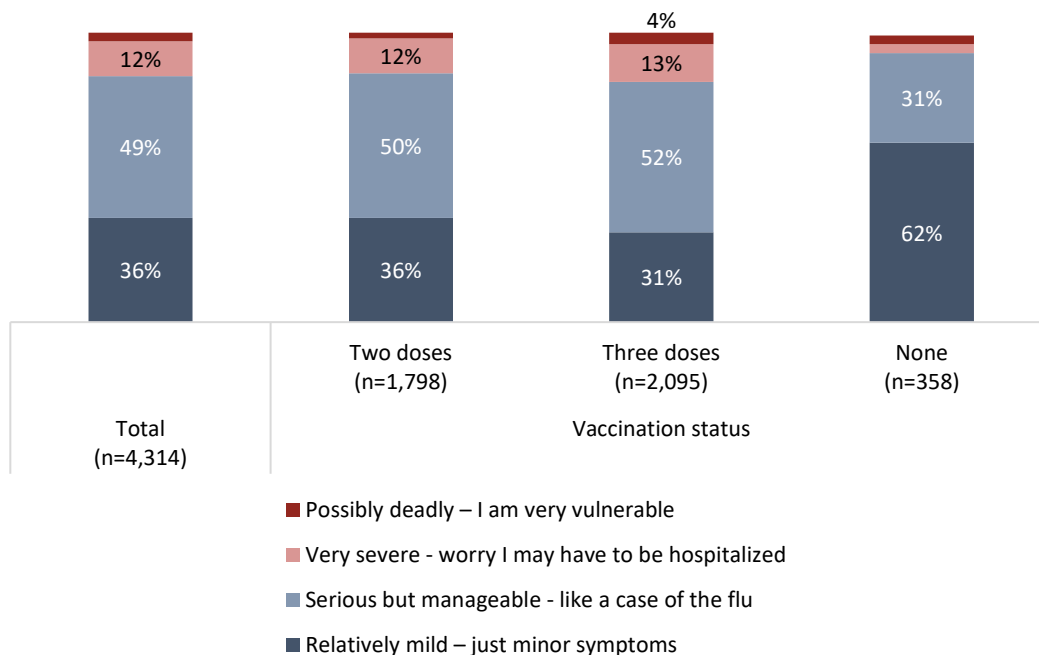
Suppose you did get sick from COVID-19. How serious do you feel this would be for you, personally?

(Among those who have not already been infected)



Nearly all of the unvaccinated (94%) believe they could manage an infection by COVID-19. Twice as many unvaccinated believe the symptoms would be minor (62%) as it would be more like a case of the flu (31%). Those who are boosted are more likely to worry of hospitalization or death if they were to be infected than those who have two doses:

**Suppose you did get sick from COVID-19. How serious do you feel this would be for you, personally?
(Among those who have not already been infected)**



Part Two: Should Canada be focusing on vaccinating the world?

In December, the WHO set a goal to have [70 per cent of the world's population vaccinated](#) against COVID-19 by the middle this year. [The concern](#) is that future variants will continue to emerge in countries where large populations of people are unvaccinated, and the virus will have opportunities to spread and mutate. The argument from [health experts](#) is that wealthy countries need to do their part to vaccinate the world to keep their own countries safe from COVID.

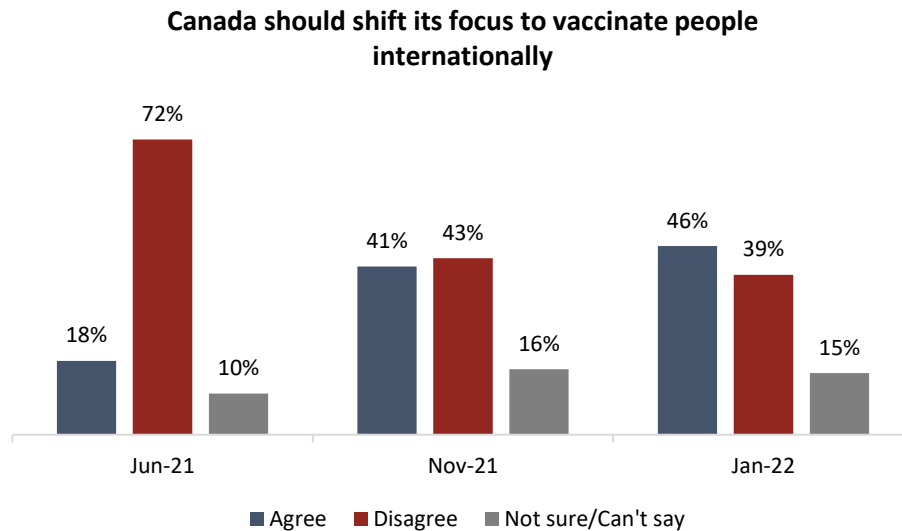
The efforts to get vaccines from high income countries to low income ones has been hindered by wealthy countries [falling behind on the doses](#) they promised to send, as well as [sending doses that were near expired](#). Meanwhile, wealthier countries are beginning to administer [third and fourth doses](#), as nearly [40 per cent](#) of the world's population has yet to receive a single dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

Canadians are split: 46 per cent believe it's time to shift the focus to vaccinating those in less wealthy countries, while two-in-five (39%) disagree. This represents a slight shift from data collected prior to Omicron's emergence. [In November](#), 43 per cent of Canadians believed we should be focusing on getting first doses to people in less wealthy countries, while two-in-five (41%) believed we should first get first doses to children and boosters to others at home.

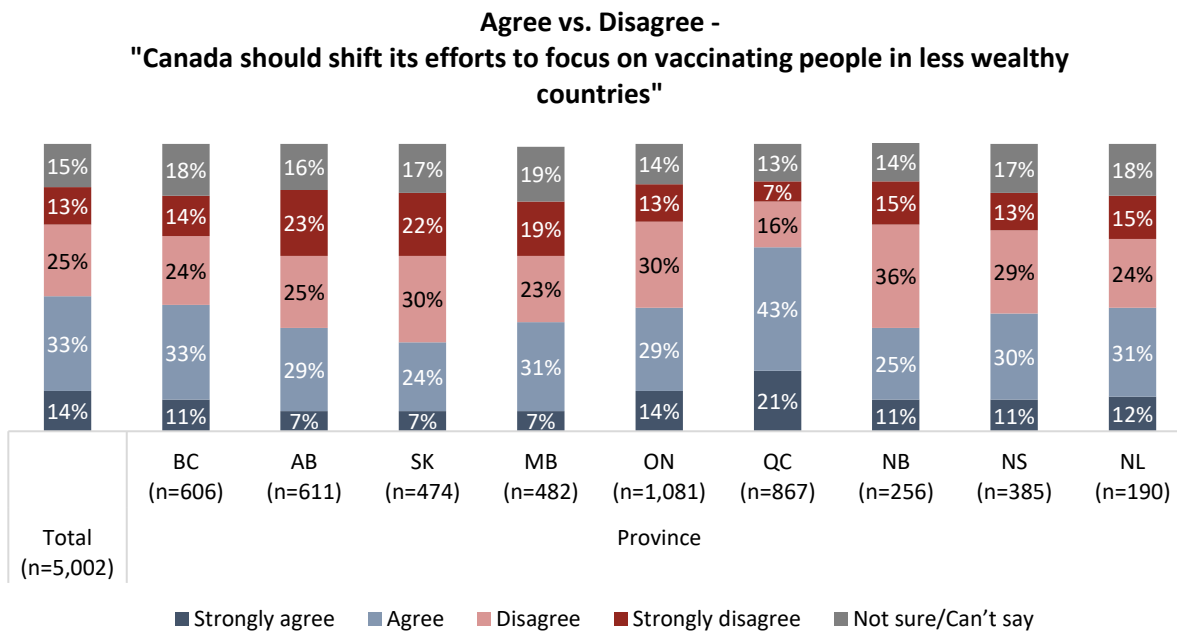
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In the summer, prior to many children receiving the jab, Canadians were much more reluctant to see vaccines leave the country:

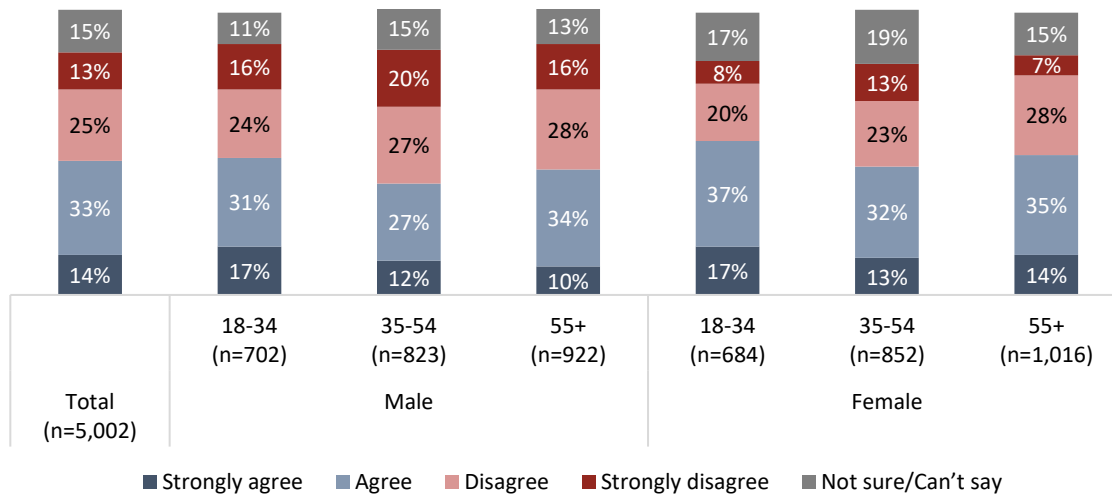


Two-thirds (64%) of Quebecers want the focus to shift internationally, the most of any province. Those in New Brunswick (51%) and Saskatchewan (52%) are the most likely to want the focus to stay within Canada's borders:



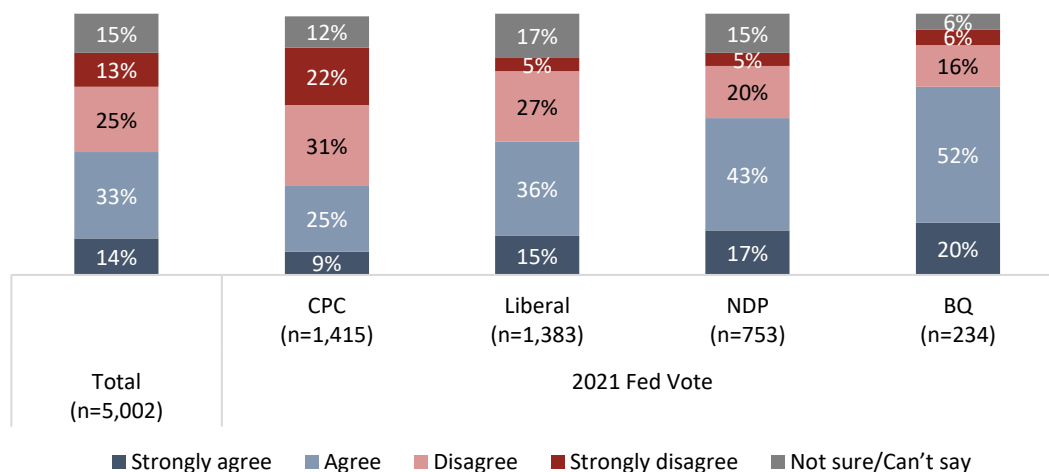
Women, and particularly those aged 18- to 34-years-old, want the vaccination effort to move abroad while men are much more divided:

**Agree vs. Disagree -
"Canada should shift its efforts to focus on vaccinating people in less wealthy countries"**



A majority of past Conservative voters (54%) disagree that Canada should be making efforts to vaccinate people in other countries, the only partisan group where that's the case. Half of Liberal supporters (51%), three-in-five past NDP voters (60%) and seven-in-ten Bloc voters (72%) believe it's time to get first doses in arms outside of the country:

**Agree vs. Disagree -
"Canada should shift its efforts to focus on vaccinating people in less wealthy countries"**

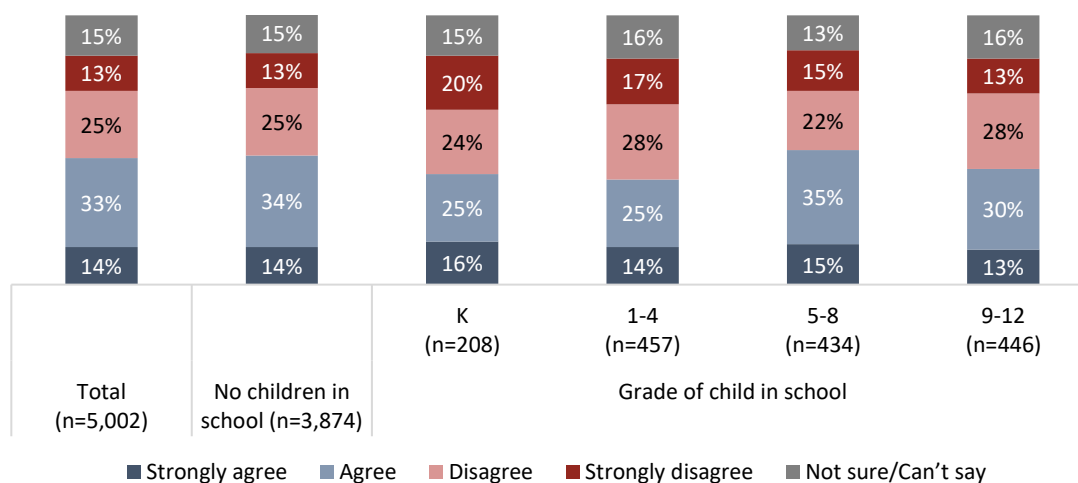


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Children aged five to 11 have only been eligible to receive a COVID-19 vaccine since November and many are still within [the eight-week interval](#) period before they are eligible for their second dose. Parents with children in kindergarten (44%) and those with children in Grades 1 to 4 (45%) are more likely to prefer the vaccination effort continues at home than those without any children in grade school (37%):

**Agree vs. Disagree -
"Canada should shift its efforts to focus on vaccinating people in less wealthy countries"**



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

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

For detailed results by vaccination status and whether the respondent has children in grade school, [click here](#).

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