

Fret vs. no sweat? Generational divide drives concern over next COVID-19 wave and preventing infection spread

Men younger than 55 years less worried than others; less willing to stay home or wear a mask

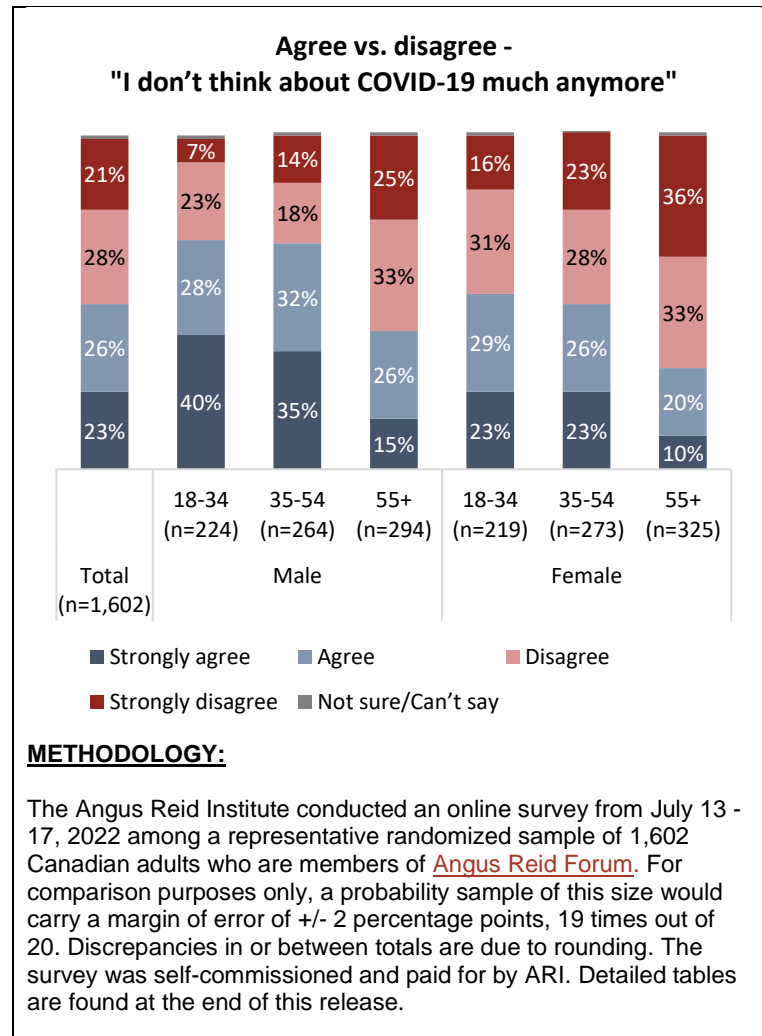
July 19, 2022 – For at least the seventh time in an ongoing pandemic, Canadians are once again faced with a decision point this summer: to change their plans and behaviour to mitigate risk of contracting or spreading the latest variant of the COVID-19 virus, or plow ahead despite what [public health officials are identifying as increasing risk?](#)

It comes as Canada's tourism sector desperately hoped for a "[summer of recovery](#)", at a time when bookings for accommodations and flights are up compared to the two previous years, and as summer festivals, concerts and parades make their return. Despite this, COVID-19 concerns continue to swirl for a significant portion of the population.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds half of Canadians expressing worry over potential illness. Those over the age of 54 carry much more of the weight of anxiety. Seven-in-ten (68%) among this age group say they're concerned about getting sick, while fewer than half of those aged 18- to 34-years-old (43%) and 35- to 54-years-old (44%) say the same. This concern manifests itself in widely divergent behaviours and attitudes toward COVID-19.

Overall, half of Canadians (46%) say they have proceeded with caution in recent months, either avoiding community events (33%), cancelling plans with friends or family (25%), or taking a rain cheque on international (17%) or domestic (16%) trips. Further, if a seventh wave is formally declared in their province (it has been in Quebec, Ontario, and B.C. already) seven-in-ten say they will adjust accordingly by doing less in public or staying closer to home. This is not, however, the case for younger people, and particularly men younger than 55.

For this group, fewer than two-in-five say they would be willing to wear a mask more often or avoid crowded spaces if cases continue to rise and a seventh wave is formally acknowledged in their province.



CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

At least 55 per cent of all women, as well as men older than 54 say they would take these two steps to mitigate the risk of infection to themselves and others.

Thus, politicians and public health officials appear to be facing a unique challenge over the coming months. Considerable portions of the population remain receptive to the challenges COVID-19 presents, while others are tuning out the messaging. Indeed, half of Canadians now agree with the statement “I don’t think about COVID-19 much anymore” while an identical number disagree. Younger people are more likely to agree, while the virus occupies much more attention for those over the age of 65.

More Key Findings:

- Two-thirds of men in the 18-to-34 and 35-to-54 age groups say they no longer think about COVID-19 very often.
- One-in-eight respondents overall (13%) say this seventh wave of COVID-19 caused by the BA.5 variant of Omicron could be more serious than previous waves, while two-in-five (37%) say it will be less serious. The rest either aren’t sure (36%) or are not paying attention to the new variant at all (14%).

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: Portions of the population checked out on COVID concern

As summer COVID-19 cases start to rise, health officials in [Quebec](#), [Ontario](#), and [B.C.](#) have officially declared their jurisdictions have entered a seventh wave of COVID-19 [driven by the Omicron sub variant identified as BA.5](#). Scientists believe the latest viral evolution of Omicron is [more infectious than previous strains and more able to evade immunity from both vaccines and previous infections](#).

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control identified BA.5 as [a variant of concern in May](#), several months after the sub lineages were [first detected in South Africa](#). It became the dominant strain in the United States in [early July](#).

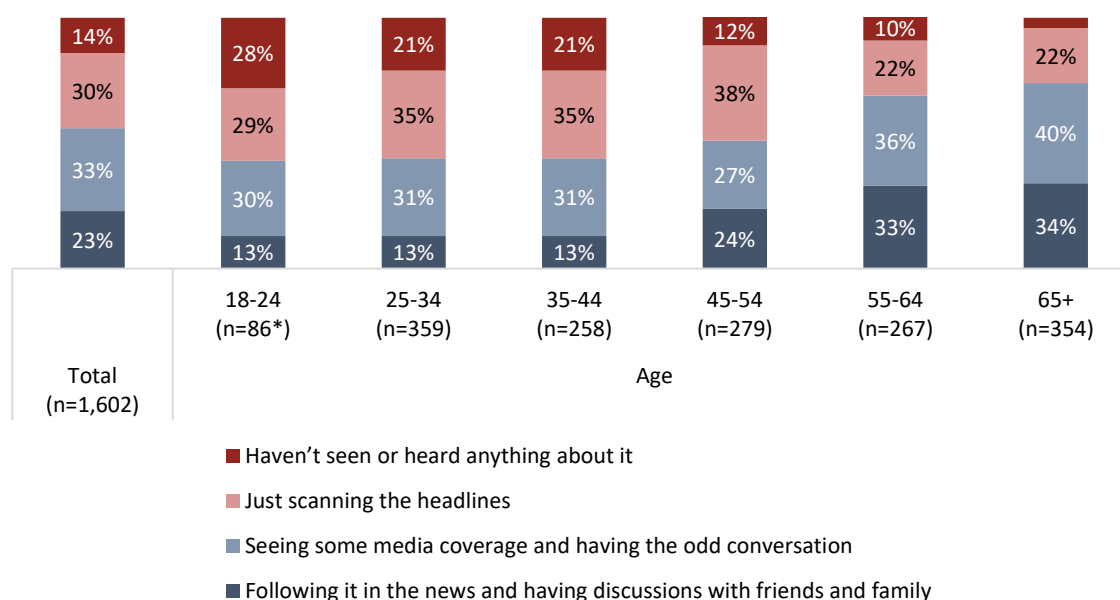
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Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

More than half (55%) of Canadians say they've been following media coverage and discussing news of the BA.5 sub variant. Three-in-ten say they've been scanning headlines, while fewer than one-in-six (14%) say they hadn't heard or read anything about it.

Older Canadians are much more likely than younger ones to say they've been following stories of the emergence of BA.5 closely. Few (4%) over the age of 64 say they have heard nothing about it. Comparatively, more than one-in-five of those under the age of 45 say the latest COVID-19 variant of concern is not on their radar:

How closely following have you been following this? - News of a sub variant of Omicron they identify as BA.5



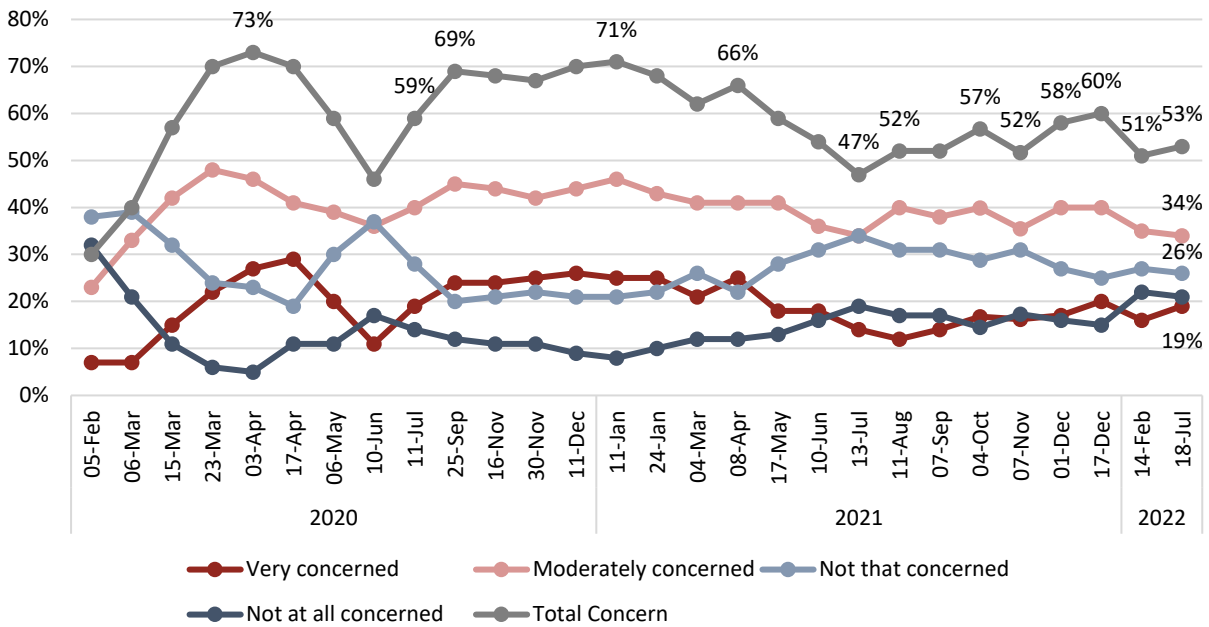
**Smaller sample size, interpret with caution*

Half say they're concerned about illness

More than half of Canadians (53%) say they are very or moderately concerned about personally becoming sick with COVID-19. One-quarter are less worried (26%) and one-in-five (21%) are not worried about being infected by COVID-19 at all.

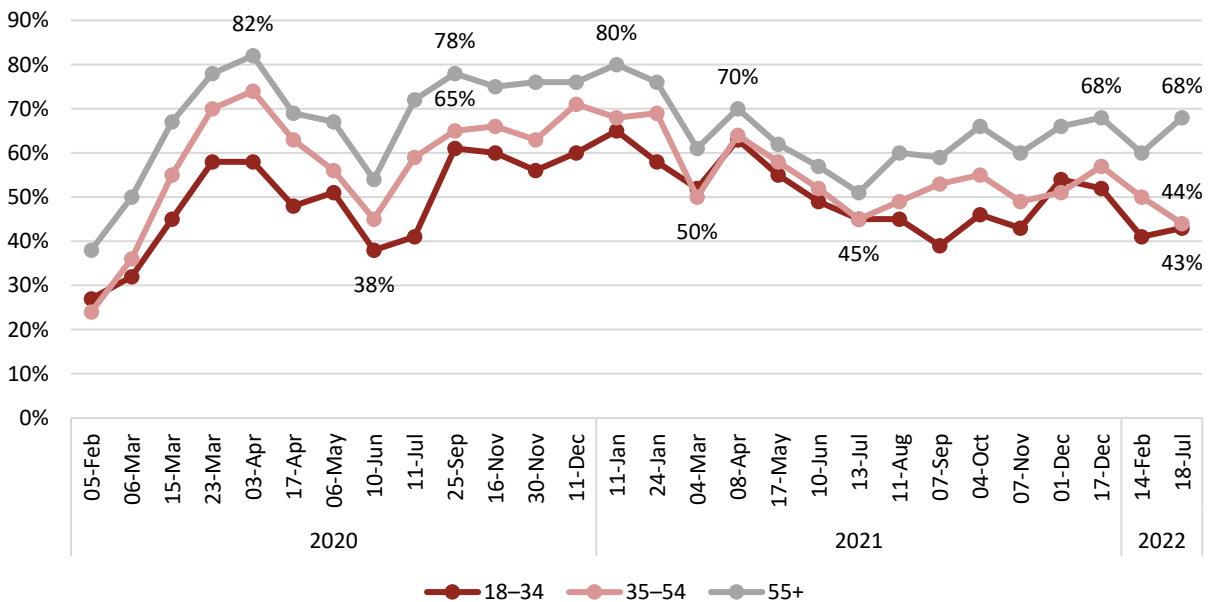
Overall, total concern is lower than it was heading into the initial Omicron wave. As health officials warned of Omicron spread prior to the holiday season, three-in-five Canadians were concerned about personally contracting the virus.

Personal concern over contracting COVID-19



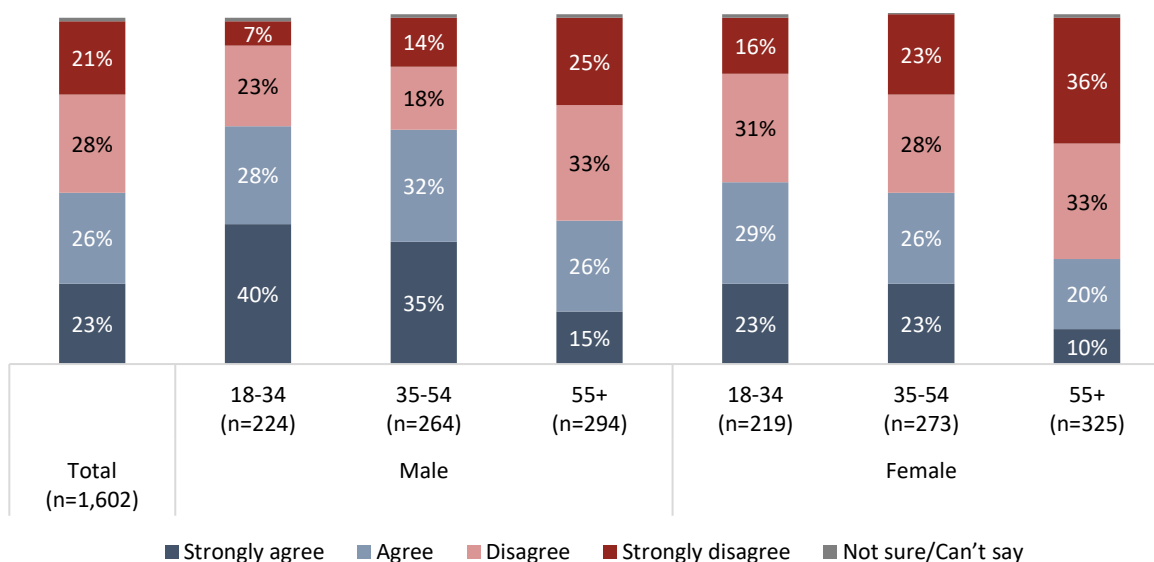
Throughout the pandemic, older Canadians are more likely to have **suffered serious outcomes from COVID-19 infection**. As such, concern among those over the age of 54 has been higher than for younger adults. However, the gap in concern between 35- to 54-year-olds and those over the age of 54 has never been as wide as it is currently:

Total concern over contracting COVID-19 by age



The gap in concern is also reflected in how much COVID-19 occupies the minds of different demographics. Overall, half of Canadians say they don't think about COVID-19 much anymore, while for the other half the pandemic still enters their thoughts regularly. Two-thirds of men under the age of 55 are in the former group, while women, and especially those over the age of 54, are much more likely to be in the latter:

**Agree vs. disagree -
"I don't think about COVID-19 much anymore"**



Widespread sense that this wave presents less risk

Whether or not BA.5 causes more severe illness than past variants of the virus remains to be seen. While COVID-19 hospitalizations have increased in the U.S., so far, severe cases have not. On the other hand, in South Africa and Portugal, two countries where BA.5 waves have already risen and fell, the results have been mixed. Portugal has had more hospitalizations and deaths than South Africa, though it is unclear whether that was due to differences in the average age of each country's population, or differences in immunity based on prior infection or the timing and availability of boosters.

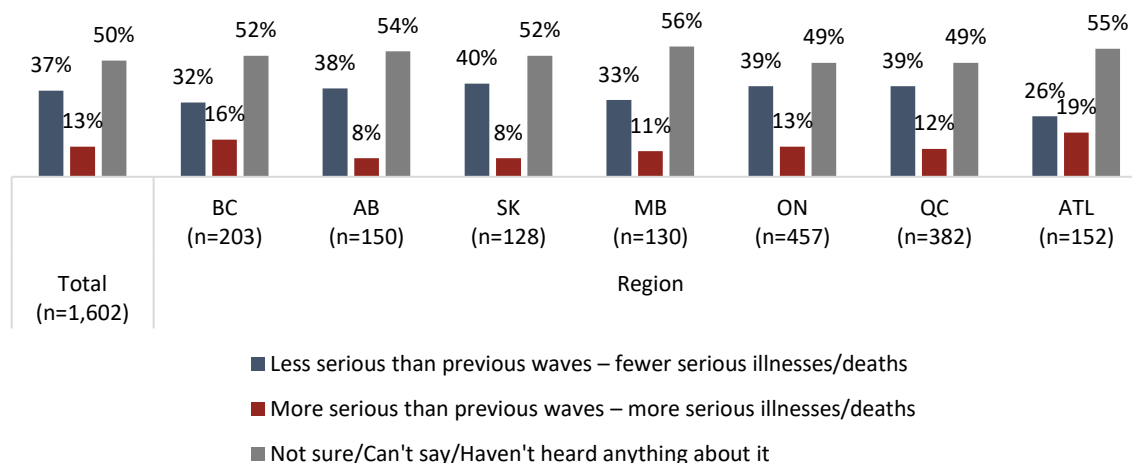
Here, Canadians are much more likely to believe BA.5 will be less serious than previous waves (37%) than not (13%), but half have no opinion or no knowledge of the latest variant.

One-in-five (19%) in Atlantic Canada fear this wave will result in more severe outcomes or deaths, the highest proportion in the country. That more than doubles the rate of Albertans or Saskatchewanians who say the same (8%):

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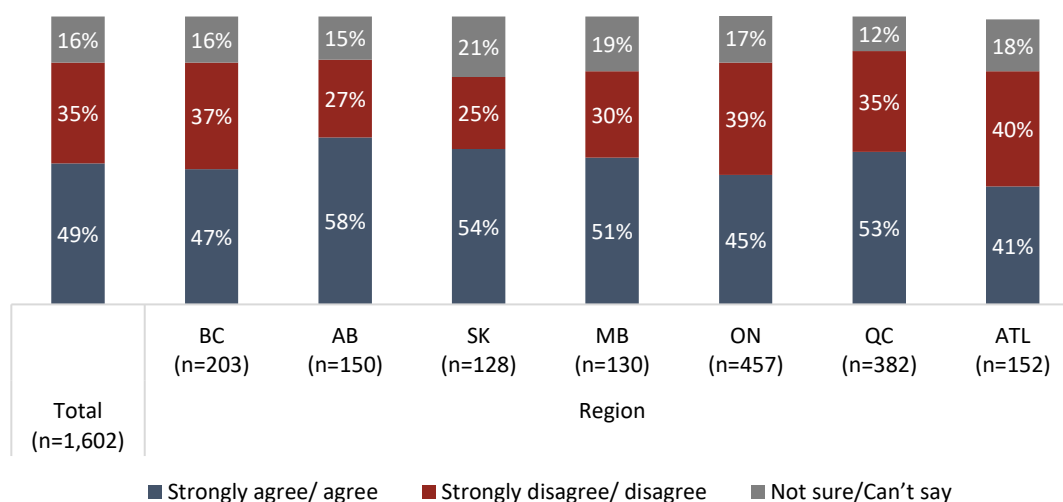
Based on what you know about this newest variant do you believe it will be...?



Indeed, three-in-five (58%) in Alberta and nearly as many (54%) in Saskatchewan believe the worst of COVID-19 is over. In Atlantic Canada, residents are more split.

Overall, half (49%) of Canadians believe we've seen the worst COVID-19 can bring to us while one-third (35%) disagree:

Agree vs. disagree - "The worst of COVID-19 is over"



Part Two: Cancelling plans a regular occurrence this summer

Nearly half have decided to cancel an outing or a trip

In the absence of public health restrictions in recent months, Canadians have been left on their own to manage their risk of exposure or spread. Approaching half (46%) of Canadians say they have passed on attending events, cancelled plans or travel in recent months because they were worried about catching or spreading COVID-19.

Women over the age of 54 have been most likely to alter their plans in the face of the virus, at nearly three-in-five (57%). Still, more than half (54%) of Canadians say COVID-19 has not affected their calendar, including nearly two-thirds of men under the age of 55 (63%), the most of any demographic:

Have you done any of the following over the past three months or so because you were worried about contracting or spreading COVID-19?							
	Total (n=1,602)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=224)	35-54 (n=264)	55+ (n=294)	18-34 (n=219)	35-54 (n=273)	55+ (n=325)
Decided not to go an event in your community	33%	23%	26%	31%	40%	32%	43%
Cancelled plans with friends or family	25%	28%	21%	18%	30%	26%	26%
Cancelled/delayed intl. travel plans	17%	11%	14%	20%	15%	19%	22%
Cancelled or delayed domestic travel plans	16%	15%	13%	17%	14%	15%	18%
None of these	54%	63%	63%	53%	48%	55%	43%

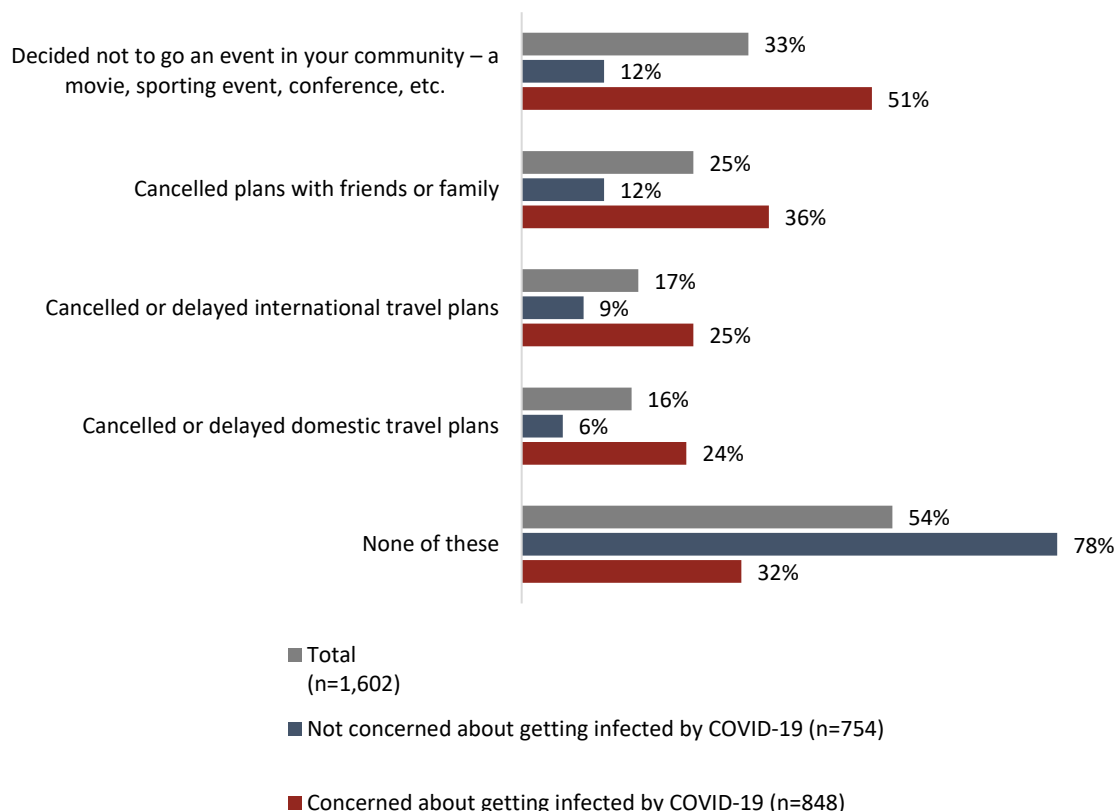
Those in Alberta (36%) and Saskatchewan (33%) are the least likely to say they have altered plans to lower their risk of catching COVID-19, while Atlantic Canadians (54%) are more likely to have cancelled engagements with COVID-19 in mind ([see detailed tables](#)).

For those with greater fears of personal infection, two-thirds (68%) say they have cancelled plans, including half (51%) who opted out of attending events in their community because they were worried about catching COVID-19. Four-in-five (78%) of those who are not concerned about contracting COVID-19 say they have no cancelled or delayed events or travel based on COVID-19:

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Have you done any of the following over the past three months or so because you were worried about contracting or spreading COVID-19?



Seven-in-ten say they will change behaviour in seventh wave

Most Canadians say public health officials declaring a seventh wave of the virus will change their behaviour. More than half (56%) say they would avoid crowded spaces and nearly as many (52%) say they would wear a mask more. Still, more (29%) say they would do nothing than say they would shrink their circle of friends and family they see regularly (25%) or cancel trips (23%) or events (20%).

While a majority (54%) of 18- to 34-year-old men say they would take at least one of the offered precautions, they are the most likely demographic to take none at 46 per cent. They are joined by more than two-in-five 35- to 54-year-old men.

Women are much more likely than men to say they would change their behaviour in the face of a seventh wave, especially those over the age of 54. Three-quarters (76%) of women that age say they would avoid crowds and more than half (55%) say they would stay home more in general:

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Seventh wave precautions: will you do any of the following or not?							
	Total (n=1,602)	Male			Female		
		18-34 (n=224)	35-54 (n=264)	55+ (n=294)	18-34 (n=219)	35-54 (n=273)	55+ (n=325)
Avoid crowded spaces	56%	33%	38%	66%	57%	55%	76%
Increase mask wearing	52%	35%	37%	55%	56%	51%	72%
Stay home more in general	41%	29%	33%	42%	41%	43%	55%
See fewer people in your circle of friends/family	25%	19%	19%	24%	22%	30%	33%
Cancel or postpone planned trips	23%	13%	19%	25%	20%	26%	32%
Cancel or postpone planned events	20%	14%	16%	20%	18%	23%	28%
None of the above	29%	46%	43%	21%	26%	32%	11%

Atlantic Canadians and Albertans are on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to how a seventh wave of COVID-19 will affect their behaviour. More than four-in-five (84%) in the Maritimes say they would avoid crowded spaces, increase mask wearing, cancel events or trips, or shrink their social circle. Two-in-five (41%) in Alberta say they would do none of that:

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Seventh wave precautions: will you do any of the following or not?								
	Total (n=1,602)	Region						
		BC (n=203)	AB (n=150)	SK (n=128)	MB (n=130)	ON (n=457)	QC (n=382)	ATL (n=152)
Avoid crowded spaces	56%	61%	47%	50%	63%	54%	55%	70%
Increase mask wearing	52%	61%	42%	42%	52%	53%	48%	66%
Stay home more in general	41%	43%	41%	45%	50%	39%	39%	54%
See fewer people in your circle of friends/family	25%	32%	25%	20%	31%	24%	18%	42%
Cancel or postpone planned trips	23%	24%	24%	22%	24%	22%	20%	36%
Cancel or postpone planned events	20%	21%	21%	20%	25%	20%	16%	31%
None of the above	29%	23%	41%	35%	25%	29%	30%	16%

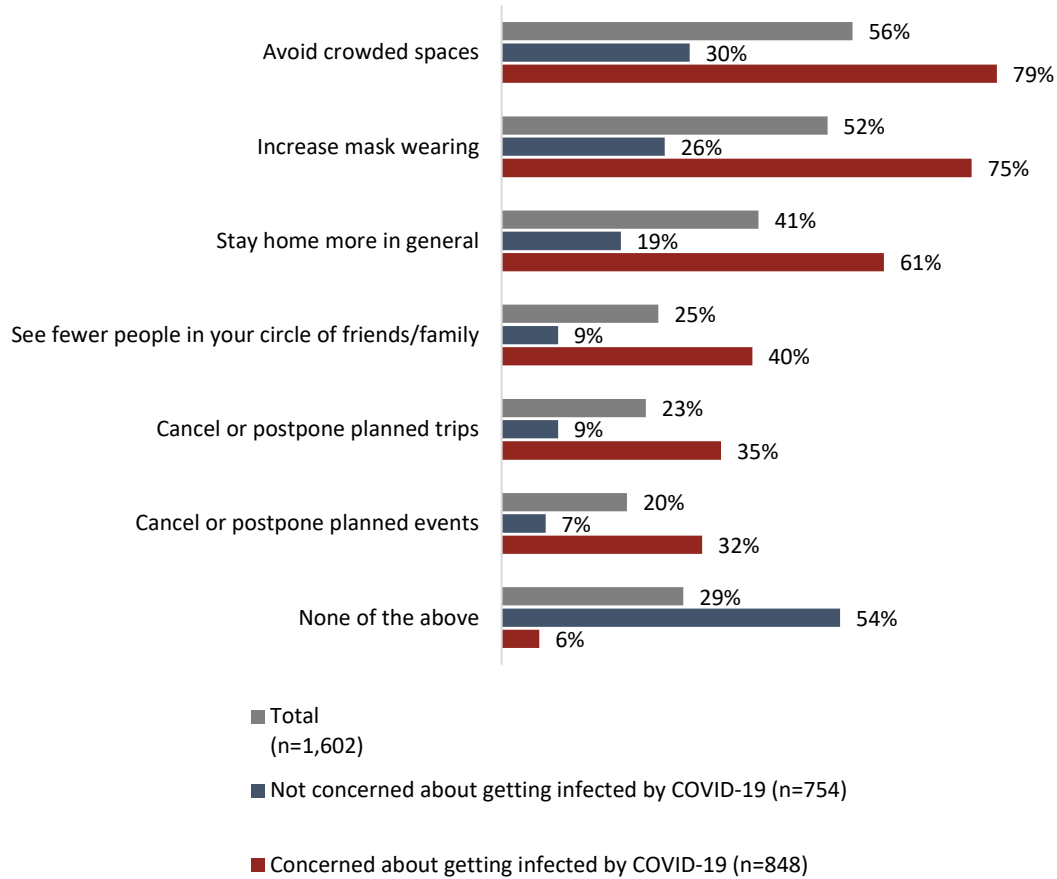
Approaching half (46%) of those who say they aren't concerned about personally contracting COVID-19 will nonetheless change their behaviour in some way in the face of the seventh wave of the virus. For those who are more worried about COVID-19 infection, nearly all (94%) plan to shrink their close contacts:

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Seventh wave precautions: will you do any of the following or not?



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

For detailed results by whether or not the respondent is concerned about being personally infected by COVID-19, [click here](#).