

As COVID BA.5 cases surge, Canadians' desire to implement mask mandates or vaccine passports plunges

Three-quarters (74%) say masking effective, though fewer (51%) would make it mandatory in public

July 20, 2022 – Provincial governments in Canada are attempting to maintain a delicate balance amid a summer surge of COVID-19 cases, fueled by the BA.5 variant.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds many Canadians [continue to be worried](#) about the risk the virus poses to their own and their families' health. And while some are taking their own steps to prevent further spread, the appetite for government public health measures is minimal – and a fraction of what it was in previous waves.

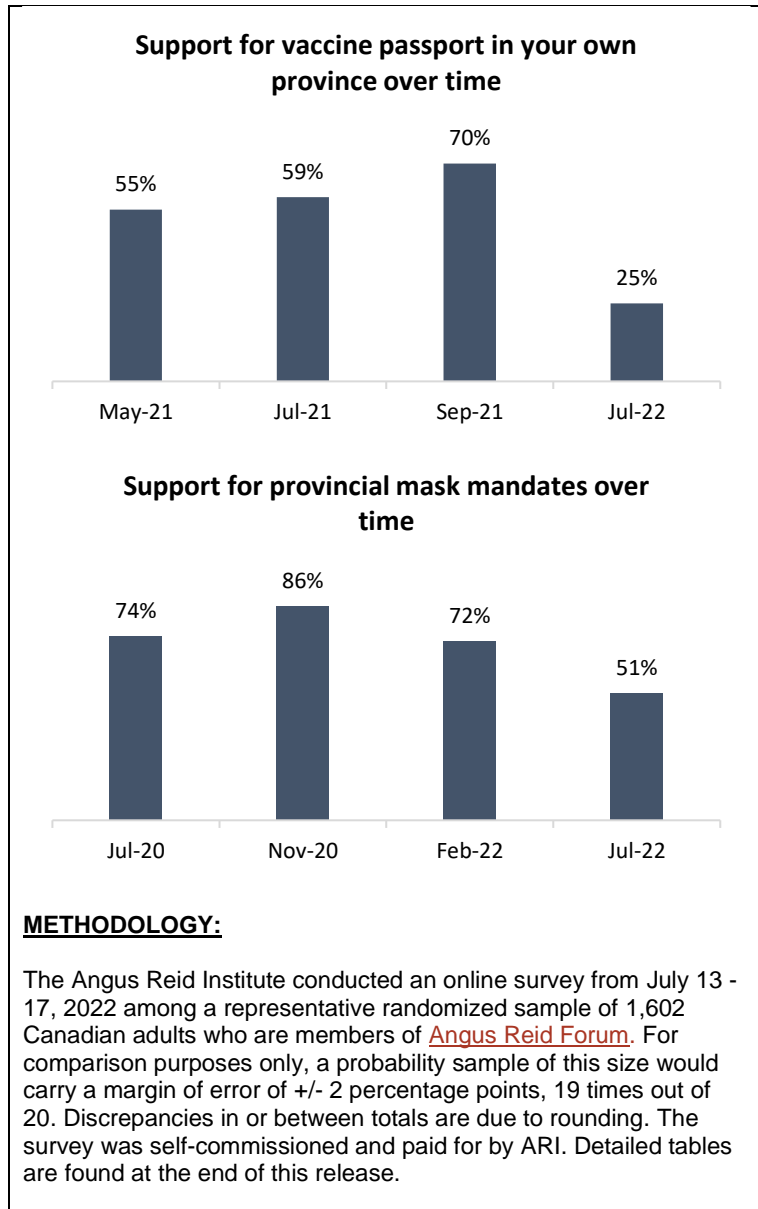
Consider that last September amid the fourth wave of the virus, seven-in-ten Canadians (70%) said they would support a vaccine passport in their community to require residents to show proof of inoculation to enter larger public spaces; this concept is now supported by one-in-four (25%).

While masking in indoor spaces is [still recommended](#) by public health officials, it is not required in most public settings in Canada. Three-quarters of Canadians (74%) recognize the effectiveness of masking at reducing the spread of COVID-19, but half say they would support mandating it in public spaces (51%).

Regional, gender, and generational variations partially define the story.

While vaccine passports are not palatable in any part of the country, more than half in B.C. (55%), Ontario (55%), and Atlantic Canada (62%) would accept a mask mandate in their community. This enthusiasm drops below two-in-five in Alberta (36%) and Saskatchewan (38%).

Men younger than 55, too, push back against the need for public health measures. Just one-in-three would implement a mask mandate in their community compared to a majority of all other age and gender combinations.



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More Key Findings:

- Three-in-ten say they are wearing a mask when they are inside places like grocery stores, banks or movie theatres “most” or “all of the time”. Half (53%) say they are doing so “rarely” or “never”.
- Past Conservative voters are much less likely to find masking, vaccination, and social distancing effective at reducing the spread of COVID-19 than those who supported the Liberals, NDP or Bloc Québécois in last year’s federal election.
- Half of Canadians (47%) are frustrated by a lack of COVID-19 data in their province. A similar number (44%) say this doesn’t bother them and that they would not get much benefit from more data.

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: Appetite for new public health measures plummets

Half would bring back mask mandates, one-quarter support vaccine passports

For most Canadians, it has been months since they’ve had to deal with public health restrictions. Quebec was [the last province to remove its provincewide mask mandate in May](#), while B.C was the last province to end its mandatory vaccine passport program [in April](#).

As health officials warn of [a summer wave of COVID fueled by the BA.5 variant of Omicron](#), half (51%) of Canadians support a return of mask mandates, but there is not much support for other restrictions. One-quarter say a surge in cases should prompt public health officials to bring back vaccine passports, while

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fewer (14%) say travel restrictions between communities should return. Overall, two-in-five (38%) believe no action is needed from governments in the event of a seventh wave of COVID-19.

A majority in Alberta (54%) and half in Saskatchewan believe mask mandates, vaccine passports and travel restrictions should stay in the past. There is more appetite for masking in Atlantic Canada (62%) than anywhere else in the country, while support for the return of vaccine passports tops out at three-in-ten in B.C.:

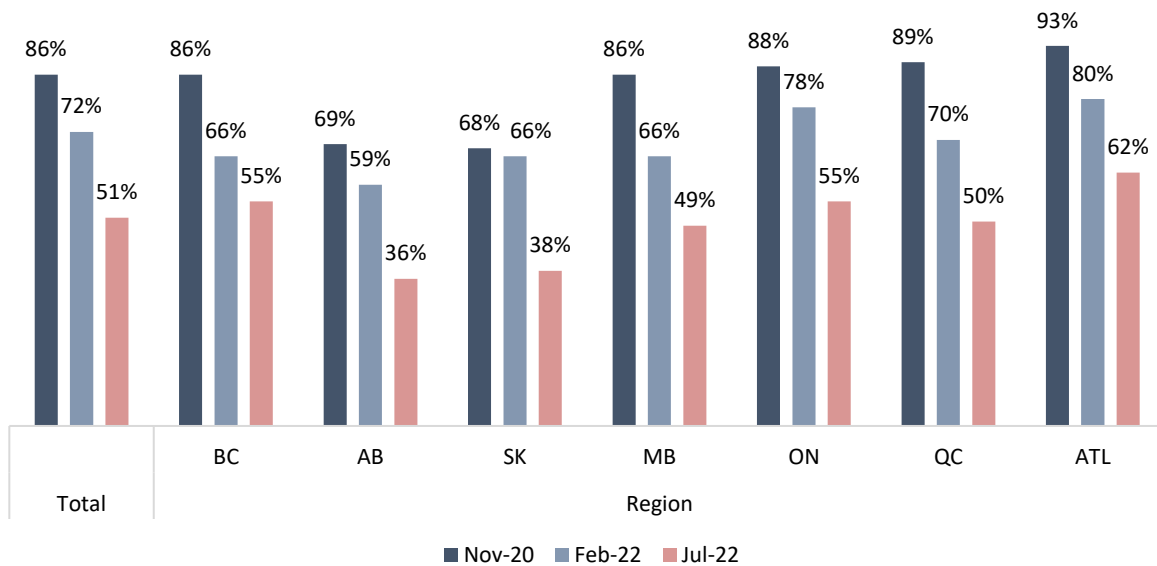
What actions, if any, should your provincial government and public health officials take if this happens?								
	Total (n=1,602)	Region						
		BC (n=203)	AB (n=150)	SK (n=128)	MB (n=130)	ON (n=457)	QC (n=382)	ATL (n=152)
Bring back mask mandates	51%	55%	36%	38%	49%	55%	50%	62%
Bring back vaccine passports	25%	30%	17%	17%	21%	26%	27%	21%
Bring back travel restrictions between communities	14%	18%	8%	9%	11%	13%	18%	15%
Other	6%	5%	8%	6%	4%	7%	6%	4%
No action needed	38%	34%	54%	50%	43%	36%	35%	34%

In all regions of the country, support for mask mandates has declined significantly over time. Even as recently as February, as the country was exiting [the Omicron surge](#), which infected as many [as nine million adults](#), nearly three-quarters (72%) across the country and at least three-in-five in all regions supported a provincial masking policy:

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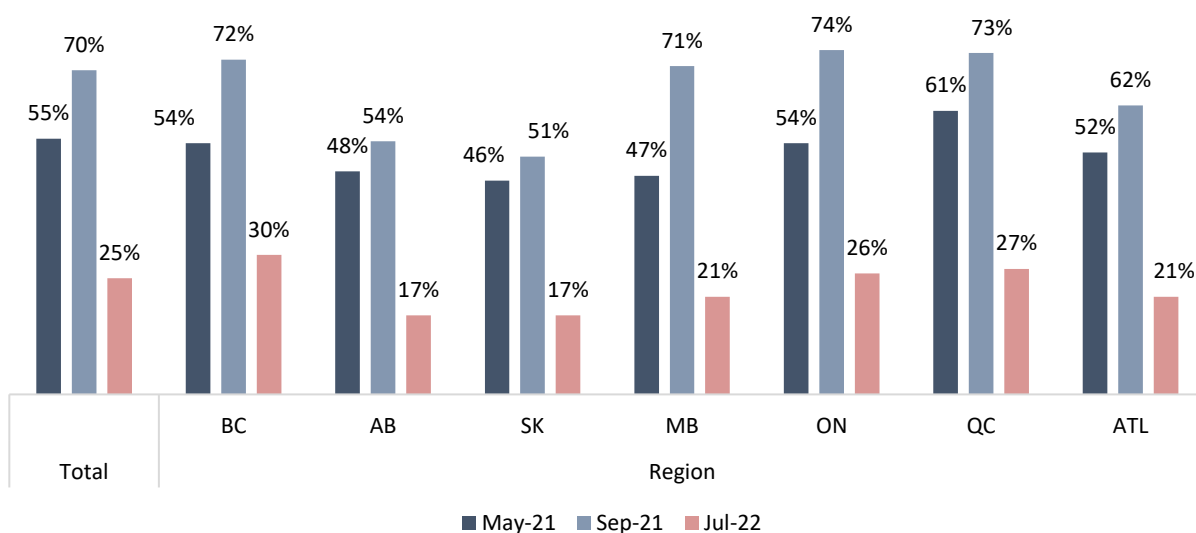
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Support for provincial mask mandates over time



Support for vaccine passports has declined even further. In September last year, as provinces were trying to convince the vaccine hesitant to get first and second doses during the fourth wave of COVID-19 – dubbed a “pandemic of the unvaccinated” – seven-in-ten Canadians supported a vaccine passport, including at least half in every region. Currently, one-quarter (25%) support the return of vaccine passports, a drop of 45 points since September:

Support for vaccine passports over time



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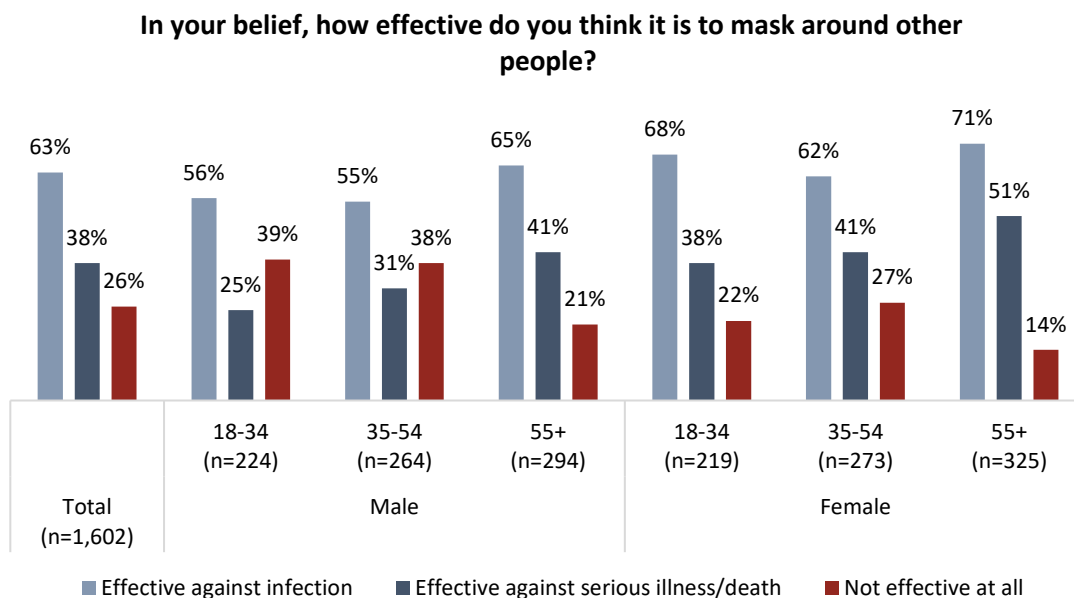
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Part Two: Which measures are seen as most effective?

Masking perceived as effective by three-quarters, but fewer are wearing one in public

Masking has consistently proven to be an effective defence against COVID-19 infection [in scientific experiments](#) and [in real world settings](#). Yet, more than two years into the pandemic, there are a significant minority of Canadians – one-quarter (26%) – who doubt masking around other people provides protection against infection or serious illness. Still, three-quarters (74%) believe it is effective, with more Canadians convinced it offers protection against infection (63%) than serious illness (38%).

Belief in the protection of masking is higher among women than men. Women over the age of 54 are the demographic most likely to believe masking is effective against infection or serious illness at nearly nine-in-ten (86%). Meanwhile, two-in-five men under the age of 54 believe wearing a mask will do nothing to protect against COVID-19:



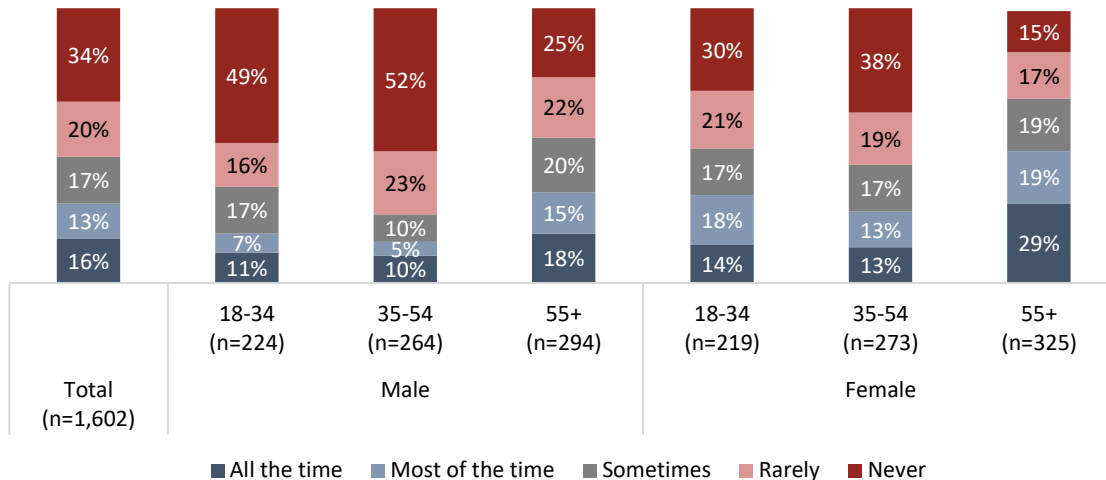
Despite significant belief in its effectiveness, few Canadians (16%) say they are wearing a mask indoors around other people at places such as the grocery store or bank all the time now. In fact, more than half of Canadians say they are rarely (20%) or never wearing one (34%).

The demographic that believes in the effectiveness of masking the least, men under the age of 55, are also the least likely to be wearing one at all. Half of men that age say they never wear a face covering. Half of women over the age of 54 (48%) are mostly or always wearing a mask when they're around other people, but still as many in that group say they are wearing one less than that:

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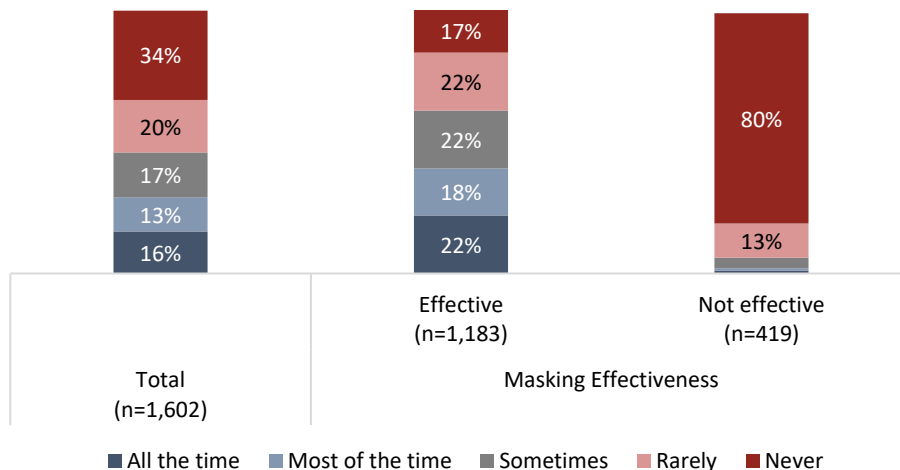
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How often are you currently wearing a mask indoors when you're around other people?



One-in-five (22%) of those who believe masking is effective at protecting them from COVID-19 are wearing one all the time when they're indoors around strangers, and nearly as many (18%) say they are covering their face most of the time in those situations. Among that group, three-in-five are wearing one less often:

How often are you currently wearing a mask indoors when you're around other people?



The political division over health measures

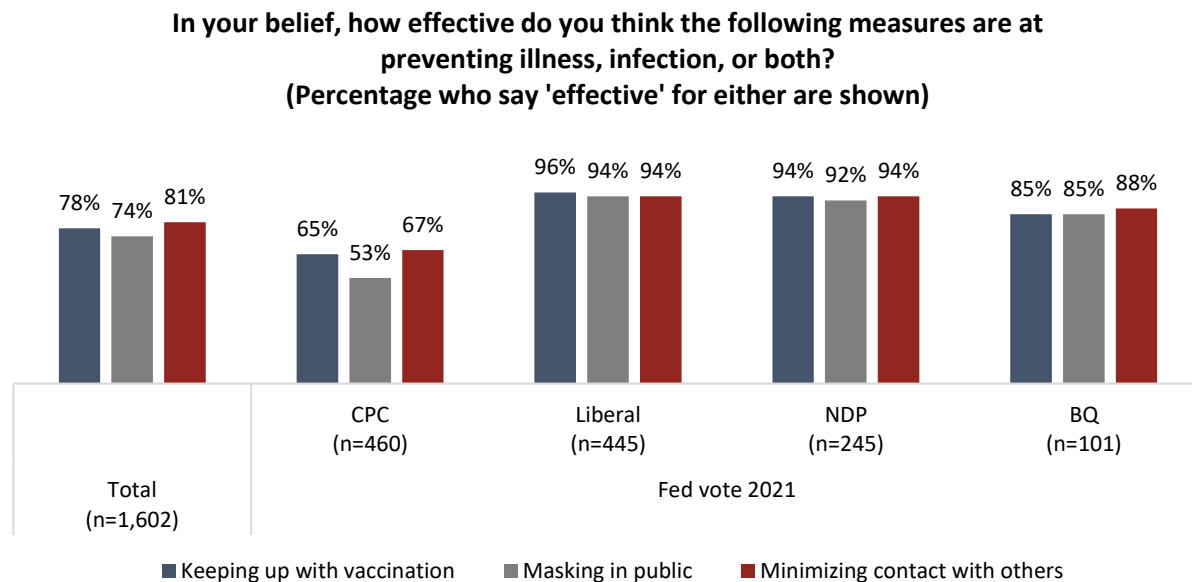
There is a significant political divide over the perceived efficacy of common measures to fight COVID-19. Nearly all of those who voted Liberal and NDP in November believe keeping up with vaccinations, masking in public and minimizing close contact with other people prevents COVID-19 infection, serious

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illness, or both. They are joined by fewer, but still a significant majority, of those who voted for the Bloc Québécois.

Among those who voted for the Conservatives, belief on the effectiveness of masking is split, while one-third among that group believe that vaccinations and social distancing are not effective at fighting COVID-19 at all:



Part Three: Provincial performance and strategy

In recent months, the fight against COVID-19 has taken a back seat, [pushed back by concerns over rampant inflation and a crumbling health-care system](#) across the country.

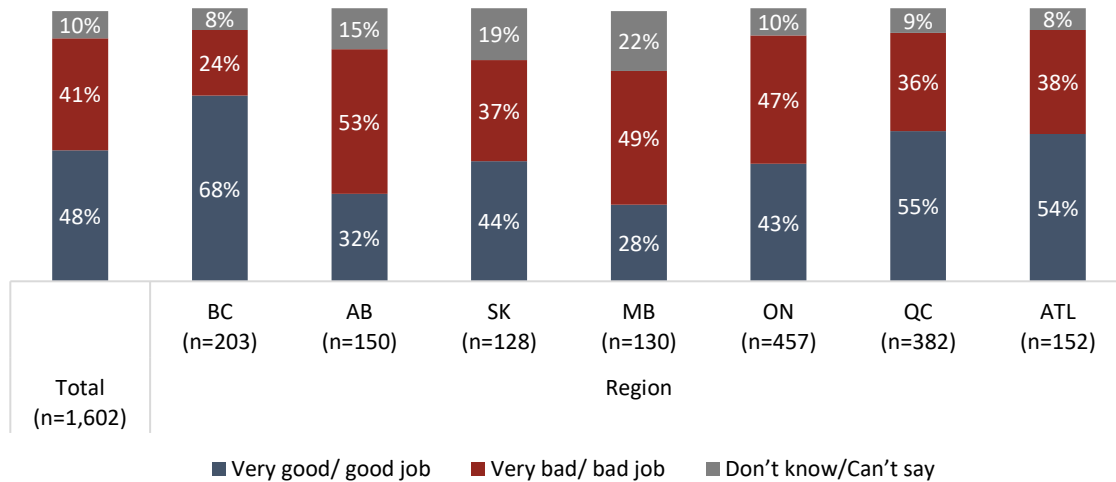
Related: [Health check: Provinces' performance on key file in massive decline](#)

Overall, half of Canadians offer their premier a passing grade on their recent performance on handling the COVID-19 pandemic. Outgoing B.C. Premier John Horgan, who has consistently been [graded well on the pandemic](#), receives the highest praise, with more than two-thirds (68%) in that province saying he has done well on COVID-19. Another premier [on his way out the door](#), Jason Kenney, receives some of the lowest marks, besting only Manitoba Premier Heather Stefanson, whose government is [taking criticism from constituents from all angles](#) in recent weeks:

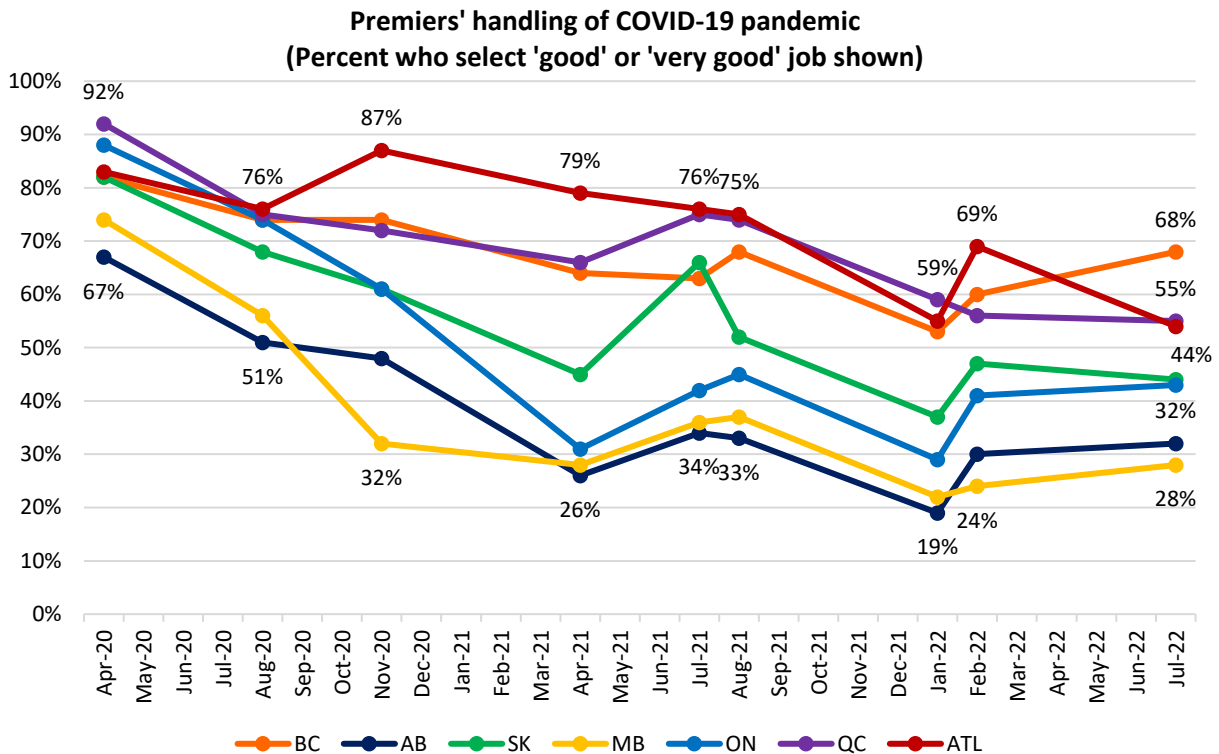
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Do you think your provincial premier is doing a good or bad job handling the COVID-19 pandemic overall?



For most provinces, evaluation of premiers' handling of the pandemic has rebounded from an Omicron January nadir. However, in Atlantic Canada, praise has never been weaker of those provinces' premiers. Quebecers, too, have been more critical of Premier François Legault in 2022 than at any point of the pandemic, but still more than half (55%) say he has done a good job:

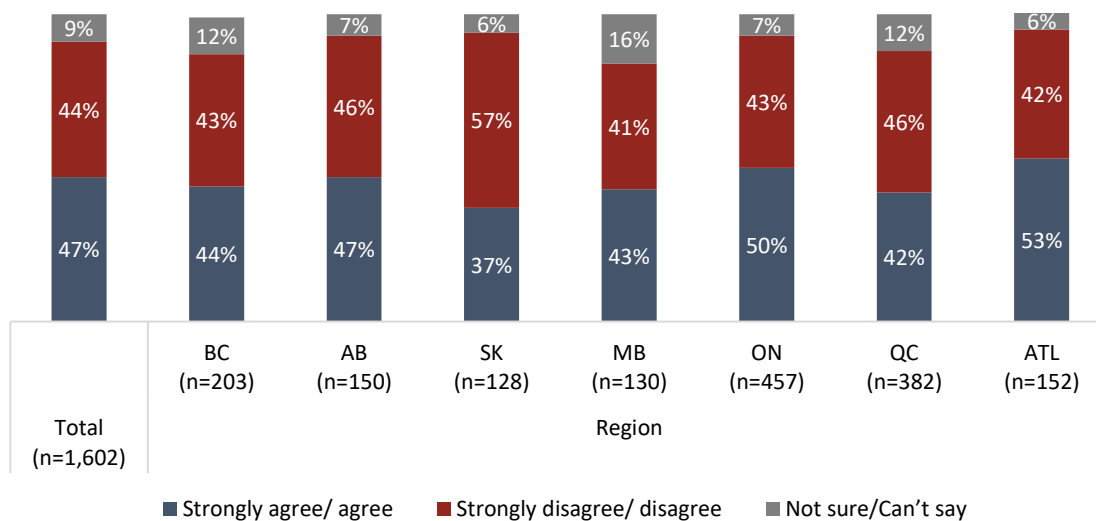


Lack of COVID-19 data frustrates nearly half

With health restrictions removed, Canadians are left to evaluate their own risk. For many, it appears a lack of data to allow for accurate risk assessment is a sticking point of current provincial COVID-19 management. Half (47%) say the lack of COVID-19 data, be it irregular updates or a lack of testing, is frustrating. Nearly as many, however, disagree (44%).

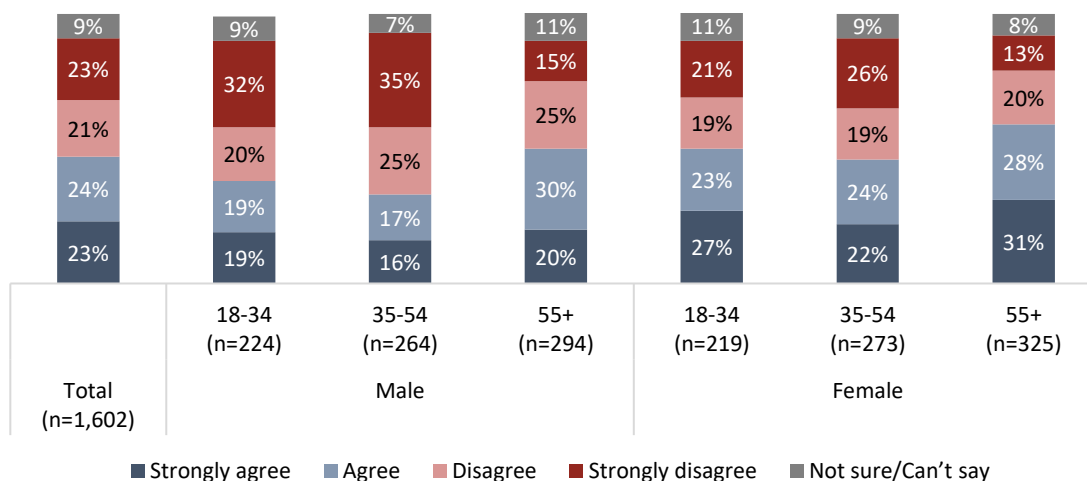
Those in Saskatchewan have the least amount of appetite for more COVID-19 data. Three-in-five (57%) aren't frustrated by the lack of it at the moment, as that province shifted to a [once-a-month report of COVID-19 statistics](#). Half in Ontario, and more than that in Atlantic Canada (53%), would like more information, but still at least two-in-five in those provinces can do without it:

Agree vs. disagree -
"The lack of COVID-19 data available now is frustrating"



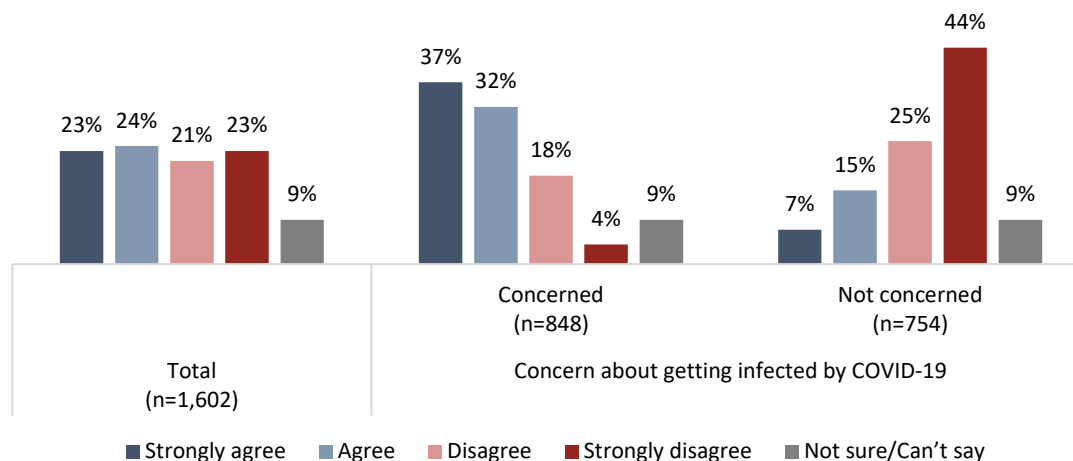
The [generational divide in concern over COVID-19](#) is apparent in the desire for better COVID-19 data reporting. Those over the age of 54 are more likely than younger Canadians to be frustrated by the lack of COVID-19 information. Three-in-five (59%) women that age are irritated by the scaled back reporting of COVID-19 statistics, while men aged 35- to 54-years-old (60%) are most likely to disagree:

Agree vs. disagree -
"The lack of COVID-19 data available now is frustrating"



For the half of Canadians that are moderately or very concerned with personally being infected by COVID-19, seven-in-ten (69%) are frustrated they can't get the information they need to assess risk in their community. For those not as worried about a COVID-19 infection, the same proportion (69%) are fine with limited COVID-19 data:

**Agree vs. disagree -
"The lack of COVID-19 data available now is frustrating"**



Canadians divided about wanting more info and data

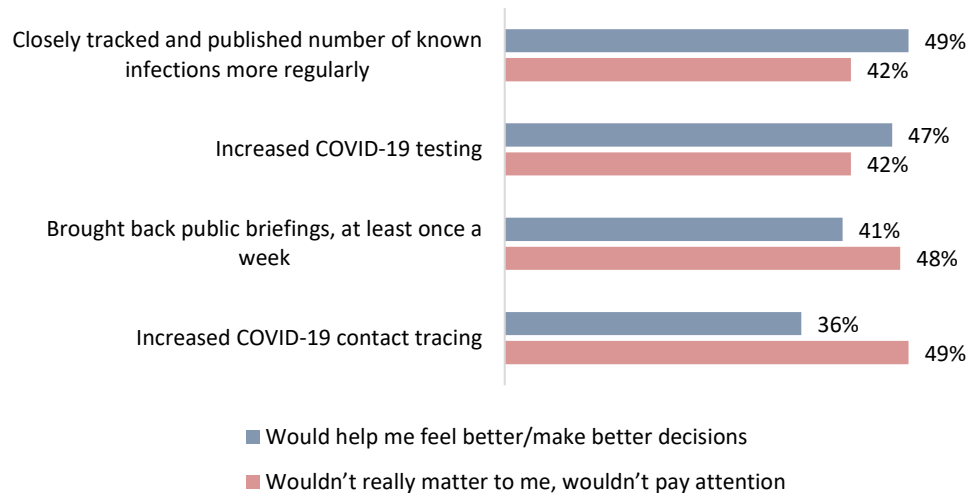
Respondents were asked how they would feel about the return of more regular public briefings, statistics, increased testing and contact tracing. Canadians are split as to whether it would make them feel better or if it wouldn't matter at all because they wouldn't pay attention.

Half (49%) say if the number of known infections was more closely tracked and published regularly it would help them make better decisions. Two-in-five (42%) say that wouldn't matter at all to them personally. Fewer say they would feel better with a return of public briefings (41%) and increased contact tracing (36%). Instead, on those two fronts, more say they wouldn't pay attention:

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**If provincial governments began to bring some of these practices back, how would each affect you personally?
(All respondents, n=1,602)**



Atlantic Canadians are the most likely to say they'd feel better with more information on the number of cases and increased public briefings. Albertans are more likely to not care than pay attention to more information, but still two-in-five say more testing and information on known cases would help them make better decisions:

If provincial governments began to bring some of these practices back, how would each affect you personally?								
		Region						
		BC (n=203)	AB (n=150)	SK (n=128)	MB (n=130)	ON (n=457)	QC (n=382)	ATL (n=152)
Closely tracked and published number of known infections more regularly	Help me feel better	47%	44%	41%	46%	52%	47%	55%
	Wouldn't really matter	43%	50%	50%	44%	38%	44%	36%
Increased COVID-19 testing	Help me feel better	45%	41%	35%	47%	52%	42%	54%
	Wouldn't really matter	43%	52%	52%	43%	39%	45%	32%
Brought back public briefings, at least once a week	Help me feel better	42%	33%	39%	40%	45%	38%	52%
	Wouldn't really matter	46%	60%	51%	48%	47%	49%	37%
Increased COVID-19 contact tracing	Help me feel better	39%	33%	28%	33%	38%	33%	42%
	Wouldn't really matter	49%	57%	58%	51%	48%	48%	40%

Among those more concerned about catching COVID-19, three-quarters (75%) say more regular releases of known infections would make them feel better. Seven-in-ten (71%) in that group say the same of increased COVID-19 testing. Two-thirds (64%) would feel better with weekly public briefings. More than half (56%) say increased contact tracing would help them make better decisions around risk assessment.

Those less concerned about being infected by the virus are much more likely to say they wouldn't pay attention if that information was available to them:

If provincial governments began to bring some of these practices back, how would each affect you personally?				
		Total (n=1,602)	Concern over personal COVID-19 infection	
			Concerned (n=848)	Not concerned (n=754)
Closely tracked and published number of known infections more regularly	Help me feel better	49%	75%	20%
	Wouldn't really matter	42%	16%	71%
Increased COVID-19 testing	Help me feel better	47%	71%	19%
	Wouldn't really matter	42%	18%	70%
Brought back public briefings, at least once a week	Help me feel better	41%	64%	16%
	Wouldn't really matter	48%	25%	74%
Increased COVID-19 contact tracing	Help me feel better	36%	56%	13%
	Wouldn't really matter	49%	27%	74%

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

For detailed results by concern over personal infection and belief in the effectiveness of masking, [click here](#).

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