

# Understanding COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake in Canada

Executive Summary

October 2024

*This initiative is supported by Moderna.*

*Understanding COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake in Canada*

## Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new level of public awareness of the devastating consequences of infectious diseases and the life-saving power of vaccines. Despite the well-described individual and population health benefits of COVID-19 vaccination, public uptake of these vaccines is decreasing. This trend is particularly concerning for older adults and those with chronic medical conditions, as there remains a significant risk of contracting COVID-19, experiencing long-term effects, considerable morbidity, and even mortality.

As Canadians enter a new phase of living with COVID-19, with mask use, physical distancing, and vaccination mandates lifted, increased efforts must be made to understand current perspectives on COVID-19, perceived risk amongst the public, and intent to be vaccinated. In response to this need the International Federation on Ageing (IFA) developed and disseminated an online survey aiming to assess older Canadians' perceptions of COVID-19 and the importance of vaccination, and vaccination practices, particularly in comparison to other vaccine-preventable respiratory diseases, such as influenza. The results of the survey intended to support the development of interventions and resources addressing the top concerns, perceptions and misconceptions of respondents, aiming to share information on COVID-19 and its risk, and emphasize the benefits and importance of vaccination.

The survey was targeted at Canadians over 50. 654 responses were received. Most respondents (59%) were between 50 and 64 years old and identified as female (59%). 50% of respondents live in Ontario, with British Columbia (17%) and Alberta (12%) being the next most common provinces. 31% have completed a university bachelor's degree, 28% hold a college diploma, and 19% have a high school diploma as their highest level of education. 48% of respondents had health conditions that would impact their risk of contracting infectious diseases and experiencing adverse health consequences, including chronic liver disease (21%), diabetes (9%), and obesity (8%). 85% of respondents indicated that they had a trusted healthcare provider.

The overarching findings can be categorized into the following key themes, with various implications for COVID-19 vaccination policy and practice: shifting perspectives on COVID-19 and vaccination since the pandemic's onset; motivations behind current COVID-19 vaccination choices; and factors contributing to the decision not to vaccinate.

As of September 2024, just over half of older Canadians (59%) intend to be vaccinated against COVID-19 this autumn/winter. In recognition of the suboptimal uptake of vaccinations, it is critical to understand how older Canadians currently perceive the impact of COVID-19. The survey indicated a significant change in attitudes toward COVID-19 post-pandemic. 83% of respondents considered COVID-19 a serious threat at the beginning of the pandemic; now only 60% do. It is unclear if the lack of concern surrounding COVID-19 means fewer people are seeking information, or inversely if the lack of understanding and knowledge surrounding COVID-19 has resulted in people taking the virus less seriously.

Survey respondents indicated decreased use and trust of printed media, television and radio, websites, social media, social interactions, and government agencies when consuming information regarding COVID-19. Overall, Canadians trust fewer sources when consuming COVID-19 information, meaning that while they may be consuming less false information, they may also be discounting materials from reputable sources. Overall, it appears that respondents did not feel

informed about the COVID-19 virus or public health efforts. Only 43% of Canadian respondents said they know the current COVID-19 vaccine recommendations and only 46% of respondents felt informed about different COVID-19 strains. Additionally, less than 2/3 (60%) of Canadians aged 50+ believe they need to receive COVID-19 vaccinations annually, which may help to explain the poor vaccination rates.

Gaining insight into the motivations and deterrents people face regarding COVID-19 vaccinations is essential for guiding public health efforts to encourage vaccination among older adults. The most common reasons people intend to be vaccinated this autumn/winter include protecting themselves from developing COVID-19 and associated risks/symptoms (96%); concern about COVID-19 variants (69%); and protecting their larger community (69%). These concerns are consistent with issues many provincial public health interventions have attempted to address post-pandemic.(1,2)

Amongst those who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 previously, 77% of people chose not to be vaccinated because of concerns about the side effects of vaccination and 60% had doubts about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination in protecting against disease. Amongst people who do not intend to be vaccinated this autumn/winter, the three main concerns regarded the side effects of vaccination (55%), concerns about vaccine effectiveness (45%), and a lack of belief that the vaccine is necessary to ensure good health (37%).

When asked what topics people required more information on to make an informed decision on whether to be vaccinated against COVID-19, responses indicated a need for more information on vaccine safety and side effects (44%), vaccine effectiveness (50%), and long-term health impacts of the vaccine (50%).

Despite the real and lasting threat of the COVID-19 virus, vaccine rates remain suboptimal amongst those most at risk, including older adults and people with underlying medical conditions. Lack of knowledge and clarity on the effectiveness, safety, and overall need for COVID-19 vaccination appears to be a pressing factor in Canadian older adult's decisions to be vaccinated. There is a need for public health campaigns to target these questions and knowledge gaps through knowledge mobilization efforts and interventions. The IFA calls upon provincial and federal governing bodies to address these knowledge gaps when promoting COVID-19 vaccination this respiratory disease season.

## References

1. Immunization Partnership Fund - Canada.ca [Internet]. [cited 2024 Sep 15]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/immunization-vaccine-priorities/immunization-partnership-fund.html>
2. Health Ontario P. Building Confidence in Vaccines PRIMER Building Confidence in Vaccines.

International Federation on Ageing  
1 Bridgepoint Drive, Suite G.238  
Toronto, ON, M4M 2B5, Canada

[www.vaccines4life.com](http://www.vaccines4life.com)

Published October 2024 © Vaccines4Life

