



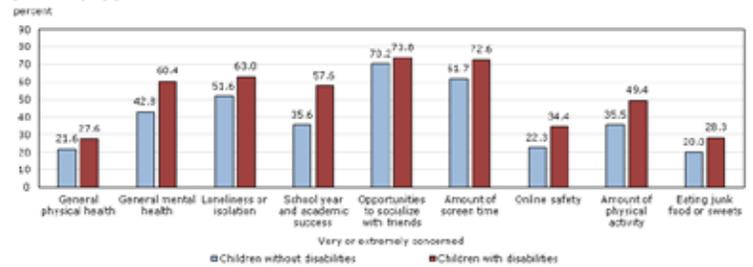
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Canadian families of children with disabilities

Despite the various resources that are available for families of children with disabilities relatively little is known about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on families of children with disabilities. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic may have been particularly hard for these families because of school closures, reductions in services, and the additional challenges related to caring for children with disabilities, including—but not limited to attending clinic and therapy appointments, receiving respite and rehabilitation services, and obtaining medical equipment, which may have been further amplified during COVID-19. The purpose of this report is to examine differences in experiences between families of children with and without disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic as reported by parents or guardians of children aged 0 to 14 years. Results from this study are based on a crowdsourcing data collection, and therefore cannot be generalized to the overall Canadian population.

Almost one in five (19%) crowdsourcing participants indicated that they had at least one child aged 0 to 14 years in their home with at least one type of disability (hereinafter termed children with disabilities). The largest proportion (84%) of these participants indicated a cognitive, behavioural or emotional disability such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), while 4% indicated a permanent physical disability such as deaf or hard of hearing, 7% indicated another type of disability, and 6% indicated a combination of at least two of these types of disabilities.

Many parent participants are concerned about their children but a higher proportion of parents of children with disabilities are very or extremely concerned. When asked about various concerns for their children, about 7 in 10 participants were very or extremely concerned about their children's opportunities to socialize with friends regardless if a child with disabilities was in the household. However, notable differences were observed for other concerns. For example, about 7 in 10 parents of children with disabilities were very or extremely concerned about the amount of screen time their children were engaging in compared with 6 in 10 parents of children without disabilities. About 6 in 10 parents of children with disabilities were very or extremely concerned about loneliness or isolation for their children compared with about 5 in 10 parents of children without disabilities (Chart 1).

Chart 1
Crowdsourcing participants' concerns for their children aged 0 to 14 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, by presence of children with disabilities at home



Notes: Percent calculations exclude both "not applicable" and "not stated" responses. The pattern of results was similar when "not applicable" responses were included.
Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians - Parenting During the Pandemic: Data Collection Series (5323).

The largest difference among participants was observed for school year and academic success: while 58% of parents of children with disabilities were very or extremely concerned for their children's school year and academic success, the figure was at 36% for parents of children without disabilities. Finally, a greater proportion of parents of children with disabilities reported to be very or extremely concerned for their children's mental health compared with parents of children without disabilities (60% vs. 43%).

Crowdsourcing participants were also asked about various concerns for their family. One notable difference was observed between parents of children with and without disabilities. Just over three quarters (76%) of parents of children with disabilities were very or extremely concerned about managing their children's behaviours, stress levels, and anxiety and emotions compared with 57% of parents of children without disabilities. This difference is expected since a large proportion of participants (84%) indicated a cognitive, behavioural or emotional disability, which are often associated with stress, anxiety, and other mental health problems.

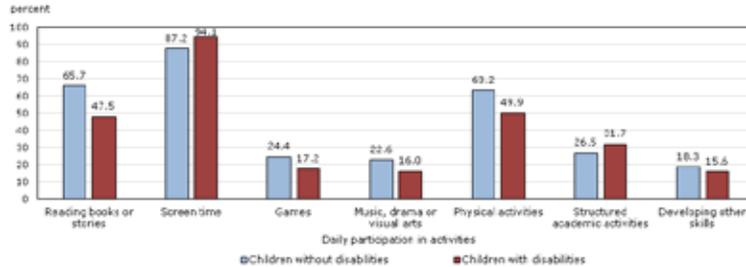
About half of the parents of children with disabilities said that their children are reading and also engaging in physical activity on a daily basis. Crowdsourcing participants indicated that their children were engaged in a variety of different activities during the COVID-19 pandemic. About 9 in 10 indicated that their children were engaging in screen time daily or almost daily regardless of whether a child with disabilities was in the household. However, two differences were noted. About half of parents who had children with disabilities indicated that their children were reading books or stories daily



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or almost daily compared with just under two-thirds of parents of children without disabilities. About half of parents who had children with disabilities in the household also indicated that their children were engaging in physical activity daily or almost daily compared with about 6 in 10 children without disabilities (Chart 2)

Chart 2
Children's daily participation in activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, by presence of children with disabilities at home



Note: Percent calculations exclude both "not applicable" and "not stated" responses. The pattern of results was similar when "not applicable" responses were included.

Source: Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians - Parenting During the Pandemic: Data Collection Series (5323).

Overall, while crowdsourcing participants' various concerns for their family were similar between parents of children with and without disabilities, a higher proportion of parents of children with disabilities were very or extremely concerned for their children's amount of screen time, loneliness or isolation, general mental health, school year and academic success.

Methodology

Results for this study were drawn from Statistics Canada's crowdsourcing data collection series The Impacts of COVID-19 on Canadians: Parenting during the Pandemic. From June 9 to June 22, 2020, over 32,000 participants voluntarily completed the online questionnaire that was designed to collect information from parents of children aged 0 to 14 about their concerns for their children and families as well as the activities of their children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Readers should note that crowdsourcing data are not collected under a probability-based sampling design. As a result, the findings cannot be applied to the overall Canadian population.

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00066-eng.htm>

Mental Health and Coping during COVID-19

The outbreak of novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) may be stressful for people and communities. It is not unusual to feel anxiety about COVID-19 and you will probably worry about the potential impact on yourself and your family. Some distress is common in uncertain situations like this outbreak, and it may cause strong emotions in both adults and children.

Everyone reacts differently to stressful situations.

The emotional impact of an unusual or urgent situation depends on the person's characteristics and experiences, their social and economic circumstances, and the availability of local resources. It is normal to feel sad, distressed, worried, confused, scared or angry when experiencing a situation such as COVID-19. However, signs of severe emotional distress, such as persistent insomnia, interpersonal problems, disabling fear, increased use of alcohol or drugs, indicate you should reach out for help.

Reactions during an infectious disease outbreak can include:

- Fear and worry about your own health status and that of your loved ones who may have been exposed to COVID-19
- Changes in sleep or eating patterns
- Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
- Worsening of chronic health problems
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or recreational drugs
- Feelings of helplessness, boredom, loneliness and depression due to being isolated
- Common symptoms of other health problems (e.g., a cough) can be mistaken for COVID-19 and lead to fear of being infected
- Some people may become more distressed if they see repeated images or hear repeated reports about the outbreak in the media.

Some of these fears and reactions spring from realistic understanding of the dangers, but many reactions and behaviours are also fed by rumours and misinformation.

Some people may have positive experiences, such as pride in their contribution and finding ways of coping and resilience. Community members often show great altruism and cooperation, and people may experience great satisfaction from helping others.



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Things you can do to support yourself and your family:

- Stay informed, but avoid excessive exposure to media coverage of COVID-19. Periodically check the news and recommendations from trusted sites such as Corona virus disease (COVID-19) and local health authorities. Take breaks from watching, reading, or listening to news stories. It can be upsetting to hear about the crisis in a constant stream.
- Take care of your body. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate. Try to eat healthy, well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep and avoid excessive alcohol and recreational drugs.
- Accept that there may be disappointment or frustration at changing plans such as cancelled or postponed vacations, or family visits. Acknowledge and accept strong emotions.
- Try as much as possible to stick to a daily routine, or create new ones to get through this period. If possible, make opportunities for children to play and relax.
- Connect with others in your social networks virtually through e-mail, phone calls or social media. Share your concerns and how you are feeling with a friend or family member. Maintain healthy relationships.
- Draw on skills that you have used in the past during difficult times to manage your emotions during this outbreak. Relaxation techniques may work for some people, others may find engaging in enjoyable hobbies or activities is effective.

- Maintain a sense of hope and positive thinking.
- Focus on the positive aspects of your life and things you can control. For situations that are beyond your control, you may want to shift your emotional response by distracting yourself with another task (cooking, cleaning), going for a walk, taking a bath, talking to a friend on the phone or meditating.
- Stay prepared and apply social distancing and preventive measures such as frequent hand washing and cough etiquette. If you are sick, stay home and reach out to medical as appropriate to your situation (e.g., military compared to civilian).

During times of increased stress, it is common to enter the Reacting Zone of the Mental Health Continuum. While this is an adaptive response, and most individuals will use their own positive coping strategies to manage the increased demands, it is important to maintain an ongoing awareness of your health and well-being during this time. Note any significant changes in behaviour including listening to friends and family members if they express concern for your well-being, and ensuring that coping strategies remain positive and effective.

Ask for help if you feel overwhelmed or concerned that COVID-19 is affecting your ability to care for yourself or your family. Reach out to a family member, friend or a professional.

HEALTHY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
Normal mood fluctuations Calm & takes things in stride	Irritable/Impatient Nervous Sadness/Overwhelmed	Anger Anxiety Pervasively sad/Hopeless	Angry outbursts/aggression Excessive anxiety/panic attacks Depressed/Suicidal thoughts
Good sense of humour Performing well In control mentally	Displaced sarcasm Procrastination Forgetfulness	Negative attitude Poor performance/Workaholic Poor concentration/decisions	Overt insubordination Can't perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate
Normal sleep patterns Few sleep difficulties	Trouble sleeping Intrusive thoughts Nightmares	Restless disturbed sleep Recurrent images/nightmares	Can't fall asleep or stay asleep Sleeping too much or too little
Physically well Good energy level	Muscle tension Headaches Low energy	Increased aches and pains Increased fatigue	Physical illnesses Constant fatigue
Physically and socially active	Decreased activity/socializing	Avoidance Withdrawal	Not going out or answering phone
No/limited alcohol use/ gambling	Regular but controlled alcohol use/gambling	Increased alcohol use/ gambling – hard to control	Alcohol or gambling addiction Other addictions

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<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/maple-leaf/defence/2020/03/mental-health-covid-19.html>

Understand the potential risks of going out

As communities and businesses are opening, you may be looking for ways to resume some daily activities as safely as possible. While there is no way to ensure zero risk of infection, it is important to understand potential risks and how to adopt different types of prevention measures to protect yourself and to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.

The risk of an activity depends on many factors, such as:

- Is COVID-19 spreading in your community?
- Will you have a potential close contact with someone who is sick or anyone who is not wearing a mask (and may be asymptomatic)?
- Are you at increased risk of severe illness?
- Do you take everyday actions to protect yourself from COVID-19?
- CDC cannot provide the specific risk level for every activity in every community. That's why it's important for you to consider your own personal situation and the risk for you, your family, and your community before venturing out.

Close contact with other people increases risk. In general, the more closely you interact with others and the longer that interaction, the higher the risk of COVID-19 spread. So, think about:

- How many people will you interact with?
- Interacting with more people raises your risk.
- Being in a group with people who aren't social distancing or wearing masks increases your risk.
- Engaging with new people (e.g., those who don't live with you) also raises your risk.
- Some people have the virus and don't have any symptoms, and it is not yet known how often people without symptoms can transmit the virus to others.
- Can you keep 6 feet of space between you and

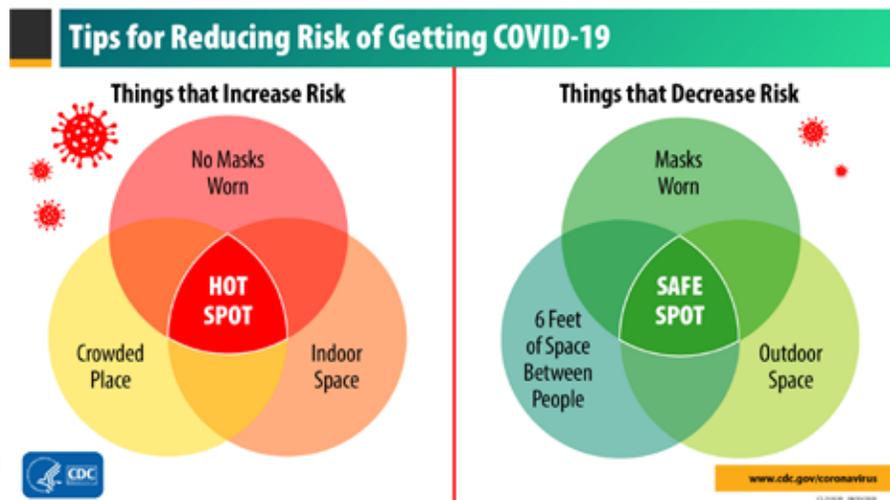
others? Will you be outdoors or indoors?

- The closer you are to other people who may be infected, the greater your risk of getting sick.
- Keeping distance from other people is especially important for people who are at higher risk for severe illness, such as older adults and those with underlying medical conditions.
- Indoor spaces are more risky than outdoor spaces where it might be harder to keep people apart and there's less ventilation.
- What's the length of time that you will be interacting with people?
- Spending more time with people who may be infected increases your risk of becoming infected.
- Spending more time with people increases their risk of becoming infected if there is any chance that you may already be infected.

Activities are safer if:

- You can maintain at least 6 feet of space between you and others. COVID-19 spreads easier between people who are within 6 feet of each other.
- They are held in outdoor spaces. Indoor spaces with less ventilation where it might be harder to keep people apart are more risky.
- People are wearing masks. Interacting without wearing masks also increases your risk.

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/deciding-to-go-out.html>



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