

Greatest positive impact on mental health in COVID's second wave is spending time outside – so how will winter weather and another possible lockdown affect Canadians?

Poll #3 in Mental Health Research Canada's ongoing series

Toronto, November 18, 2020 – Canadians report that spending time outside (39%) is having a more positive effect on their mental health than any other activity. Young people (ages 18 to 34), healthcare workers, and those who indicated that they are not following COVID-19 guidelines are reporting high levels of anxiety and depression.

These are among the key findings of a new poll by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC), a national organization that is committed to advancing impact-focused research in mental health. This is MHRC's third poll in a series on "Mental Health in Crisis: How COVID-19 Is Impacting Canadians." The poll captures Canadians' perceptions of their levels of anxiety and depression in order to identify and evaluate the factors that influence mental health. The fourth poll will collect data in early December.

"Our studies have shown that many activities that had been useful in helping people cope early in the pandemic have lost some of their effectiveness in later months. It is encouraging to learn that being outside is an effective coping strategy for many Canadians. This underscores the need to provide opportunities for people to be outside, in a safe manner, as the weather turns colder," says Akela Peoples, CEO of MHRC.

Other major findings of MHRC's study include:

- Self-rated anxiety and depression rose dramatically when the pandemic started, but the rates remain relatively stable despite changing COVID-19 case counts and restrictions across Canada. Levels of anxiety and depression are still, respectively, four times and two times pre-pandemic levels. (MHRC's study validates self-rated mental health scores using the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale.)
- Those Canadians who indicated a low degree of adherence to COVID-19 regulations report a high degree of anxiety and especially depression compared to those who actively adhere to these regulations. Those Canadians not adhering also report a higher degree of negative mental health due to the economic downturn resulting from COVID-19 (56% compared to overall response of 44%).

“The second wave of the pandemic poses a challenge for Canadians, especially as we approach the winter months. With levels of anxiety and depression continuing to be high, it is important that Canadians seek out, where possible, resources that will support them or reach out to loved ones during these unprecedented times. The Wellness Together Canada website is a good source for online support (<https://ca.portal.gs/>). We continue to do our part to provide vital data to shape existing resources to better serve the needs of Canadians,” says John Trainor, Chair of MHRC’s Board of Directors and adjunct faculty member, Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto.

A full report of the study is available at www.mhrc.ca.

-30-

ABOUT THE STUDY:

The poll was conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights with an online sample of 2,004 adult Canadians and was conducted from October 22 to October 28, 2020. This is the third poll of this study. Results from a probability sample of this size could be considered accurate to within ± 2.2 percentage points. Results have been weighted based on age, gender and region to be representative of the Canadian population.