

NEWS RELEASE



International survey by the Université de Sherbrooke on the impact of communication strategies during the pandemic

COVID-19 vaccine: Significant increase in number of undecideds

Sherbrooke, February 11, 2021 – A study done in November as part of an international survey overseen by a team from the Université de Sherbrooke has revealed that only 59% of Canadians want to get the COVID-19 vaccine, compared to 68.3% who were open to getting the vaccine when asked in the same survey conducted last June, for a decrease of 9.3%. The number of people who switched from being in favour of the vaccine to undecided increased by 8.5% between June (17.9%) and November (26.4%), with the rate among those who do not want to get the vaccine remaining fairly stable.

These results are worrying, as scientists have recommended a vaccination rate of 70% to achieve herd immunity, or the point at which a population exhibits “natural” immunity to a virus. These numbers are similar to those observed in other countries, as revealed by the survey results.

“This trend of more people becoming undecided was seen in all eight countries in our study,” explained Professor Marie-Eve Carignan, one of the lead investigators of this project and a specialist in crisis communications. “These results should be of serious concern to our leaders. An action plan must be developed to reverse this trend and combat the fear and misinformation associated with the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Likelihood to get vaccinated – November / June 2020								
Country	Canada	United States	England	Switzerland	Hong Kong	Philippines	New Zealand	Belgium
Yes	Nov: 59%	Nov: 46%	Nov: 63.1%	Nov: 43%	Nov: 43.8%	Nov: 51.4%	Nov: 59%	Nov: 52.8%
	Jun: 68.3%	Jun: 57.9%	Jun: 73.8%	Jun: 60.8%	Jun: 46.6%	Jun: 67.3%	Jun: 67.2%	Jun: 70.1%
No	Nov: 14.6%	Nov: 21.8%	Nov: 12.2%	Nov: 27.2%	Nov: 16.9%	Nov: 14%	Nov: 11.7%	Nov: 15.3%
	Jun: 13.9%	Jun: 21.7%	Jun: 12.3%	Jun: 21.8%	Jun: 23.1%	Jun: 14.6%	Jun: 14.3%	Jun: 11.9%
Undecided	Nov: 26.4%	Nov: 32.2%	Nov: 24.7%	Nov: 29.8%	Nov: 39.3%	Nov: 34.6%	Nov: 29.3%	Nov: 31.9%
	Jun: 17.9%	Jun: 20.4%	Jun: 13.9%	Jun: 17.5%	Jun: 30.4%	Jun: 18.1%	Jun: 18.5%	Jun: 17.9%

This survey was conducted among 9,000 people, including 2,000 Canadians.

Belief in conspiracy theories is fairly stable in Canada and around the world

“Given the significant positive correlation that we established between the likelihood of believing in conspiracy theories and that of refusing or being reluctant to get vaccinated, it makes sense to question the potential impact of conspiracy theories on public health in Quebec and Canada,” said Professor Carignan, who is also Head of the Media Division for the UNESCO Chair in the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism.

The same survey also asked people to indicate their level of agreement with five statements related to conspiracy theories and COVID-19:

- I think that the government is hiding important information about the coronavirus.
- I think that the virus was created intentionally in a lab.
- I think that the virus was created accidentally in a lab.
- I think that the pharmaceutical industry is helping to spread the virus.
- I think that there is a link between 5G technology and the virus.

When the levels of agreement with these different statements are combined to create a conspiracy theory belief index, the results show that 23.5% of Canadians agree with one of the statements on the index. In June, the same survey showed that agreement in Canada was 23.9%.

General agreement with the conspiracy index – November / June 2020							
Country	Canada	United States	England	Switzerland	Philippines	New Zealand	Belgium
Agreement	Nov: 23.5%	Nov: 3 5.2%	Nov: 35.8%	Nov: 34.8%	Nov: 61.6%	Nov: 22.8%	Nov: 25%
	Jun: 23.9%	Jun: 41.4%	Jun: 38.9%	Jun: 29.7%	Jun: 58%	Jun: 24.4%	Jun: 24.9%

“Considering that evidence-based data and research findings on COVID-19 are rapidly advancing, it may be surprising to see that misinformation continues to spread and that people continue to believe in conspiracy ideas. These results show that agreement with conspiracy theories is based on a belief system that is difficult to shake and that is likely to continue in the long term,” said Professor Carignan.

Increase in number of respondents who show strong agreement with the conspiracy index

The survey results also reveal that more people showed strong agreement with statements on the conspiracy index in November compared to June. In Canada, agreement increased from 6.1% to 6.9%. The same phenomenon can be seen in other countries around the world.

Strong agreement with conspiracy index statements – November / June 2020							
Country	Canada	United States	England	Switzerland	Philippines	New Zealand	Belgium
Strong agreement	Nov: 6.9%	Nov: 16.8%	Nov: 14.4%	Nov: 9.7%	Nov: 23.9%	Nov: 7.8%	Nov: 4.7%
	Jun: 6.1%	Jun: 16.8%	Jun: 12.5%	Jun: 7.4%	Jun: 21.6%	Jun: 6.9%	Jun: 4.3%

Confidence in public health experts: Canada shows some stability

Public confidence in public health experts slightly increased in most countries surveyed. In Canada, confidence in health authorities increased slightly by 1.1% to 90.4% (89.3% in June).

Confidence in public health experts – November / June 2020								
Country	Canada	United States	England	Switzerland	Hong Kong	Philippines	New Zealand	Belgium
High level of confidence	Nov: 90.4%	Nov: 81%	Nov: 87.3%	Nov: 81.5%	Nov: 82.8%	Nov: 91.9%	Nov: 90.7%	Nov: 87.3%
	Jun: 89.3%	Jun: 80.3%	Jun: 89.7%	Jun: 87.4%	Jun: 77.8%	Jun: 90.2%	Jun: 90.6%	Jun: 84.8%

Confidence in political authorities: Mixed international results

In terms of confidence in political authorities (governments and politicians), the portrait is much more nuanced and reflects how management of the pandemic is a major political issue. Some countries/regions have shown slight increases in confidence (Canada and the United States), others have shown significant increases (Hong Kong and Belgium), some have shown slight decreases (England, the Philippines and New Zealand), while one country had a significant drop (Switzerland).

Confidence in political authorities – November / June 2020								
Country	Canada	United States	England	Switzerland	Hong Kong	Philippines	New Zealand	Belgium
High level of confidence	Nov: 73.8%	Nov: 42.2%	Nov: 55.8%	Nov: 66%	Nov: 58.5%	Nov: 69.8%	Nov: 77.4%	Nov: 53.5%
	Jun: 70.2%	Jun: 41.7%	Jun: 57%	Jun: 74.7%	Jun: 50.9%	Jun: 71.8%	Jun: 78.8%	Jun: 44.4%

About the research project

A multidisciplinary team from the Université de Sherbrooke is conducting an international comparative analysis of the influence of communication strategies and media discourse on the psychological and behavioural response of populations to COVID-19. The team members include Prof. [Gabriel Blouin-Genest](#) (politics), Prof. [Marie-Eve Carignan](#) (communications), Prof. [Olivier Champagne-Poirier](#) (communications), Prof. [Marc D. David](#) (communications), Prof. [Mélicha G  n  reux](#) (public health), and Prof. [Mathieu Roy](#) (public health), in addition to researchers in seven other countries. The team is supported by Prof. [Jean-Herman Guay](#) (politics) and by the UNESCO Chair in the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism, in particular by co-chairholder Prof. [David Morin](#) (politics). The project's main goal is to analyze people's perceptions and interpretations of public health messages (from the World Health Organization and governments) and other sources of information (from the media and other sources) as well as the psychosocial impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on individuals.

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