

VARYING KNOWLEDGE ON VARIANTS? WHAT CANADIANS BELIEVE TO BE TRUE OR FALSE

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Since the start of 2021 news about SARS-CoV-2 variants has emerged from around the globe: [first in the United Kingdom](#), then [South Africa](#), Brazil, the US and Canada where variants are becoming the dominant strain of the virus.

In April 2021, a survey conducted for the Association for Canadian Studies by Leger Marketing revealed that opinion was divided three ways when Canadians were asked whether vaccines would protect us from the variants with some one-third persuaded it will, one third that it won't and just over a third saying they don't know. Uncertainty about the effect of the variants is becoming an increasingly important driver of opinion as to how Canadians feel that the Covid crisis will evolve. Today we officially launch the Covid 19 network on the Social Impacts of Variants with a series of survey question aimed at examining what Canadians believe to be true or not about the variants. Conducted between June 18 and 20, 2021 for the University of Manitoba and the Association for Canadian Studies, some 1542 Canadians were polled and while no margin of error can be associated with a non-probability sample (Web panel in this case). However for comparative purposes, a probability sample of 1542 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.52\%$, 19 times out of 20.

INTRODUCTION:

DO CANADIANS UNDERSTOOD WHAT IS MEANT BY VARIANTS OF COVID 19

WAS THE EMERGENCE OF THE VARIANT A SURPRISE:

The variant did not arrive unexpectedly. [As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains](#): “Viruses constantly change through mutation, and new variants of a virus are expected to occur over time.” Yet most Canadians believe that....

...the Covid 19 health variants caught experts by surprise

The COVID-19 variants caught health experts by surprise

	Total	French	English	Others	Visible Minorities	Not a visible minority
True	62%	56%	63%	64%	70%	60%
False	38%	44%	37%	36%	30%	40%

Are the new variants more likely to cause severe illness or death or are they just more contagious?

Do we know whether the new variants are more likely to cause severe illness or death. That idea runs somewhat counter to the view that the variants are more contagious. Some suggest that because they are more contagious the net outcome is that where a similar number of persons get the infected with the original virus versus the variant a somewhat higher number could die. But that may simply be because more people are getting infected since the variants are more transmissible, not because the strains themselves are causing the deaths.

For their part, seven in ten Canadians believe that:

...the variants are more deadly than the original COVID-19

The COVID-19 variants are more deadly than the original COVID-19. -

	Total	French	English	Others	Visible Minorities	Not a visible minorities
True	70%	50%	75%	80%	81%	68%
False	30%	50%	25%	20%	19%	32%

DO VACCINES WORK AGAINST THE VARIANTS

...both the Pfizer, Moderna and other approved vaccines appear to protect against the known COVID-19 variants and while there is some indication that they may be less effective against the Delta variant that doesn't imply that they are not effective

For their part three in four Canadians believe that -

...Our current vaccines do work against the COVID-19 variants. -

Our current vaccines do not work against the COVID-19 variants. -

	Total	French	English	Others	Visible Minorities	Not a visible minorities
True	27%	22%	28%	31%	34%	24%
False	73%	78%	72%	69%	66%	76%

CAN WE PREVENT THESE VARIANTS — OR FUTURE ONES — FROM SPREADING

The variants are definitely spreading around the world and certainly that is the case here in Canada. And while that sounds worrisome, the situation can be mitigated with protective strategies that are in place to combat the original strain. Vaccination is the most important means to curtail the spread of the variants

For their part, Canadians are divided as to whether ...

...we can prevent these variants — or future ones — from spreading

We cannot prevent these variants — or future ones — from spreading

	Total	French	English	Others	Visible Minorities	Not a visible minorities
True	53%	59%	51%	56%	52%	54%
False	47%	41%	49%	44%	48%	46%

METHODOLOGY

Web survey using computer-assisted Web interviewing (CAWI) technology.

From, 2021 some 1542 Canadians were surveyed via web panel

Using data from the 2016 Census, results were weighted according to gender, age, mother tongue, region, education level and presence of children in the household in order to ensure a representative sample of the population.

No margin of error can be associated with a non-probability sample (Web panel in this case). However for comparative purposes, a probability sample of 1542 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.52\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The research results presented here are in full compliance with the CRIC Public Opinion Research Standards and Disclosure Requirements.

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