

COVID-19: Canadians call for more rapid access to rapid antigen tests as Omicron fuels more holiday season anxiety

Almost half say their own province is doing a poor job distributing rapid tests

December 20, 2021 – It's beginning to look a lot like (last) Christmas. With cases of the COVID-19 Omicron variant surging, governments are once again scrambling to provide guidelines and rules to navigate the holiday season.

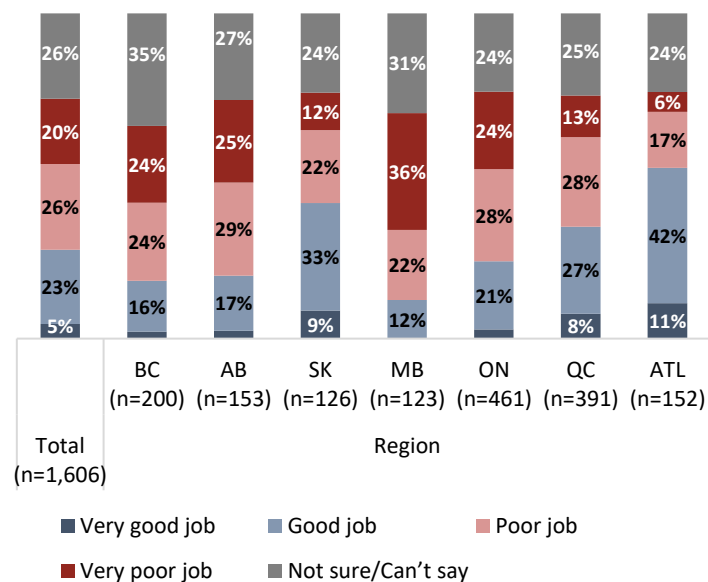
One new element this year is what has been described as a "**frenzied**" search for rapid antigen tests, which many were hoping would add an extra layer of security to holiday gatherings.

Amid **inconsistent supply and evolving distribution plans**, new data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds nearly half of Canadians dissatisfied with the responses of their respective provincial governments on this file.

Overall, 46 per cent of residents say their own province has done a poor job providing rapid tests where they are needed. This proportion rises to majority levels in Alberta (54%), Manitoba (58%) and Ontario (52%), and is the plurality view in British Columbia and Quebec. Opinions are most positive in Atlantic Canada, where **hundreds of thousands** of tests were rushed out to schools and workplaces in recent weeks.

Some provinces have **faced criticism** for a perceived unwillingness to distribute stockpiles of tests which were delivered by the federal government, and in many cases, for requiring Canadians to pay costs for rapid testing. Three-in-five Canadians (63%) say their province should endeavour to make tests free and universal, while about one-in-five (18%) would prefer tests are used only to monitor higher risk spaces, conserving supply. Indeed, fully one-quarter (26%) say they have wanted to take a rapid test at some point during the pandemic but been unable to find or afford one.

Based on what you have read, seen or heard, do you think your province has done a good job or a poor job of distributing rapid antigen tests where they are needed?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Dec. 15 - 17, 2021 among a representative randomized sample of 1,606 Canadian adults who are members of **Angus Reid Forum**. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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More Key Findings:

- One-in-three Canadians say they would like to see their own province institute more restrictions over the coming weeks, rising to 41 per cent in Ontario. Two-in-five (41%) feel their provincial restrictions are currently hitting the right mark, while 26 per cent say they go too far
- Albertans are most likely to say that they have wanted a test but not received one (30%) and are also most critical of their provincial government's COVID-19 handling overall. One-in-five (20%) say the UCP have done a good job to this point.
- Three-in-five Canadians are concerned about becoming sick with COVID-19, a level essentially unchanged since the beginning of the month.

About ARI

*The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.*

INDEX

Part One: Concern ticks up slightly as Omicron spreads

- **One-quarter more worried about new variant**

Part Two: Are governments doing enough?

- **Provincial government appraisal**
- **View of federal pandemic management**
- **Are restrictions too strict or in need of tightening?**

Part Three: Majority want more access to rapid antigen tests

- **One-quarter have tried and failed to access a rapid test**
- **Testing seen as a part of mitigation strategy**

Part One: Concern ticks up slightly as Omicron spreads

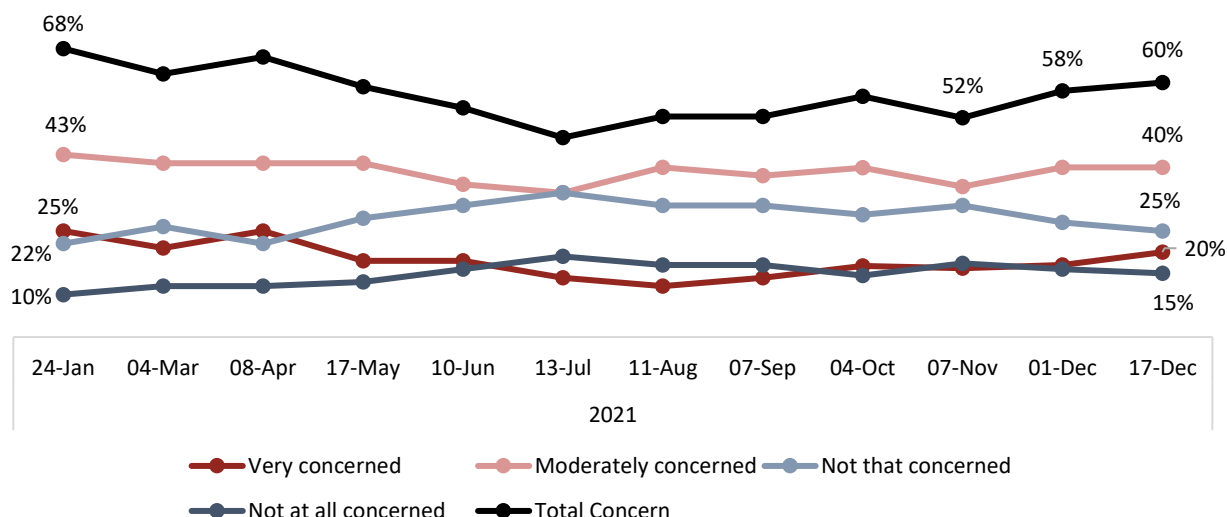
New restrictions – and recommendations – have been announced by governments across the nation in recent weeks in an attempt to slow the spread of the Omicron variant of the coronavirus. While these have been met with a healthy amount of both appreciation and chagrin (see part two), Canadians' concern over contracting COVID-19 continues to tick up slightly. Three-in-five (60%) say they are either "very" or "moderately concerned" over personally contracting COVID-19.

Information about how severe Omicron is when compared to previous strains of COVID-19 [is still emerging](#). However, it has proven to spread [much quicker than previous variants](#), and scientists worry Omicron's many mutations will allow it to [evade antibodies](#) generated by vaccines or previous infections:

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Personal concern over contracting COVID-19



One-quarter more worried about new variant

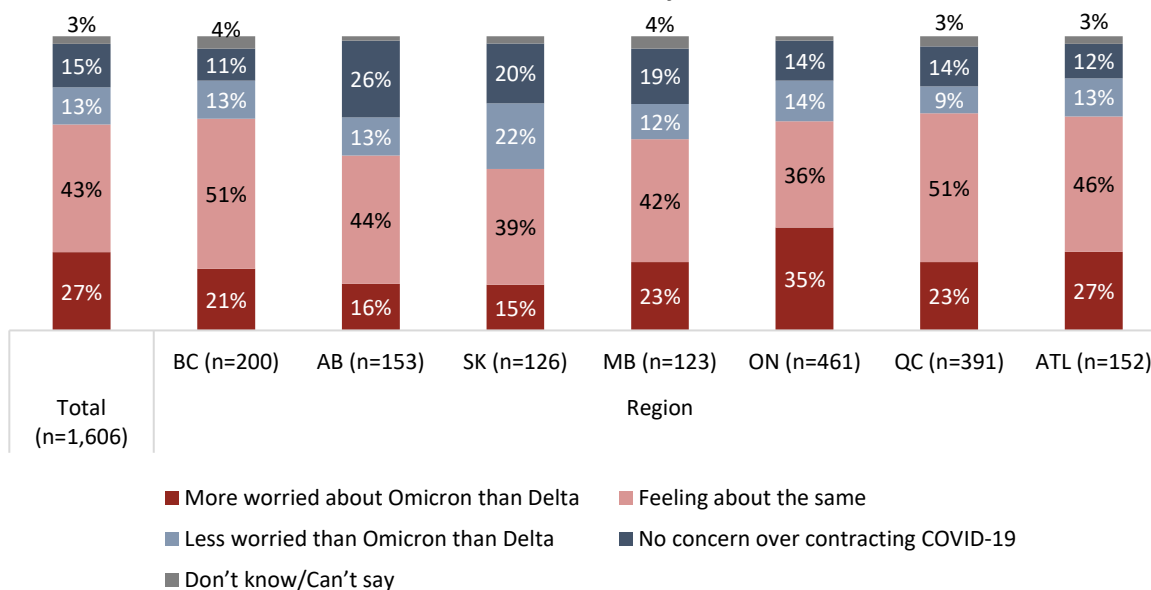
Canadians are divided over whether they perceive this new variant to be more concerning than Delta, the variant that caused the [most recent wave of infections](#) in the country in the fall. Two-in-five (43%) are no more worried about Omicron than they were Delta, one-quarter say the new variant is more concerning. A further three-in-ten (28%) find Omicron to be a lower threat than Delta or are not concerned about contracting COVID-19 at all.

A plurality in every region finds both Delta and Omicron equally concerning, but Ontario is the home to those most concerned about the latter. After reporting 3,000 new cases of the virus, the province announced a [host of new COVID-19 restrictions](#) on Friday, including the return of reduced capacity at restaurants, bars and other businesses and indoor and outdoor gathering limits. One-third (35%) of Ontarians say they find the Omicron variant to be of more concern than Delta. In Alberta, one-quarter (26%) say they have no concern over contracting COVID-19, a number greater than those who say they find Omicron more worrying than its predecessor:

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As you may know, a new variant of COVID-19 has been identified – called Omicron. Thinking about this variant and how it compares to the previous Delta variant, are you...

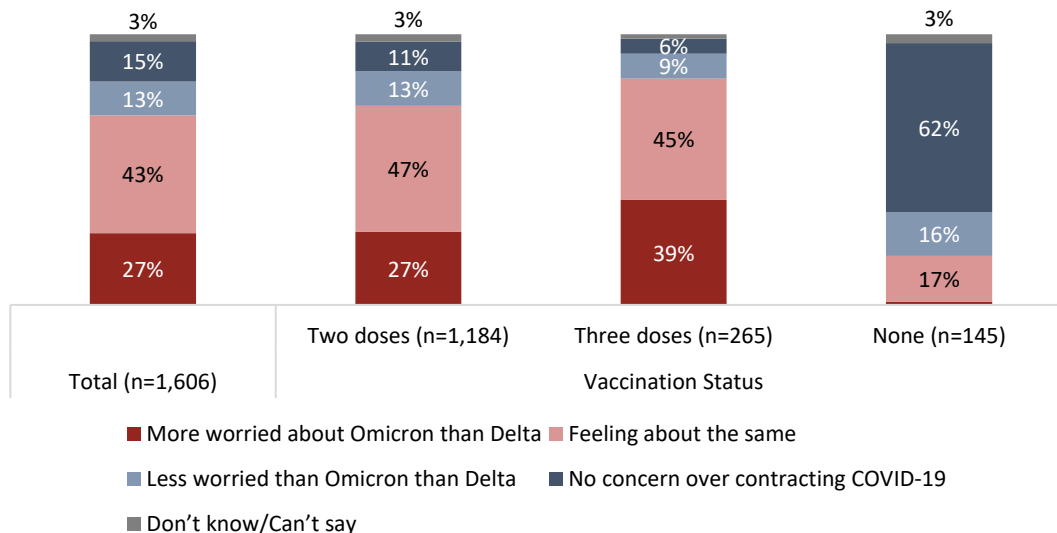


Excepting 18- to 34-year-old men, a plurality of all demographics believe Delta and Omicron are equal threats. Two-in-five (43%) of the youngest group of men find themselves less worried about Omicron than Delta or not at all worried about being infected by COVID-19. Women over the age of 54 are the most concerned about the latest variant, with one-third (36%) finding the threat of it to be greater than Delta.

There is also a significant partisan divide over the comparative threat of Omicron. One-in-six (15%) Conservatives believe Omicron is more worrisome than Delta, the lowest group of any group of party supporters ([see detailed tables](#)).

Despite being shielded with what is understood to be the fullest vaccine protection currently available, two-in-five (39%) with booster shots are more worried about Omicron than they were with the Delta variant. Booster eligibility [varies across the country](#), though most provinces have only recently begun to open up third doses to those under the age of 50. Indeed, seven-in-ten of those who say they've received three doses of COVID-19 vaccine are 55 years old or older ([see detailed tables](#)), notably the group who have consistently been the most concerned with personally contracting COVID-19.

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Part Two: Are governments doing enough?

After a period of relative reprieve from rising infections – due largely to successful vaccination campaigns – provincial governments are again under immense pressure to use policy mechanisms to reduce the threat posed by COVID-19.

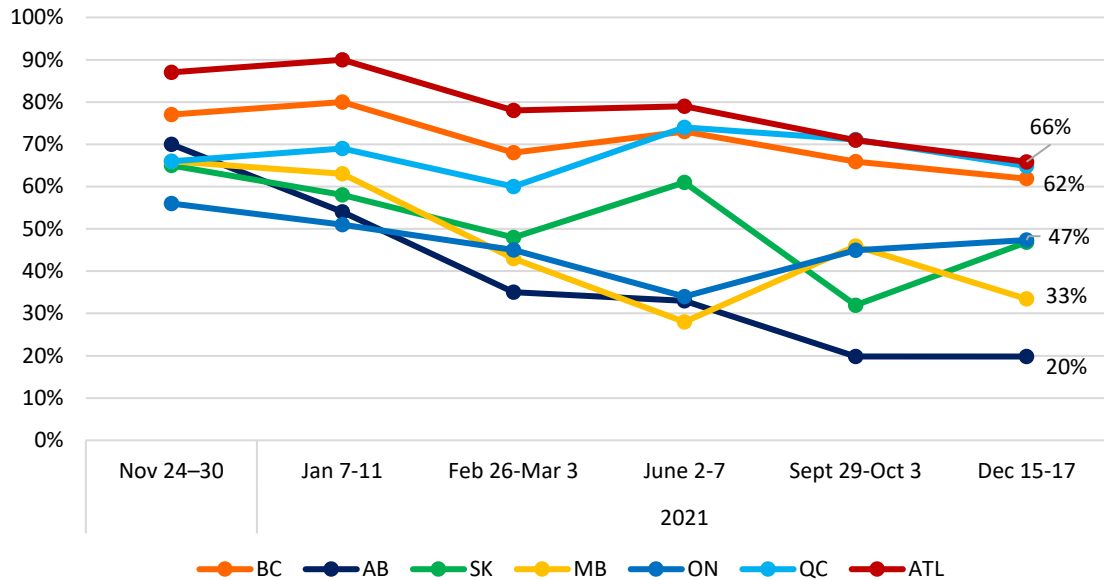
Provincial government appraisal

As has been the case for most of the pandemic, governments in Atlantic Canada receive the highest marks for their handling of the crisis. At least three-in-five residents in Quebec (65%) and British Columbia (62%) also approve of their government's COVID-19 handling. Perceptions of the governments of Scott Moe in Saskatchewan and Doug Ford in Ontario have improved since the autumn but are still sub-majority. Alberta's Jason Kenney continues to govern over the country's most criticized COVID-19 approach:

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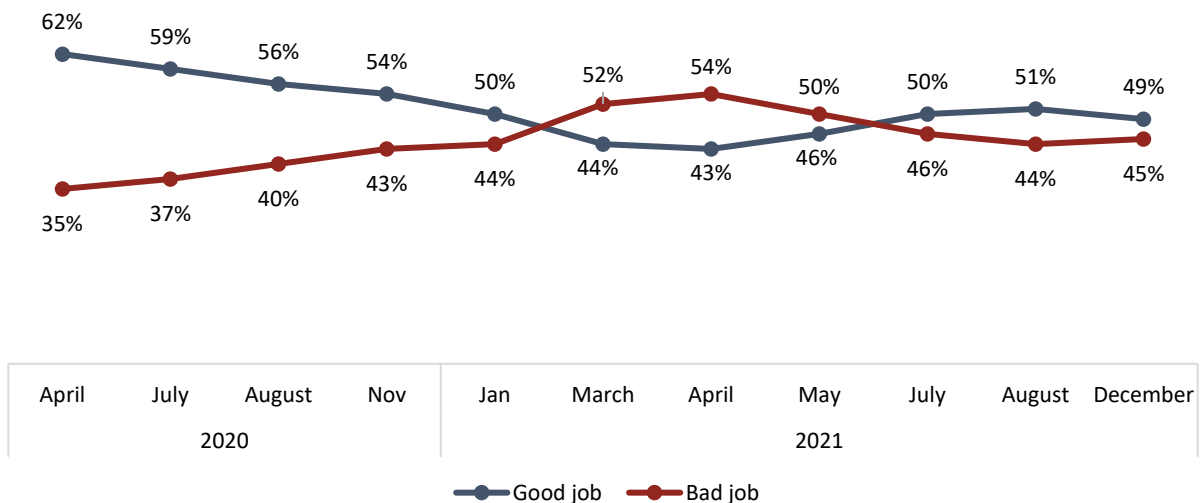
Percentage of Canadians who believe their government has done a good job handling COVID-19



View of federal pandemic management

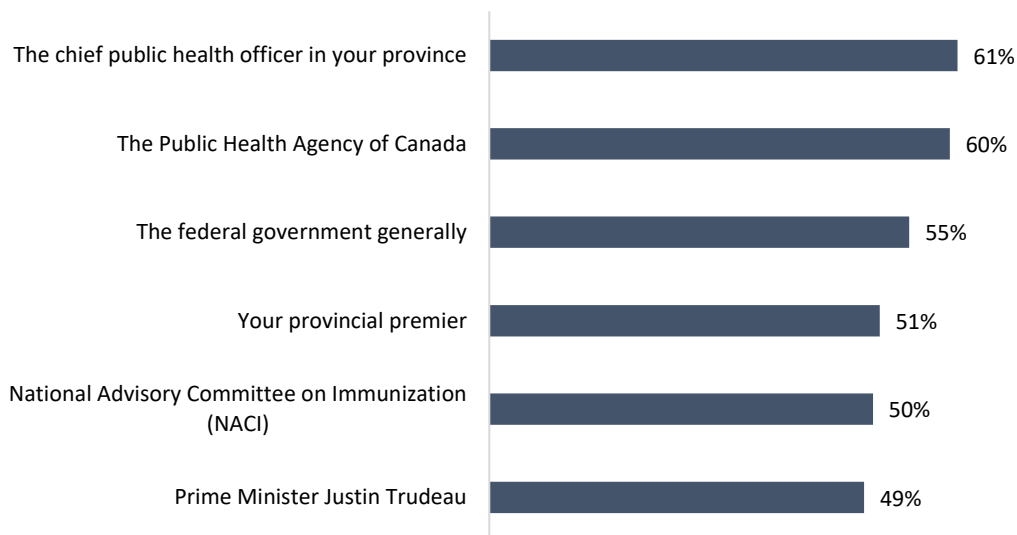
Prime Minister Justin Trudeau entered the federal election in September with approximately half of Canadians approving of his handling of COVID-19. He heads into 2022 with that level of assessment down slightly, but not significantly.

Do you think [Prime Minister Justin Trudeau] is doing a good or bad job handling the Covid-19 pandemic overall?



Other individuals and institutions are better assessed than the PM. Provincial chief public health officers are more likely to receive higher levels of praise overall than the governments they serve, and the same is true of the Public Health Agency of Canada. For information by province, [view detailed tables here](#):

Percentage saying each is doing a good job in COVID-19 response:



Are restrictions too strict or in need of tightening?

One of the biggest questions facing provincial leaders are this time, as Canadians head into what would normally be a period of sociability and celebration, is how to approach community restrictions.

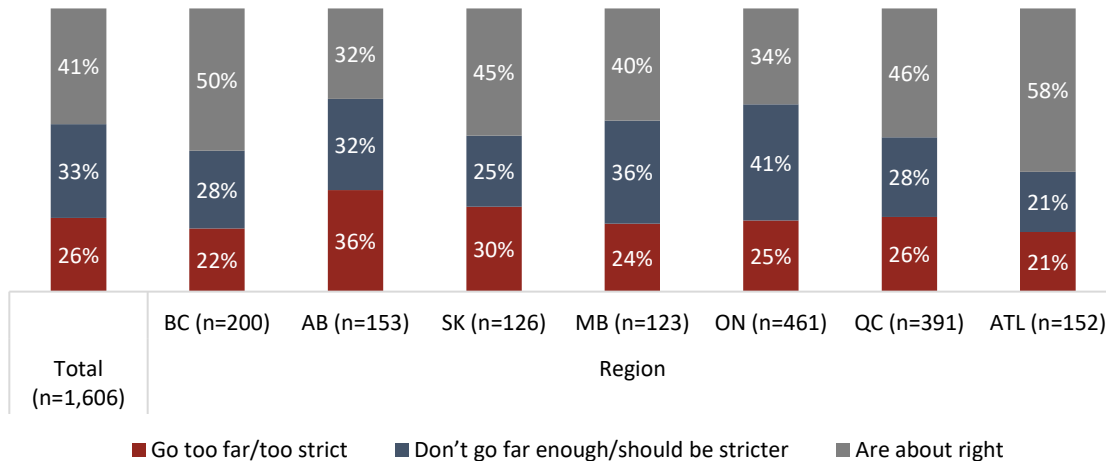
In [British Columbia](#), the government today implemented new restrictions on event sizes and household gatherings, among other policies. In [Quebec](#), private gatherings are now restricted to 10 people indoors, schools will re-implement mask mandates, and the Montreal Canadiens will play in an empty arena. In Ontario, [similar enactments](#) have been made.

From a public opinion perspective, many are aligned with the current state of affairs in their province, while a considerable number would tighten the rules further. Ontario residents are most receptive to new measures, while opposition is highest in Alberta. Those in B.C. and Atlantic Canada are most likely to agree with the current approach:

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Thinking about your community, where you live, do these restrictions – or the lack of them:

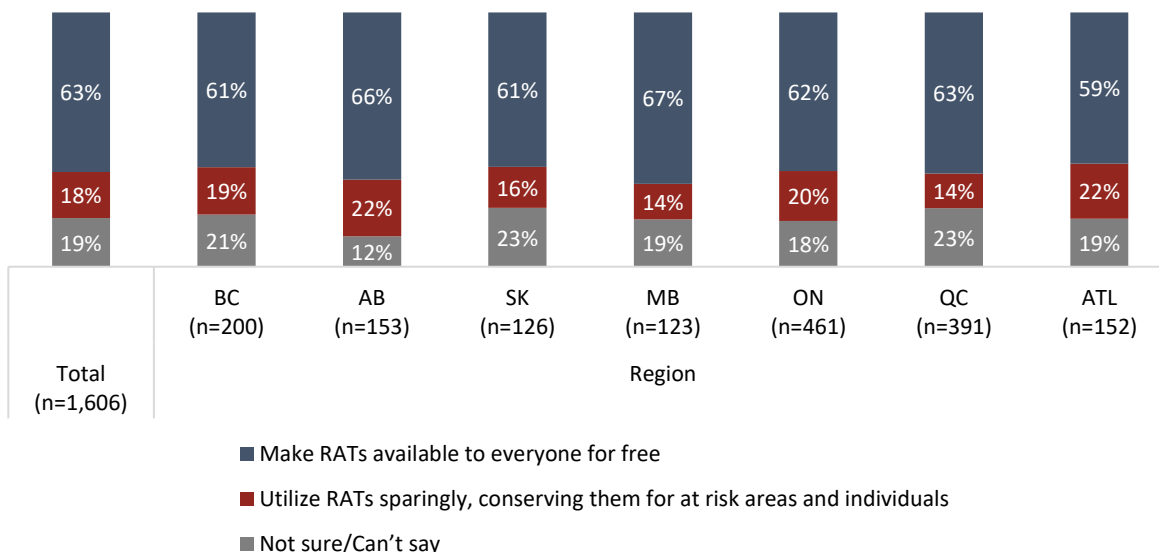


Part Three: Majority want more access to rapid antigen tests

There is another element to this discussion that has many Canadians demanding answers from their provincial leadership. Access to rapid antigen testing – tests utilized to assess positivity for COVID-19 in a relatively timely manner – has been a source of frustration for advocates for months. This has been exacerbated by reports that fewer than 20 per cent of the more than 100 million tests delivered to the provinces by the federal government have been used. Some provincial governments have announced free access to tests at pop-up locations, or through schools and workplaces. Others, prominently British Columbia, have been more hesitant to commit to such a plan. [Click here](#) for a summary of current policies by province.

Canadians are generally in agreement that free and universal access should be the goal of the provinces. Three-in-five (63%) say this, as opposed to 18 per cent who believe that the tests should be reserved for at risk individuals and settings:

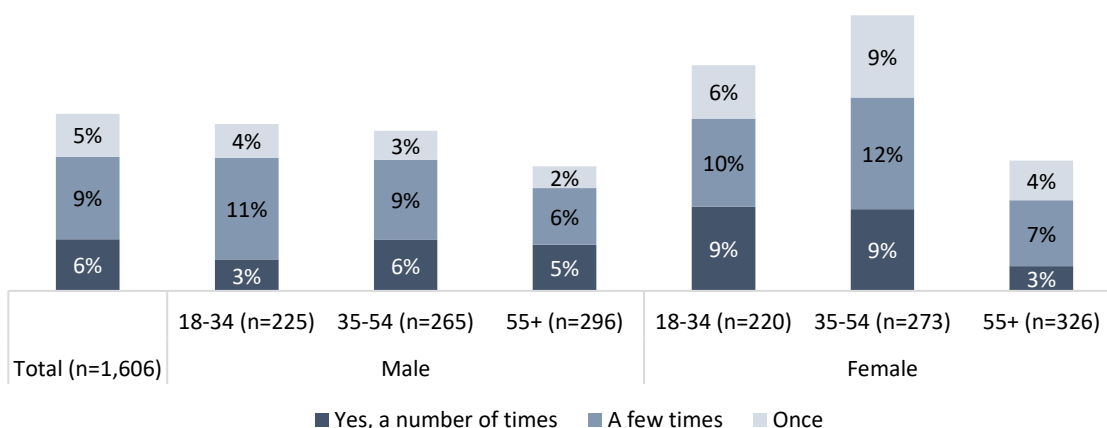
Which strategy do you think is best for your own province regarding Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs):



One-quarter have tried and failed to access a rapid test

Some of this desire for increased rapid testing may be driven by the finding that one-in-four Canadians have wanted to utilize a test but been unable to acquire one. While 26 per cent of Canadians have used a RAT ([see detailed tables](#)), the same number say they have been unable to access one at some point during the pandemic. Notably, women between the ages of 35 and 54 are most likely to say that they would have benefited from RATs:

At any time have you wanted to take a rapid antigen test but been unable to access or afford one?

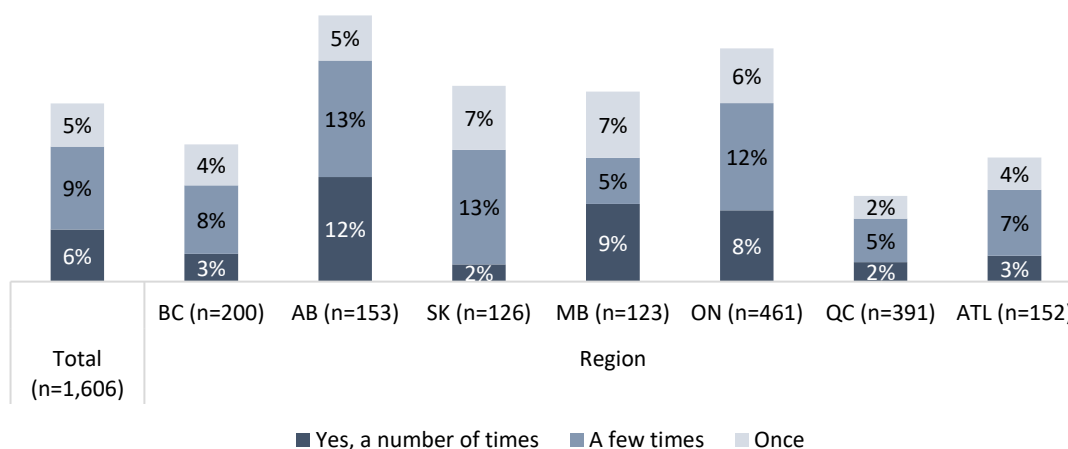


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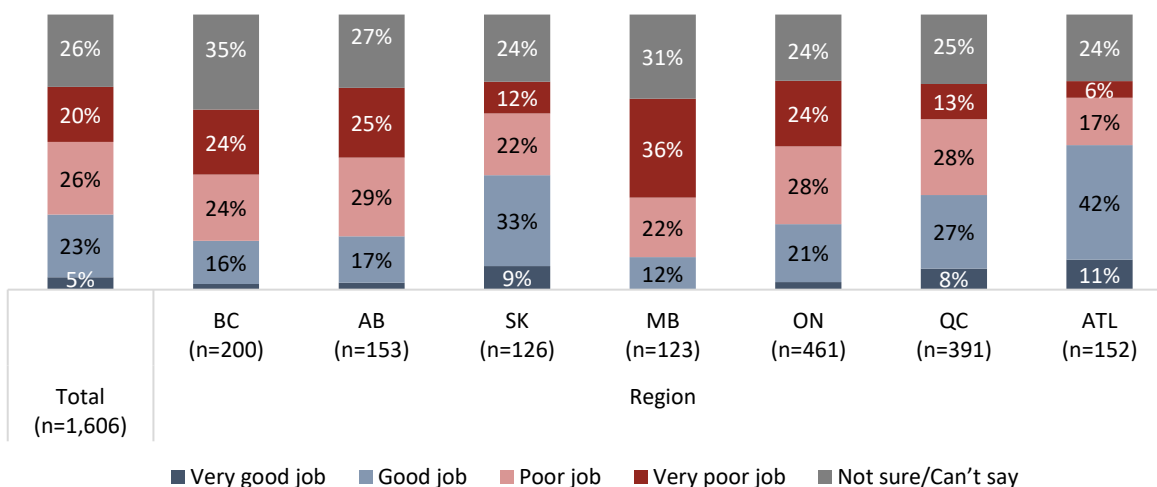
Albertans (30%) and Ontario residents (26%) are most likely to say that they have wanted a test but been unable to find or afford one. In Quebec, just one-in-ten (9%) say this:

At any time have you wanted to take a rapid antigen test but been unable to access or afford one?



It is perhaps not surprising then, that when asked to assess their provincial government’s distribution efforts so far, those in Alberta and Ontario are among the most critical. That said, Manitobans voice the highest levels of frustration:

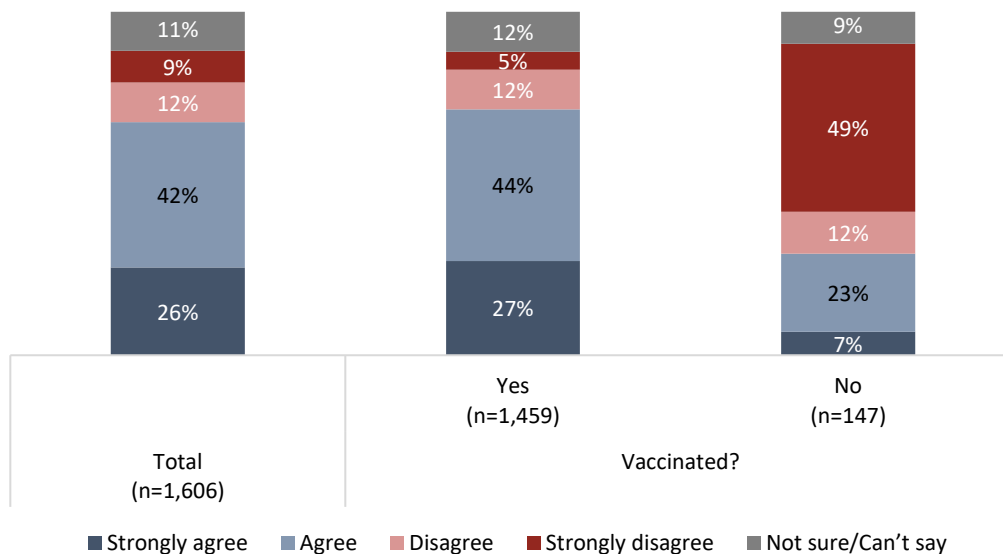
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Testing seen as a part of mitigation strategy

Advocates for increased rapid testing have suggested that this would allow Canadians to quickly discern whether or not they should be engaging in activities around others, from work, to school, to holiday parties. This sentiment is something that many Canadians agree with. Seven-in-ten (68%) say that government should be promoting rapid testing as a mitigation strategy. Those who disagree are much more likely to be unvaccinated, and evidently not supportive of either testing or immunization:

"The government should be pushing Canadians to use rapid tests to help stop COVID-19 from spreading"



For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)