Symptoms of Anxiety and Depression during the COVID-19 Pandemic

February to May 2021 Data from the Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health[1]

The COVID-19 pandemic and stress

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected individuals, families, and communities in several ways. **More than 7 out of 10** Canadians reported being negatively impacted by COVID-19.

More than 2 out of 5 Canadians reported some level of distress in the past month. With social distancing and repeated lockdown measures, feelings of isolation and loneliness can increase levels of anxiety and depression.

Anxiety and depression

Feelings of anxiety and depression are some of the most common symptoms of mental disorders.

Anxiety symptoms can include:[2]

- excessive and constant feelings of nervousness
- worry and fear

Depression symptoms can include:[3]

- lack of energy
- agitation
- lowering of a person's mood

*Diagnosing a disorder related to symptoms of anxiety or depression requires a trained and licensed clinician. The Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health used symptom-based screening tools to identify individuals with moderate to severe symptoms of anxiety and depression (i.e., those who would screen positive for **generalized anxiety disorder [GAD]** or **major depressive disorder [MDD]**).[4]*

Symptoms of anxiety (GAD) and depression (MDD) in Canadians 18+

15% of Canadians screened positive for **GAD**. This prevalence was:

19% of Canadians screened positive for **MDD**. This prevalence was:

GENDER

Higher among **women** than men

18% 12%

Higher among **women** than men

22% 15%

AGE GROUP

Highest among those **aged 18-34**

24% 18–34

Highest among those **aged 18-34**

31% 18–34

GENDER BY AGE GROUP

Higher among **women** than men in these age groups

2X higher 18–34

2.5X higher 65+

Higher among **women** than men in these age groups

1.5X higher 18–34

1.5X higher 35–49

2.5X higher 65+

23% of Canadians screened positive for either **GAD,** and/or **MDD**.

Use of alcohol and cannabis

Compared to those who did not screen positive for **GAD, MDD** or both disorders, those screened positive were **more likely** to report:

Daily or almost daily heavy drinking[5] — **1.5X**

Increased alcohol use since the beginning of the pandemic — **1.5X**

Daily cannabis use — **2X**

Increased cannabis use since the beginning of the pandemic — **2.5X**

Groups more likely to screen positive

The proportion of individuals screening positive for **GAD, MDD,** or both disorders, was **higher** among:

Indigenous groups[6] — **1.5X**

Frontline workers[7] — **1.5X**

Those with decreased income due to the COVID-19 pandemic — **1.5X**

Those who experienced a traumatic event during their lifetime — **1.5X**

As the pandemic continues, learning how to cope with stress in healthy ways is important to minimize experiencing symptoms of anxiety and depression. If you or someone you know is in crisis or needs mental health support, visit **Wellness Together Canada** for a wide range of resources.

VISIT
Canada.ca website on Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

GET DATA
Mental Illness during the Pandemic: Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health

MORE
Mental health support: Get help / Coronavirus disease (COVID-19): Awareness resources

REFERENCES & NOTES:

1. Statistics Canada. Survey on COVID-19 and Mental Health (SCMH). 2021 (Retrieved December 2021). Available from: https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=5330.
2. American Psychiatric Association. Anxiety Disorders. In Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). 2022 (Retrieved August2022). Available from: https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787.x05_Anxiety_Disorders.
3. American Psychiatric Association. Depressive Disorders. In Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). 2022 (Retrieved August2022). Available from: https://dsm.psychiatryonline.org/doi/full/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787.x04_Depressive_Disorders.
4. The severity of anxiety and depression were measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) and Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) respectively. These clinical screening tools are widely used in population health surveys to identify those who may have generalized anxiety disorder and major depressive disorder, with scores of ≥10 (i.e., moderate to severe symptoms) in the two weeks prior to completing the survey. The data reported above do not necessarily reflect a clinical diagnosis of these conditions.
5. Heavy drinking is defined as 4+ alcoholic drinks for women and 5+ alcoholic drinks for men in one sitting.
6. Indigenous identity refers to the First Nations, Métis, or Inuk (Inuit). The target population of the survey only included persons living off reserves.
7. A frontline worker was defined as "an individual who has the potential to come in direct contact with COVID-19 by assisting those who have been diagnosed with the virus". Examples provided were "police officers, firefighters, paramedics, nurses or doctors."

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Public Health Agency of Canada / Agence de la santé publique du Canada

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