

Senior Wellbeing During COVID-19: Part 2

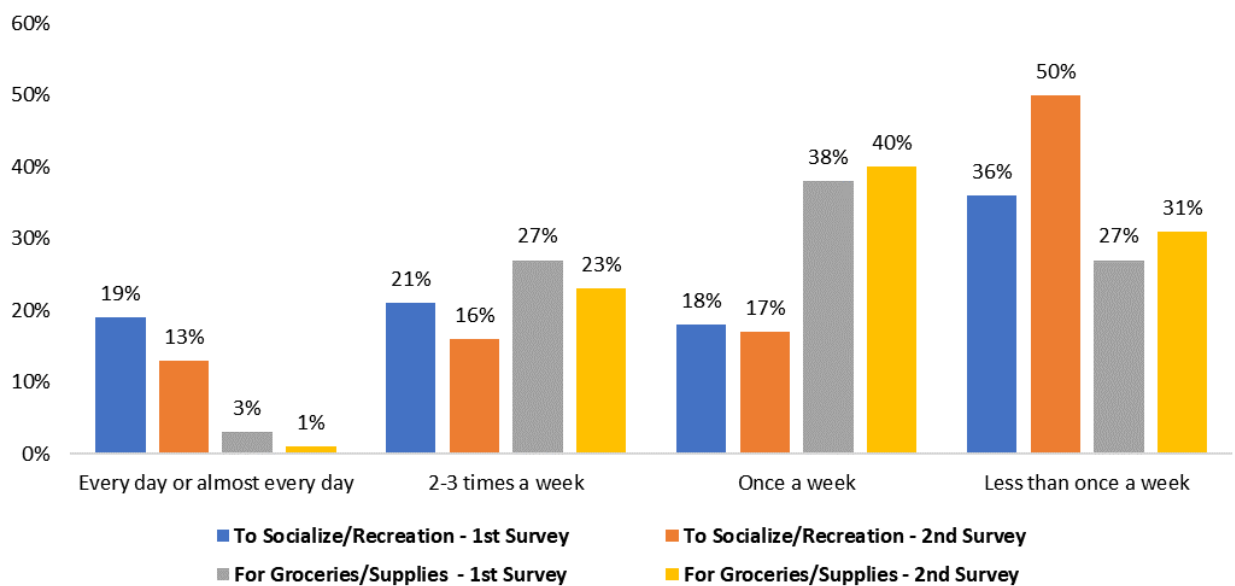
In the summer of 2020, a survey went out to older adults (aged 50 or older) in Halton “who receive food supports from *Food for Life* asking about their nutrition, food security, food needs, health, and overall wellbeing.” The survey, part of the *Putting Food on the Table* project, a partnership between Sheridan Centre for Elder Research, Food for Life, and Community Development Halton, went out to over 1,000 older adults, with 223 responding.

In January 2021, Community Development Halton analyzed those survey findings in a *Community Lens* entitled, [Senior Wellbeing During COVID-19](#).

In June 2021, a follow-up survey went out to the older adults that responded to the first survey. Its findings will be the subject of this *Community Lens*. The content, structure and questions did not change between the first and second surveys, which was considered the best approach to identify if, and how, patterns of behaviour and feelings towards the pandemic had changed over time among older adults in Halton.

The demographics of respondents were broadly similar across the two surveys. Once again, the majority of survey respondents were women: 74% in the first survey; 77% in the second survey. And, just as in the first survey, the largest group of respondents to the second survey were in their 70s.

How often do you leave your home?



Comparing data from the two surveys, respondents were more likely to leave their home during the first survey period (August 2020) than in the second survey period (June 2021) when Ontario’s vaccine rollout was beginning to accelerate. In Ontario, on June 5, 2021, for example, 60% of eligible candidates had received at least one dose, with almost 7% fully vaccinated.¹ Older adults were less likely, across all categories, to socialize or take part in recreational activities during the second survey period. This is important because of the role that socialising plays in alleviating loneliness, particularly for older adults who may experience isolation, and contributing to the maintenance of good mental and physical health.

There are likely explanations why older adults were leaving their homes more in the summer of 2020, during a time when vaccines were still only in the development and preapproval stages. Last August confirmed COVID-19 cases were close to zero in Halton. For example, on August 5, 2020, there was 1 confirmed case in Halton; there were 3 days when cases were zero, and daily confirmed cases never went above 6 during the month of August.² This was at a time when some health restrictions were still in place across the province, but the summer weather facilitated socializing and gatherings in relatively safer, outdoor settings.

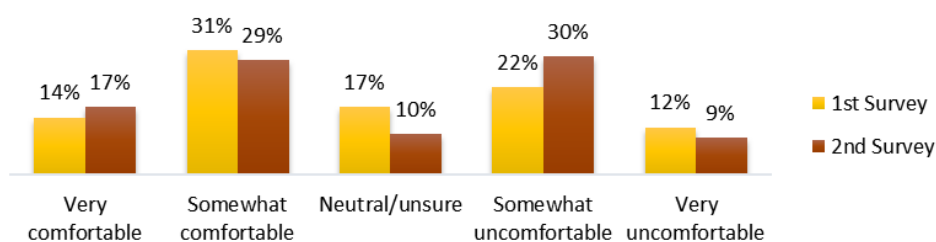
Fast forward nine months to June 2021, when the second survey was sent out, Ontario’s vaccine rollout was gathering pace, but only a couple of months previously the third wave in Canada hit

its peak with 10,275 new cases recorded on the 21st of April.³ Despite the increasing levels of inoculation in June, it is likely this third wave peak was fresh in the minds of

people across Halton, particularly older adults, and those in COVID’s higher risk categories.

During the second survey, 17% of older adults were “very comfortable” leaving their home during the pandemic compared with 14% in the first survey period. There was a minor dip in the “somewhat comfortable” category: 31% in the first survey compared to 29% in the second survey. The most significant increase in this survey question was the 8% increase – from 22% to 30% – in those feeling “somewhat uncomfortable” between the first and second surveys. At play here, again, is likely the issues that were mentioned earlier, such as low inoculation levels, third wave concerns, and some province-wide restrictions on gatherings.

How comfortable are you leaving your home during the pandemic?



¹Public Health Agency of Canada. Canadian COVID-19 vaccination coverage report. Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada; October 12, 2021: <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccination-coverage>

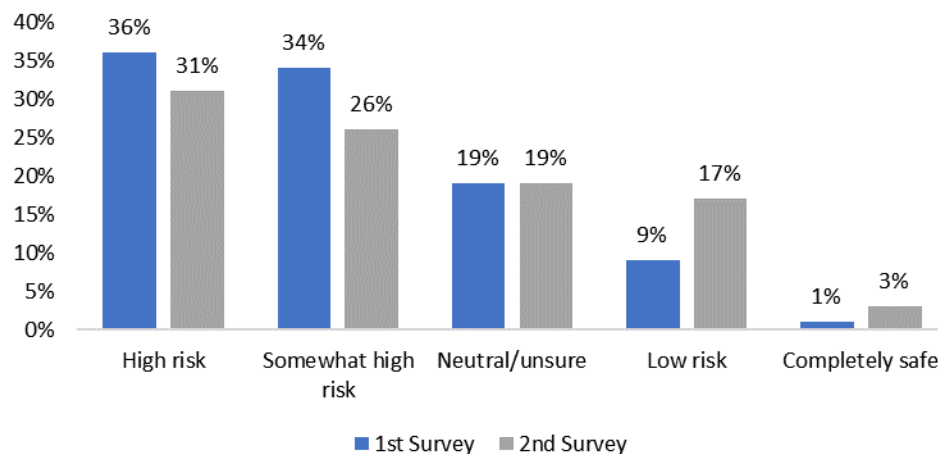
²Halton Region, COVID-19 Dashboard, Status of COVID-19 cases in Halton (accessed October 12, 2021): <https://www.halton.ca/For-Residents/Immunizations-Preventable-Disease/Diseases-Infections/New-Coronavirus/Status-of-COVID-19-Cases-in-Halton>

³World Health Organization, Health Emergency Dashboard (COVID-19), Canada (accessed October 12, 2021): <https://covid19.who.int/region/amro/country/ca>

Elsewhere in the second survey findings, respondents were less likely to feel COVID was a risk to their health, safety, and wellbeing across all categories - apart from the “neutral/unsure” category, which was 19% for both surveys - compared to respondents in the first survey.

In the first survey, 36% of respondents felt “high risk”, compared with 31% in the second survey, and the numbers that felt “low risk” increased from 9% in the first survey to 17% in the second survey.

How much of a risk is COVID to your health, safety, and wellbeing?



In conclusion, these survey results are instructive in number of ways. It is likely that the vaccine rollout has contributed to older adults in Halton feeling less at risk from COVID. It is not the silver bullet, however, that some may have hoped for at the beginning of 2021. As strong as the province’s vaccine program has been, the trends suggest that older adults will continue to, at least for the time-being, exercise caution when it comes to increasing their social contacts and leaving their homes.

For further information on the ‘Putting Food on the Table’ project you can go to Community Development Halton’s Age Friendly website: cdhalton.ca/age-friendly or email Heather Thompson, Director, Age Friendly Initiatives: hthompson@cdhalton.ca

Community Lens is prepared by Community Development Halton to disseminate and interpret important community data as it becomes available. For more information please contact us at data@cdhalton.ca or 905-632-1975



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