



Public Perspectives on a COVID-19 Vaccine - Results Summary
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In this study, “Public Perspectives on a COVID-19 Vaccine”, we interviewed Ontarians about their life experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This document provides a brief summary of the major findings of the study. If you have further comments, questions, or concerns about this work, please contact Vivian Nelson (nelsonv@uoguelph.ca) or Kieran O’Doherty (odohertk@uoguelph.ca).

Summary of Study Design:

Telephone interviews were conducted with forty individuals who live in Ontario between July and August 2020. Interviews ranged in length from about twenty minutes to one hour. All participants were offered a \$20 e-gift card to thank them for their time.

What are Ontarians most concerned about with respect to COVID-19?

Participants shared varying concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic. In many of the interviews, participants indicated a primary concern of getting sick or causing someone else to get sick. Many participants mentioned that the COVID lockdown has caused significant changes to their work lives (working remotely and/or experiencing unemployment), family relations (namely with respect to childcare and schooling), social lives (significant decrease in face-to-face social gatherings), and personal and/or mental wellbeing. Many participants commented on the day-to-day precautions that have accompanied COVID, namely mask-wearing and social distancing in public spaces, though few participants indicated that they took issue with these behaviours. On the contrary, many participants indicated feelings of unease or discomfort when they witnessed noncompliance to COVID guidelines amongst other members of their community.

Some participants indicated that they had very few concerns or complaints with respect to the COVID-19 situation and mentioned that their lives remained relatively unchanged. A few participants commented on the way(s) in which COVID has positively affected their life, reporting decreased commuting time to their workplace, increased time spent with family, and a re-centering of personal values.

How do Ontarians perceive the development of a potential COVID-19 vaccine?

We asked participants about what information (if any) they had about a potential COVID-19 vaccine. Some participants indicated that the potential vaccine wasn’t something they had read or heard much about, while others commented on some of the ongoing clinical trials and

estimated timelines for a vaccine release date. It seemed that many participants perceived a potential COVID-19 vaccine was “in the works”, and were interested in following these scientific discussions, but few were able to confidently estimate when it might become available.

What concerns do Ontarians have about a potential COVID-19 vaccine?

Almost all of the concerns participants shared about a potential COVID vaccine were related to safety, efficacy, or the logistics of its distribution. Participants expressed uncertainty with respect to the development and roll-out timeline of a potential COVID-19 vaccine. Some participants worried that too much remains unknown about the virus itself to make a safe and effective vaccine, others expressed concerns that the virus might mutate, thus making vaccine development efforts futile. Some Ontarians worried about accessibility disparities amongst countries and communities (i.e. whether poorer countries or remote Ontario communities would have access to the vaccine), and some remarked on the economic consequences of COVID vaccine development. In general, participants indicated that they would trust provincial and federal health officials to communicate any significant issues with a potential COVID-19 vaccine (should any such issues arise and be known) to the general public. However, participants did express concerns about the vested interests of the pharmaceutical industry and the intersection between politics and public health as it pertains to vaccine development.

Are Ontarians planning on a receiving a potential COVID-19 vaccine, if it becomes available?

It is important to note that the goal of this study was not to estimate the percentage of Ontarians who might “opt-in” to a potential COVID-19 vaccine. Instead, this study aimed to understand some of the considerations Ontarians are making when thinking about decisions related to a potential COVID-19 vaccine. Of the Ontarians who indicated that they do plan on receiving a potential COVID-19 vaccine (should a safe and effective vaccine become readily available), some communicated that they would like to be among the first vaccinated, while others indicated that they would prefer to wait until they had seen the vaccine’s safety and efficacy confirmed by others in the population. In other words, some participants indicated that they wanted to pursue a COVID-19 vaccine, but did not want to be “first in line”. Others still suggested that they might not get a COVID-19 vaccine due to low perceived personal risk of contracting COVID, uncertainty about the value of a COVID-specific vaccine, and general safety and efficacy concerns about a vaccine that has been developed on an accelerated timeline.

Conclusion

We interviewed 40 Ontarians to understand perspectives on a potential COVID-19 vaccine. Participants shared their concerns about the potential vaccine’s safety, efficacy, and the logistics of its distribution, in contrast with other vaccines. These findings suggest that members of the public want access to more scientific information from trustworthy neutral sources, have trust in Canadian regulatory bodies to ensure vaccine safety, and are experiencing tension in negotiating potential vaccine decisions on an individual basis while considering publics and individuals with needs different from their own.