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**Canadians who report lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic more likely to report increased use of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco**

by Michelle Rotermann

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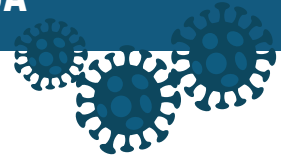
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# Canadians who report lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic more likely to report increased use of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco

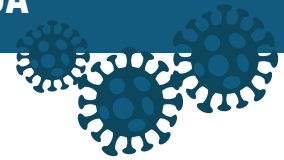
by **Michelle Rotermann**

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed Canadians' lives in previously unimaginable ways in a very short period of time. Given the disruption and stress it may come as no surprise that the consumption of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco has increased for some. In particular, Canadians who rated their mental health as fair or poor were more likely to report increased use of these substances.

## Vast majority of Canadians report that their consumption of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco remained unchanged while a minority report increased use

According to the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS), Wave 1 collected from March 29 to April 3, 2020, 14.0% of Canadians aged 15 and older increased their consumption of alcohol, 6.5% increased their consumption of cannabis and another 3.3% their use of tobacco, during the early COVID-19 period (Table 1). By contrast, the majority (ranging from 76.3% to 93.4%) report no change.

People aged 15 to 34 were more likely to report increased use of each substance than those aged 55 and older. Canadians aged 15 to 34 were also more likely to have increased their consumption of cannabis than those aged 35 to 54. On the other hand, reported changes in the consumption of cannabis, alcohol or tobacco did not differ by sex.



**Table 1**

**Percentage of Canadians who changed their weekly consumption of alcohol, tobacco products or cannabis by age group and sex, household population aged 15 or older, Canada, excluding territories, 2020**

	Cannabis	Alcohol percent	Tobacco
<b>Total, 15 years and older</b>			
Increased	6.5	14.0	3.3
Decreased	1.6	9.7	3.4
No change	91.9	76.3	93.4
<b>Age group</b>			
<b>15 to 34<sup>††</sup></b>			
Increased	11.6	18.7	3.5 <sup>E</sup>
Decreased	2.0 <sup>E</sup>	8.1	3.3 <sup>E</sup>
No change	86.3	73.2	93.2
<b>35 to 54</b>			
Increased	6.5 <sup>*</sup>	18.5	4.8 <sup>E</sup>
Decreased	1.8 <sup>E</sup>	11.1	3.9 <sup>E</sup>
No change	91.6 <sup>*</sup>	70.4	91.3
<b>55 or older</b>			
Increased	1.6 <sup>E*</sup>	6.0 <sup>*</sup>	1.7 <sup>E*</sup>
Decreased	F	10.0	2.9 <sup>E</sup>
No change	97.5 <sup>*</sup>	84.0 <sup>*</sup>	95.4
<b>Sex</b>			
<b>Female<sup>††</sup></b>			
Increased	5.4	13.5	2.9 <sup>E</sup>
Decreased	1.5 <sup>E</sup>	9.1	2.7 <sup>E</sup>
No change	93.1	77.4	94.4
<b>Male</b>			
Increased	7.6	14.5	3.6 <sup>E</sup>
Decreased	1.7 <sup>E</sup>	10.5	4.1
No change	90.7	75.1	92.3

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

\* significantly different from reference category ( $p < 0.05$ )

<sup>††</sup> reference category

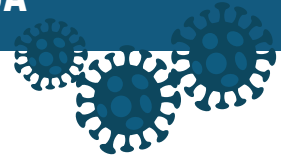
**Note:** Based on the question: "Have your weekly habits changed for any of the following activities?" Consuming cannabis; consuming alcohol; using tobacco products.

**Source:** [Canadian Perspectives Survey Series](#) (CPSS), Wave 1 2020.

## Canadians reporting worse mental health more likely to have increased their use of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco

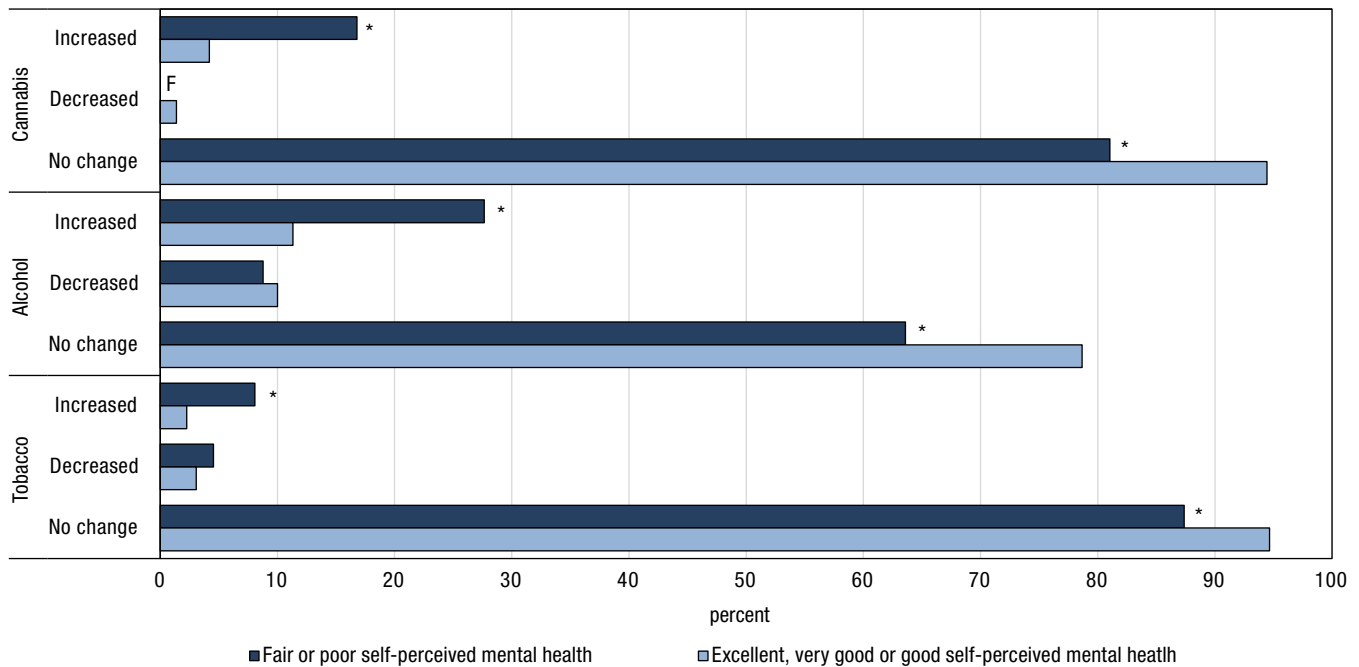
The negative relationship between substance use and mental health is well established. Persons who are isolated, bored, stressed, and experiencing significant disruptions to their normal ways of life –as is the case for most Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic, may use cannabis, alcohol, and tobacco products, in the hopes of easing these feelings.

Data from the CPSS suggests that Canadians who reported having fair or poor mental health were more likely to have increased their use of these three substances (Chart 1). This association persisted for both sexes and also generally for persons young and older.



**Chart 1**

**Canadians with fair or poor self-perceived mental health more likely to report increased use of cannabis, alcohol and tobacco products**



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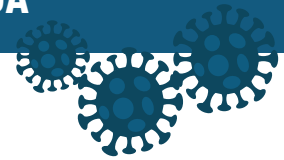
\* significantly different from the corresponding estimate for those in excellent, very good or good self-perceived mental health (p < 0.05)

Notes: "Have your weekly habits changed for any of the following activities?" Consuming cannabis; consuming alcohol; using tobacco products.

Source: Canadian Perspectives Survey Series (CPSS), Wave 1 2020.

While the CPSS did not collect information about the current level of cannabis use, drinking or tobacco use, other national Canadian data sources collected within a year or two (2019 or 2018) of the COVID-19 pandemic show that consumption of these substances is common, e.g. about 1 in 5 Canadians drinks heavily, about 1 in 6 currently smoke cigarettes and an additional 1 in 6 have consumed cannabis in the past 3 past months.

The likelihood of using cannabis or being a current tobacco smoker was strongly associated with how the individual perceived their own mental health (Table 2). Canadians who assessed their mental health status as fair or poor tended to be about twice as likely as those who perceived their mental status as better to report being a cannabis consumer or cigarette smoker. Heavy alcohol consumption tended not to depend as much on one's mental health status (Table 2). It might be that use of substances, like cannabis, contribute to reductions in mental health but it may also be that people with worse mental health use substances.



**Table 2**

**Percentage of Canadians reporting consuming cannabis, smoking cigarettes, or heavy drinking by self-perceived mental health, age and sex (gender), 15 and older, Canada excluding territories 2018 or 2019**

	Self-perceived mental health	
	Fair or poor	Excellent, very good or good
	percent	
<b>Cannabis consumer</b>		
Total, 15 years and older	36.2*	15.1
15 to 34	46.5*	22.2
35 to 54	34.4 <sup>E*</sup>	17.1
55 or older	F	8.1
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	29.7 <sup>E*</sup>	13.9
Male	43.1*	16.5
<b>Heavy drinker</b>		
Total, 15 years and older	22.3	20.1
15 to 34	30.2	26.3
35 to 54	23.1	22.4
55 or older	10.2*	13.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	20.5*	15.2
Male	24.7	25.1
<b>Current cigarette smoker</b>		
Total, 15 years and older	31.1*	15.2
15 to 34	32.4*	16.0
35 to 54	33.5*	16.9
55 or older	26.4*	13.0
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	29.4*	12.1
Male	33.4*	18.3

<sup>E</sup> use with caution

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\* significantly different from corresponding estimate for those reporting excellent, very good or good self-perceived mental health ( $p < 0.05$ )

**Notes:** Heavy drinking refers to males who reported having 5 or more drinks, or women who reported having 4 or more drinks, on one occasion, at least once a month in the past year. Current cigarette smokers include daily and occasional smokers. Current cannabis consumers reported using cannabis at least one time in the past three months.

**Source:** [National Cannabis Survey](#), Quarter 4 2019, [Canadian Community Health Survey](#) 2018.

## Methodology

This article uses data from three data sources. First, to get timely information about how Canadians are coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, Statistics Canada conducted, the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19 (CPSS). More than 4,600 people, aged 15 or older, in the 10 provinces, responded to this web survey between March 29th and April 3rd, 2020. Second, the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) 2018 was used to estimate rates of heavy alcohol consumption and rates of current cigarette smoking by self-perceived mental health. Individual cycles of the CCHS cover the population aged 12 and older in the 10 provinces and 3 territories, with approximately 65,000 respondents annually. In order to align with the sample of the CPSS, only those aged 15 and older and living in the 10 provinces were included in this analysis. Third, the National Cannabis Survey (NCS), Fourth quarter 2019, was used to estimate the rate of cannabis consumption in the past three months by self-perceived mental health.

Changes in substance use were based on the CPSS question: Have your weekly habits changed in any of the following activities?: Consuming cannabis, consuming alcohol, and using tobacco products. The response categories included: increased, decreased, no change.



Self-perceived mental health was based on the CPSS question: In general, how is your mental health? The response categories included: Excellent, very good, good, fair, poor. The CCHS and NCS use similar questions with matching response categories.

The analysis focuses on differences between estimates that are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. Survey sampling weights were applied so that the analyses would be representative of the Canadian population.

## Data Sources

[Canadian Perspective Survey Series 1: Impacts of COVID-19](#)

[Canadian Community Health Survey – Annual Component](#)

[National Cannabis Survey](#)

## Additional information

[Wellness Together Canada: Mental Health and Substance Use Support](#)

[Impacts of COVID-19 on Substance Use](#)

[World Health Organization. Coping with stress during the 2019-nCoV outbreak.](#)

[Canadians report lower self-perceived mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

[Here to help-Mental health and substance use information you can trust](#)

[Mental and substance use disorders in Canada](#)