

PANDEMIC PERCEPTIONS: CANADIANS NOT WORRIED ABOUT H1N1, GIVE GOVERNMENTS A PASSING GRADE



Nik Nanos

In his latest exclusive poll for *Policy Options*, pollster Nik Nanos finds that Canadians, by and large, aren't worried about H1N1, notwithstanding saturation media coverage that may have raised anxiety levels. And in spite of intensive coverage in the media of the pandemic and vaccine supply, the federal and provincial governments receive passing grades for assuring the supply of and meeting the demand for vaccine.

Selon le dernier sondage réalisé en exclusivité pour *Options politiques* par le sondeur Nik Nanos, la grippe A (H1N1) suscite globalement peu d'inquiétude chez les Canadiens, en dépit de l'intense couverture médiatique qui aurait pu augmenter l'anxiété dans la population. Et bien que les médias aient abondamment parlé de pandémie et d'approvisionnement en vaccins, les gouvernements fédéral et provinciaux reçoivent la note de passage pour ce qui est d'assurer un approvisionnement qui réponde à la demande de vaccination.

Seven Canadians in ten aren't at all worried or are not very worried about H1N1, despite saturation coverage in the media about Ottawa's ability to provide an adequate supply of vaccine and the provinces' capacity to meet the demand.

As of November 8, the Public Health Agency had estimated that over 6 million doses had been distributed to the provinces.

Although a pandemic in name, public opinion at the time of the Nanos-*Policy Options* survey indicates that with a strong majority of Canadians not worried about H1N1, this may be perceived of more as a nasty flu than as a pandemic.

Furthermore, a majority of Canadians think Ottawa is doing an adequate job of assuring a supply of flu vaccine, and that their provincial governments are doing an equally decent job of meeting the demand.

These are the principal findings of the latest Nanos Research poll conducted exclusively for *Policy Options*, and published as an *Online Extra*. The poll is a companion piece to our survey on Canadians' attitudes on health care, published as part of the cover package "Health Care, Again," in the November issue of the magazine (it can be viewed and downloaded at www.irpp.org).

The poll of 1,005 randomly selected Canadians was conducted by telephone from November 7 through November 10 — precisely while the H1N1 rollout was the

dominant news frame in newspapers, radio, television and online news sites. The poll has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percent, 19 times out of 20.

The most striking finding in the poll is that two Canadians in three aren't at all worried or even somewhat worried about H1N1, after weeks of coverage of the story that might well have raised anxiety levels in the country. But clearly, there is nothing even approaching panic in the mood of Canadians about H1N1.

On a scale of 1 to 4, "where 1 is not at all worried, and 4 is very worried," one respondent in three, 32.5 percent, said they weren't at all worried. Another 38.1 percent said they weren't very worried, making a total of 70.6 percent of Canadians who weren't at all worried or were not very worried about H1N1 (question 1).

Only one Canadian in 10, just 10.5 percent, said they were very worried about H1N1, while another 18.3 percent said they were somewhat worried.

Regionally, British Columbians were the least concerned about the threat of H1N1. Fully 42 percent of British Columbians said they weren't at all worried about the flu pandemic, while another 34.6 percent said they weren't very worried. In effect, three BC residents out of four aren't worried about H1N1, and this in the province that will be welcoming the world to the Vancouver Olympic Winter Games in only two months time.

In the other regions, on the scale of 1 to 4, Atlantic Canadians (at 22.7 percent and 35.9 percent who were not at all worried or not very worried) had the lowest comfort level of any part of the country. Thus, the anxiety level was highest in

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the Atlantic (at 22.2 percent and 19.3 percent of respondents who were somewhat worried or very worried about H1N1).

In Quebec, 26.6 percent said they weren't at all worried, while another 49.5 percent said they weren't very worried. Like British Columbians, three Quebecers in four aren't worried about H1N1.

In Ontario, 34.9 percent weren't at all worried, while another 28.9 percent weren't very worried. On the prairies, 34.4 percent said they weren't at all worried while another 41.3 percent said they weren't very worried.

And in spite of continuously intensive and highly negative coverage of the rollout in the media in the weeks leading up to and including the four days we were in the field from November 7 to November 10, a majority of Canadians think their governments, both federal and provincial, are doing a good or average job on the delivery and distribution of the vaccine.

While only 5.5 percent of Canadians thought the federal government was doing "a very good job of assuring an adequate supply of vaccine against H1N1," another 20 percent thought Ottawa was doing "a good job" (question 2). Another 32.7 percent thought Ottawa was doing "an average job." In all, 58.2 percent of Canadians, a clear majority, thought Ottawa was doing a very good, a good or an average job.

Another 23.2 percent thought Ottawa was doing "a poor job" of the rollout, while 13.2 percent thought it was doing "a very poor job." In sum, 36.4 percent of Canadians thought Ottawa was doing a poor or very poor

job. Only 5.4 percent, one Canadian in 20, was unsure.

When we asked Canadians how they thought their provincial governments were doing at "distributing the H1N1 vaccine at clinics in your community," again governments received generally positive to average scores, while negatives tended to reflect unevenness in the distribution of vaccine from one province to the next.

Overall, while only 7.9 percent of Canadians thought their provincial government was doing "a very good job," another 22 percent thought it was doing "a good job," while 29.6 percent thought it was doing "an average job" (question 3). In total, 59.5 percent of Canadians thought their provincial government was doing a very good, a good, or an average job.

In spite of continuously intensive and highly negative coverage of the rollout in the media in the weeks leading up to and including the four days we were in the field from November 7 to November 10, a majority of Canadians think their governments, both federal and provincial, are doing a good or average job on the delivery and distribution of the vaccine.

On the other side of the response, 19.3 percent of Canadians thought their provincial government was doing "a poor job," while 13.8 percent thought it was doing "a very poor job."

The approval rating was comparatively highest in Quebec, where 11.9 percent thought their government was doing "a very good job,"

another 24.3 percent thought it was doing "a good job," and a further 27.4 percent thought it was doing "an average job." In all, 63.6 percent give their government high to average marks, while 18.4 percent said

Quebec was doing "a poor job" and 10.9 percent said it was doing "a very poor job," for an aggregate negative score of 29.3 percent.

The comparatively lowest approval rating was in Ontario, where only 4.9 percent said Queen's Park was

doing "a very good job," while 21.1 percent said it was doing "a good job," and another 31.8 percent said it was doing "an average job." On the negative side, 18.9 percent of Ontarians said their provincial government was doing "a poor job", while another 15.3 percent said it was doing "a very poor job."

There is a striking gap between the personal worry and approval ratings in the two central provinces. It likely reflects the efficient and well publicized rollout of the H1N1 strategy in Quebec. Conversely, the higher level of concern in Ontario likely exists because anxiety levels spiked after H1N1 was linked in a widely publicized death of a 13-year-old boy who was a star hockey player.

The key takeaway, in an atmosphere of heightened focus on a pandemic, Canadians are not worried

about H1N1 and feel relatively good about how the Canadian and provincial governments are handling this health issue — so far.

Pollster Nik Nanos is the president of Nanos Research and a research associate professor with the State University of New York in Buffalo.

QUESTION 1. ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 4, WHERE 1 IS NOT AT ALL WORRIED AND 4 IS VERY WORRIED, HOW WORRIED ARE YOU ABOUT H1N1?

		Total responses		1 = not at all worried %	2 = not very worried %	3 = somewhat worried %	4 = very worried %	Unsure %
		N	Mean					
Region	Canada	1,005	2.07	32.5	38.1	18.3	10.5	0.6
	Atlantic	100	2.38	22.7	35.9	22.2	19.3	0.0
	Quebec	254	2.06	26.6	49.5	13.9	9.2	0.7
	Ontario	302	2.10	34.9	28.9	26.2	9.2	0.8
	Prairies	201	2.00	34.4	41.3	14.6	9.7	0.0
	BC	149	1.91	42.0	34.6	12.0	10.4	1.0
Gender	Male	508	1.94	38.9	36.0	16.3	8.1	0.7
	Female	498	2.20	26.0	40.3	20.3	13.0	0.4
Age	18 to 29	198	1.94	37.0	37.8	16.3	7.4	1.5
	30 to 39	193	2.02	31.0	44.0	16.7	8.3	0.0
	40 to 49	217	2.26	25.4	39.1	18.8	16.2	0.5
	50 to 59	172	2.01	35.4	35.8	20.4	8.0	0.4
	60 plus	225	2.08	34.5	34.2	19.4	11.5	0.4
	Home	Own	731	2.05	32.2	39.4	18.6	9.4
Rent		234	2.12	33.7	34.3	17.0	14.5	0.5
Refused		40	2.04	31.7	36.4	20.5	7.7	3.7
Vote profile	Liberal	235	2.12	29.9	38.9	20.0	10.6	0.6
	Conservative	310	2.02	33.9	39.3	17.8	9.0	0.0
	NDP	146	2.09	32.9	38.1	15.9	13.1	0.0
	Bloc Québécois	76	2.19	21.3	49.6	17.6	11.5	0.0
	Green Party	48	1.82	44.0	36.5	13.2	6.3	0.0
	Undecided	191	2.08	34.9	31.2	20.3	11.4	2.2

QUESTION 2. DO YOU THINK THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS DONE A VERY GOOD JOB, A GOOD JOB, AN AVERAGE JOB, A POOR JOB OR A VERY POOR JOB OF ASSURING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF VACCINE AGAINST H1N1?

		Total N	Very good job %	Good job %	Average job %	Poor job %	Very poor job %	Unsure %
Region	Canada	1,005	5.5	20.0	32.7	23.2	13.2	5.4
	Atlantic	100	3.1	21.0	28.8	24.2	18.8	4.1
	Quebec	254	8.4	19.3	36.5	18.3	13.1	4.5
	Ontario	302	5.5	21.5	27.2	29.1	12.4	4.4
	Prairies	201	3.0	20.4	36.1	22.7	12.3	5.5
	BC	149	5.3	17.0	35.5	19.9	12.4	9.9
Gender	Male	508	5.5	22.5	31.7	21.7	13.1	5.5
	Female	498	5.4	17.5	33.7	24.7	13.3	5.3
Age	18 to 29	198	8.9	19.3	31.1	23.0	8.9	8.9
	30 to 39	193	4.8	19.0	32.7	25.0	11.9	6.5
	40 to 49	217	3.6	21.3	34.5	24.4	12.7	3.6
	50 to 59	172	6.2	15.0	35.0	20.4	19.0	4.4
	60 plus	225	4.3	24.1	30.6	23.0	14.0	4.0
	Home	Own	731	5.4	20.7	34.2	22.2	13.1
Rent		234	5.7	18.9	28.9	26.4	13.5	6.5
Refused		40	5.7	14.2	28.0	24.4	11.9	15.7
Vote profile	Liberal	235	5.3	15.1	30.7	33.3	12.7	2.9
	Conservative	310	5.6	24.8	34.1	19.3	10.4	5.7
	NDP	146	6.1	15.7	31.5	26.5	17.0	3.3
	Bloc Québécois	76	7.9	13.9	45.0	21.4	11.7	0.0
	Green Party	48	7.7	18.7	24.2	12.6	22.7	14.0
	Undecided	191	3.3	24.4	30.9	18.1	13.6	9.7

QUESTION 3. DO YOU THINK YOUR PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT HAS DONE A VERY GOOD JOB, A GOOD JOB, AN AVERAGE JOB, A POOR JOB OR A VERY POOR JOB OF DISTRIBUTING THE H1N1 VACCINE AT CLINICS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

		Total N	Very good job %	Good job %	Average job %	Poor job %	Very poor job %	Unsure %
Region	Canada	1,005	7.9	22.0	29.6	19.3	13.8	7.4
	Atlantic	100	8.7	26.6	25.3	18.6	15.9	4.9
	Quebec	254	11.9	24.3	27.4	18.4	10.9	7.1
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	40 to 49	217	8.6	20.3	32.5	19.8	14.7	4.1
	50 to 59	172	7.1	17.7	31.4	21.7	15.9	6.2
	60 plus	225	6.8	21.6	29.1	21.2	14.4	6.8
Home	Own	731	8.4	21.8	30.4	19.6	13.7	6.1
	Rent	234	6.5	23.0	29.9	18.3	14.1	8.2
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