

Portrait of French-speaking minorities with respect to vaccination against COVID-19

OBJECTIVE and BACKGROUND:

The COVID-19 vaccination campaign has demonstrated the importance of better understanding the health needs of different Canadian populations, including linguistic minorities. For Francophones living in minority situations outside Quebec (FM), this gap has had a significant impact on their vaccine uptake since it is influenced by many sociocultural factors. To better describe the health needs of FMs in relation to COVID-19 vaccination, a survey was administered to compare their vaccination status and their attitudes and beliefs regarding COVID-19 vaccination with those of the English-speaking majority.

KEY RESULTS:

- FMs are less likely to vaccinate their children against other diseases (74.2% vs. 86.3%), against COVID-19 (58.6% vs. 73.9%) and to follow the vaccination schedule (0% vs. 22%) compared to English speakers. FMs with vaccinated children have a higher income.
- Canadian-born FMs are more likely to vaccinate for reasons of protection against serious diseases (79% vs. 59%) and “to return to normal life” (55% vs. 39%) compared to those not born in Canada.
- FMs are more likely to vaccinate to obtain the proof of vaccination certificate (39% vs. 29.3%) compared to English speakers.
- Among the unvaccinated, 60% of FMs doubt the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine, compared to only 36.4% of English speakers.
- FMs with a higher level of education have more trust in health professionals (76% vs 56%) compared to English speakers.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

To combat suboptimal doctor-patient communication, the shortage of bilingual family physicians must be addressed to increase accessibility for family physicians. This could be achieved by:

- Recruiting more students into French-speaking medical programs.
- Allocating additional funding to train bilingual medical personnel.
- Implementing incentives to attract and retain French-speaking health professionals in areas with greater need.

Strategies to combat inconsistent information from official sources include:

- Working closely with the media on public health information to ensure accurate and consistent coverage, through regular briefings and summaries for journalists.
- Engaging community leaders and local organizations in communicating information, to tailor messages to local realities and build credibility.

INTERPRETATIONS:

- Among FMs, there is even more hesitancy among parents to vaccinate their children compared to English speakers. This could indicate suboptimal communication between physicians and their FM patients. However, this hesitancy tends to be reduced when these FM parents have a high income.
- Despite doubts about the effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine, FMs are getting vaccinated to obtain the vaccine passport and protect themselves against serious diseases. One possible explanation is that the information given in the news was inconsistent, so FMs turned to government recommendations that promised a return to normal through vaccination.
- Compared to English speakers, Canadian-born FMs with a high level of education were more likely to strongly disapprove or approve of the recommended vaccination regimen. The reason could be the inconsistent information from official sources.

For more information, see:

Desjardins C, Haraysm JL, Abdounour J, Denis-LeBlanc M, Hubert D, Fotsing S, Lamothe DB, Boet S. Portrait of French-speaking minorities with respect to vaccination against COVID-19. *Can Commun Dis Rep.* 2023 Aug 1;49(7-8):320-330. doi: 10.14745/ccdr.v49i78a04. PMID: 38455881; PMCID: PMC10917132.

For questions or comments, please contact Salomon Fotsing (Salomon.Fotsing@uottawa.ca).

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