

Access to Health Care amid COVID-19

In March 2021, Asthma Canada reached out to the Canadian asthma community with an invitation to share their experience of access to asthma care and resources during the last twelve months of the global pandemic.

Participation in a short survey was voluntary and anonymous.

73%

Participated in a Virtual Call

Seventy-three per cent of our community members participated in a virtual call with their health care provider (HCP). Eighty-seven per cent said this call worked well, and 83% said the call addressed their concerns.

44%

Had an appointment to review their asthma control

Forty-four per cent had an appointment with their health care provider *specifically* to review their asthma control during the pandemic. During this call, 64% said their treatment plan was reviewed or updated.

30%

Do not have annual asthma check-ups

Of those who did not schedule an appointment, 30% stated it was because they do not have annual asthma check-ups. Thirty per cent also stated it was not necessary to book an appointment because their asthma was well controlled.

41%

Had a health concern but did NOT contact their health care provider

The majority of respondents cited high case counts in their area or concerns about contracting COVID while accessing treatment as the reason they refrained from making an appointment to see their health care provider.

25%

Had lung function testing

Twenty-five per cent of respondents indicated they had lung function testing during an appointment. Sixty-eight per cent did not, and 7% were unsure.

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67%

Did not use a different health care provider during the pandemic

The majority of respondents relied on their primary health care provider for care during the pandemic.

18%

Relied on their pharmacist in place of their primary HCP

Other sources of care listed were: hospital emergency room (11%), walk-in clinic (7%), provincial telehealth service (5%).

64%

Did not consult, use or update their Asthma Action Plan during the pandemic

The majority of respondents indicated this was because they either didn't have one (49%) or believed their asthma to be well controlled (38%).

10%

Intentionally skipped or stopped taking their prescribed medications

Of those respondents, 15% indicated it was because their ability to access medication during the pandemic was limited due to financial reasons. Seven per cent indicated it was because of lack of ability to reach a physical location.

6%

Tested positive for COVID-19

The majority of respondents who indicated they tested positive with COVID-19 shared that they felt their asthma symptoms worsened, but had mild COVID-19 symptoms overall.

Survey Highlights



Our virtual future

The majority of our community members indicated they were able to access virtual care from their primary health care provider when they needed it, with few technological issues.

An underused tool

More than half of respondents (64%) stated they did not have an Asthma Action Plan. Developed with a health care provider to create a personalized program for managing asthma, an Asthma Action Plan can identify when asthma may be flaring up and determine how to manage asthma when it gets out of control.



Barriers remain

Although the primary reason for missing or skipping a dose of medication was simply forgetting, a small number of respondents were unable to get the prescribed medication because they couldn't afford it or they couldn't physically access the location to pick it up.



From Our Community

"My family doctor can only see patients for 10-15 minutes at a time due to having a large practice, so I have delayed making appointments about health concerns that are unrelated to what I'm currently followed for."

"I was very sick late March with my asthma, but I contacted my pharmacist and got what I needed."

"We had to miss a spirometry appointment but have been able to get in now."

"I have ensured I now take my meds on a regular basis. Once the pandemic hit it scared me. I feel as someone who has a lung disease I would have been more prone to getting Covid. I spoke with my doctor, she changed up some of the medications and I'm feeling good."

"I had two serious asthma attacks over the past year that I managed alone (I live alone) in order not to go to the emergency department."

"Medication has been forgotten or missed. Our routine is gone."

"My asthma was diagnosed during the pandemic. I believe I would have been diagnosed and on treatment much quicker than if there been no pandemic because diagnosing through virtual appointments is difficult, and so is receiving an appointment for a pulmonary function test."

"I have not seen my doctor. He is working in the Covid unit and will not see patients."

"The pandemic affected my asthma care during the lockdown period the most, where most non-urgent clinic services were either canceled, postponed or not scheduled."