



# Community Check-In Report Post-Lockdown in the "New Normal"

***We connected with our community through an online survey to understand ongoing asthma management and experience as Covid-related restrictions and policies lifted and changed throughout most parts of Canada in 2022.***

Understanding the patient experience of asthma in Canada helps us identify pressing issues and areas for improvement in asthma care, and directly informs our strategy to ensure that every Canadian with asthma gets the care and support they need.

This outreach was an opportunity to see how Canadians with asthma are dealing with the stresses on the healthcare system



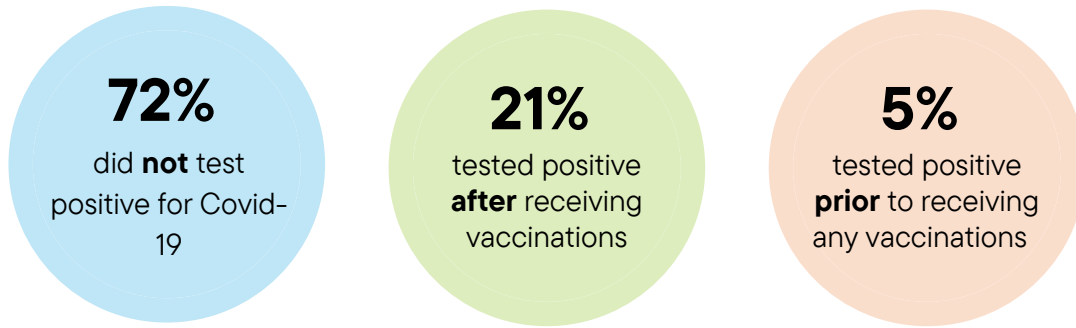
and supporting management of their disease in the "new normal."

The responses underscore how important it is to maintain reasonable precautions and seek support for those most at risk from complications from Covid. Thankfully, the majority of respondents had not tested positive for Covid. However, Long Covid is very real, and some in our community are facing it. Our community also noted that virtual care has its positives—but there are drawbacks, too.

As Canadians move forward in a world alongside Covid, it is imperative that those with health challenges are recognized and supported. And as we look toward the future, we can draw upon some lessons from the pandemic to prioritize our health and well-being.

## Navigating a Difficult Time

**Thankfully, nearly three quarters of survey respondents (72%) had not tested positive for Covid. For those who did test positive, they did so after receiving one or more vaccinations.** (Note that survey participants indicated if they tested positive from January to June, 2022, as increasingly contagious Covid-19 variants became the dominant strains.)



We asked respondents to share the biggest challenge they had faced while managing their asthma and overall health during the first six months of 2022. Many found managing seasonal allergies more difficult than in years past. A substantial number stated that trying to find the right type of asthma medication for their symptoms was their number one challenge, and many listed asthma symptoms like shortness of breath, chest tightness and coughing as their biggest challenge.

### **Other challenges Canadians with asthma noted:**

- Managing anxiety about Covid
- Potential exposure to Covid from use of shared facilities, like a laundromat
- Managing outdoor triggers, like smoke and pollution
- Difficulty exercising and concern around getting enough exercise
- Anxiety around coughing or showing asthma symptoms in public that may be mistaken for Covid symptoms
- General fatigue
- Concern about having an asthma attack

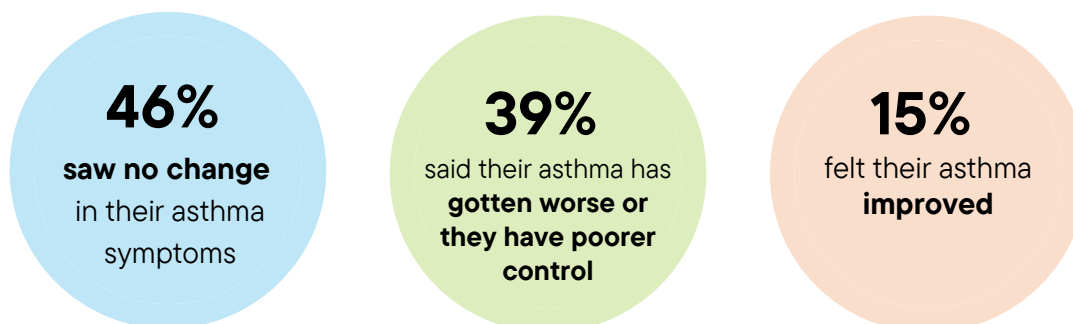
*"Always having to think whether or not it's okay to go to the store, or to out for any reason. It adds to anxiety - sometimes."*

*"Myself and daughter both have asthma and it can be very challenging with allergies and colds."*

*"Allergies! I've never had a season like the current one. Despite maintenance asthma medication and seasonal allergy medication, I am losing ground."*

## Asthma Control amid the Pandemic

While many Canadians saw no change in their asthma symptoms, nearly forty per cent indicated they felt their symptoms were worse, or they had poorer control over their asthma. Just 15% felt their asthma improved.



For respondents who indicated they tested positive for Covid-19, we asked if they had seen a link between contracting Covid-19 and their asthma symptoms worsening or changing. The responses varied, but **the majority of respondents indicated they had experienced more severe asthma symptoms like shortness of breath, a feeling of heaviness in the chest, and increased coughing.**

*"Yes. Most definitely worse and have changed, more easily triggered and by things that previously may have only caused sneezing or coughing now causes a full blown asthma attack. Situations that previously caused an asthma attack now cause a worse one."*

*"My asthma was controlled by one puff of Symbicort for 18 years. I'm now taking two doses a day and can't always get a full breath. I went from feeling like I didn't have asthma anymore (well controlled) to being well aware of it and having it affect my activities."*

*"While I was sick with COVID my asthma was a little worse. My asthma stayed bad for about 6 weeks after I no longer tested positive for COVID and made me feel worse than COVID did."*

### **Some respondents indicated they saw no change at all in their asthma symptoms:**

*"I was fortunate enough to go on antivirals immediately and my asthma stayed under control as a result."*

*"My 3 year-old got Covid a month ago and had no asthma crisis nor respiratory issues."*

*"While I had Covid my chest was tight and I had a cough that lasted for weeks. My asthma is now back to normal."*

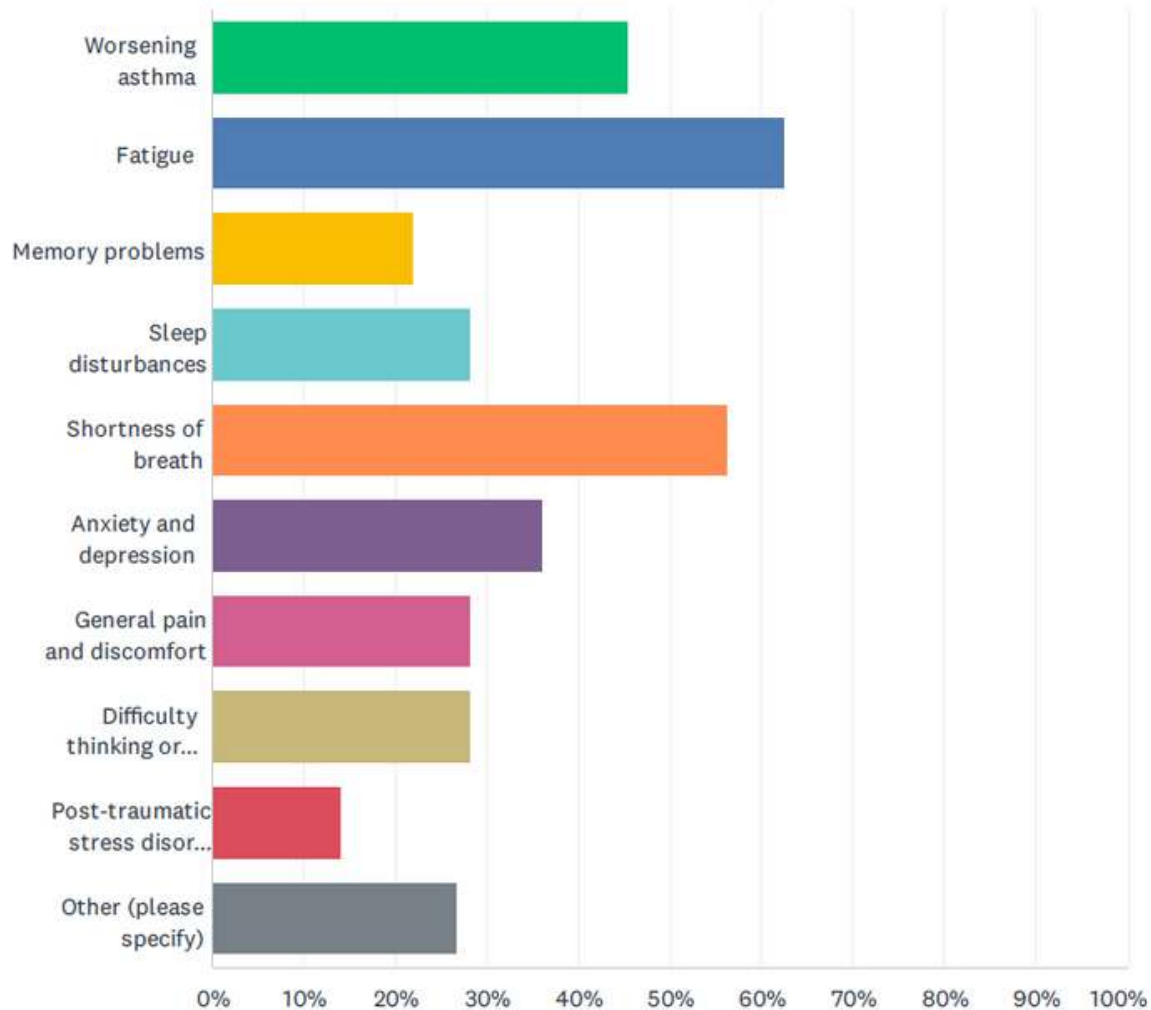
## Asthma and Long Covid

We asked if respondents had experienced Long Covid: symptoms of Covid persisting longer term. The majority of respondents (85%) had not, but for the 15% who indicated they had, they reported that their symptoms continue to have an impact on their health and well-being.

**15%**  
of respondents  
experienced  
**Long Covid**

The most common symptom reported by survey respondents was fatigue, followed by shortness of breath and worsening asthma. However, many other symptoms were reported, including memory problems, sleep disturbances, general pain and discomfort, and symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder. For those who indicated they experienced symptoms not listed, they named 'other' symptoms like a chronic cough, lack of smell and taste or change in taste, increased heart rate, and sinus congestion.

**We asked: What symptoms have you continued to experience?**

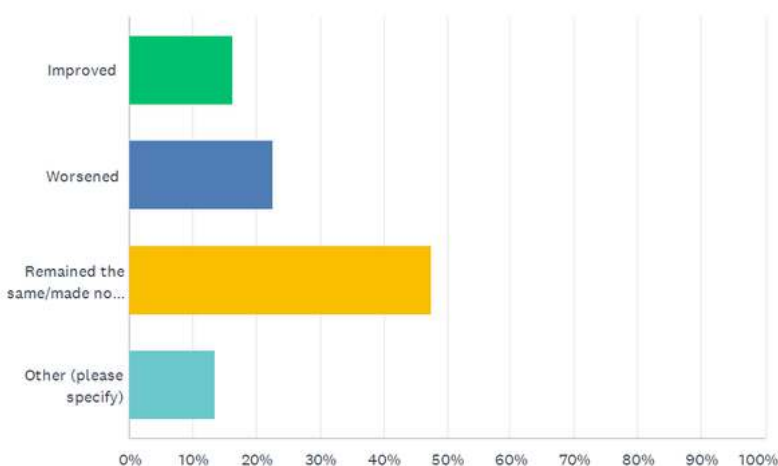


## Accessing Health Care

**We asked: In the past six months, have you had any difficulties or delays in healthcare services due to the pandemic?**

The most common challenge respondents faced was visiting their healthcare provider (**57%**). Nearly a third (**32%**) had difficulty booking tests used to diagnose asthma, like spirometry and lung function testing, and **17%** found picking up prescriptions challenging. Forty per cent of people either had no issue accessing health care services due to the pandemic, or listed specific medical procedures unrelated to asthma that were delayed, like hip replacement surgery, specialist appointments, and screenings for other health issues.

**We asked: How has virtual care impacted your relationship with your GP/specialist?**



**For those who were able to access health care, their experience varied.** We asked participants how virtual care impacted the relationship with their general practitioner and/or specialist. Nearly half indicated the relationship with their primary care physician remained the same and that virtual care made no difference (**48%**). Nearly a quarter (**23%**) thought the relationship worsened, while just **16%** said the relationship improved. Some indicated that while they liked the relationship they had with their care provider, communication was just not the same when it was not in-person.

*"Communication is much better face to face."*

*"I appreciate the virtual appointments so I don't have to sit in a waiting room full of sick patients and possibly come out of there sicker than when I went in."*

## The Virtual Care Experience

While many noted perks of virtual care like lessened exposure to others, at-home convenience and time saved by not having to travel, most shared that they feel virtual care is not a complete replacement for in-person health care visits.



*"Virtual appointments are optional now. But when they were not, my health suffered."*

*"A phone call is not the same as an in person visit."*

*"It is accessible but my child finds it easier to have clear and frank conversations with her doctor in person."*

*"I do feel like virtual care appointments feel rushed—I've gotten better at writing down questions ahead of time as prep. I do find it hard to get appointments, though."*

*"I'm fortunate to have a great GP who is a good listener whether in-person or online."*

*"I have mobility challenges and lots of pain. Not having to see my doctor in person has been great. I do not have to get out on HandyDART esp[ecially] in winter. And for just refills a time and energy saver. Love it."*

*"The personal touch, face to face assessment by my asthma specialist cannot be replaced by a virtual/telephone visit but until Covid is truly under control, we must all adapt."*

*"I hope the option for virtual care continues especially for those quick check-ins on meds, for example. But at least an annual in-person with each doc would be a good idea. The conversation is different in person and has much to offer in terms of relationship and understanding."*

## Asthma and the Emergency Room

Thankfully, the majority of respondents (**74%**) had not been to the emergency department or hospitalized in the last six months. However, **6% had been to the emergency or hospitalized because of their asthma symptoms. Seventeen per cent** were in hospital for a reason unrelated to their asthma. Many reported busy emergency room environments and long wait times. As one respondent shared, *"My experience in the ER/hospital was as good as could be expected during these trying times for our medical professionals."*

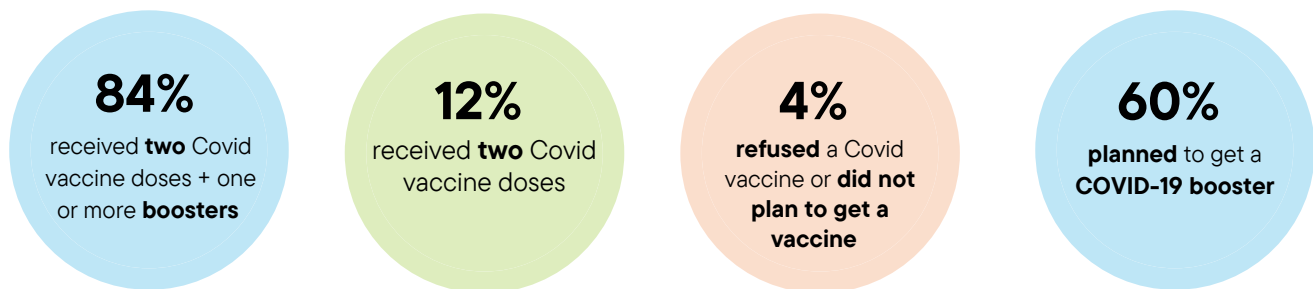
**6%**

were in hospital  
because of  
**asthma**

## Maintaining Good Health: Vaccines & Masks

**The overwhelming majority of survey respondents had received two Covid vaccine doses and one or more boosters at the time they participated in the survey.**

When asked which maintenance vaccines they planned to get in 2022, the majority (**71%**) of respondents indicated they planned to get their influenza vaccine. **Sixty per cent** planned to get a Covid-19 booster. Just **15%** planned to get the pneumococcal vaccine (recommended for Canadian adults with asthma) and 14% planned to get the shingles vaccine. Some noted they may get a tetanus shot.



One of the hallmark public safety measures during the pandemic has been wearing a mask to reduce transmission of disease. We asked participants if they continued to wear a mask, as public health advice changed. **Nearly 20% indicated they continue to wear their mask in public and private settings, regardless of whether it is required by a public or private setting. Forty-three per cent** of respondents said that they wear their mask in public settings regardless of requirements, and about a third (**31%**) stated their wore masks occasionally, depending on the situation or only where mandatory. Just 7% indicated they do not wear a mask.

*"I will continue to wear a mask for a while even when restrictions are lifted. We lost a few family members to Covid."*

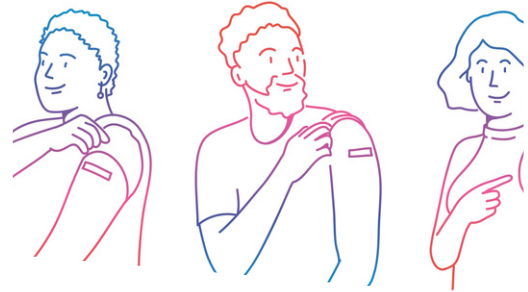
*"I do hope that people will continue to stay home and/or wear masks when they are sick as the new norm. It may mean I get lung infection that makes my asthma worse less often than before the pandemic."*

*"I will still mask in indoor public places, maybe permanently. Covid is still very much here and I need to take precautions. I have started to do some travelling again, cautiously."*



## Looking Toward the Future

Asthma Canada advocates to government and others to develop priorities and highlight concerns to support our community. We asked respondents what they would like to share with us regarding living with asthma and managing it on a daily basis, as Canadians move forward and learn to live with Covid.



### Many comments pertained to the affordability of medications:

*"The cost of drugs is ridiculous - luckily I have a plan, but do not know how people afford them if they don't."*

*"I wish there was better coverage for asthma medications especially for people with low income."*

*"Cost of medications is a lot. As asthma worsens, there is a need to use more medication and therefore more cost. I sometimes use less medication than prescribed to try and save money."*

### Some touched on the need for improved asthma education in the workplace:

*"My asthma was caused by working in an office building that had removed 30+ year old carpet. There should have been better protection for workers."*

*"No tolerance in the workplace. When I cough people think I will give them a disease. I have lost a position at work because of my asthma. Hard to find scent free environment."*

### And others focused on how we can learn from the pandemic experience:

*"I really wish people would continue to adopt the "if your sick stay home mentality" even if it's just a cold."*

*"I hope we persist with things like better hand hygiene, time to wash at school, more sinks, wearing masks and staying home when sick, and more people getting vaccinated for flu. It has really helped us as our child's asthma is triggered when she gets sick. She's had less illness and less severe symptoms when she does get sick. Access to hand washing facilities (soap and water) are also really helpful for managing food allergies. That's improved at school and in public places."*

*"Recognition of the role that airborne viruses play in our everyday life and improving indoor air quality and normalizing mask wearing during peak seasons would go along way to decreasing hospital visits... we know that masks (one of many tools) helped decrease the spread of influenza and other respiratory viruses...more needs to be done for everyone's health and air quality should be top of the list."*



## Acknowledgements

**Asthma Canada would like to thank our community for their participation in our survey. Feedback from the Canadian asthma community is invaluable to us and we appreciate their time. We would also like to thank members of our Medical and Scientific Advisory Committee for their contributions: Dr. Susan Waserman, Dr. Alan Kaplan and Ms. Stacey McNeilly, RRT, CRE.**



## Methodology

The survey was open online from June 13th to July 15th, 2022 and received 253 responses. The vast majority of survey respondents (87%) indicated that they have asthma. Approximately 6% indicated they are a parent or caregiver to a child or another adult with asthma. About 6% indicated they are a healthcare professional. Half of the respondents indicated that they had moderate asthma. The percentage of respondents indicating mild and Severe Asthma was 27% and 23% respectively.

The majority of the survey respondents (42%) were in the 45-64 years age-group followed by the 65+ group (35%). Respondents in the younger groups (17 & under, 18-24 and 25-44) made up 23%. Most of the survey respondents (85%) identified as female.

Majority (86%) of the respondents were from four provinces of Ontario (52%), British Columbia (16%), Alberta (11%), and Quebec (7%). Response from the Atlantic Provinces was comparatively low - collectively accounting for just 6% of the respondents. Response from Manitoba and Saskatchewan was also low - representing 8%. No response was received from Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon.

Due to the small sample size interpretations must be made with caution. The questions were specific to responding between January and June 2022 as a follow up to our report in March 2021: [Asthma Canada Access to Health Care amid COVID-19](#). This report was written in August 2022 by Jenna Reynolds and Kristin Valois of Asthma Canada.

## About Asthma Canada

Asthma Canada is the only national charity solely devoted to enhancing the quality of life for people living with asthma and respiratory allergies. For nearly 50 years, Asthma Canada has proudly served as the national voice for Canadians living with asthma. We empower patients with evidence-based information, education programs and support asthma research in Canada.

Our mission is to help Canadians with asthma lead healthy lives through education, advocacy and research. Our vision is a future without asthma. Visit our website at [asthma.ca](http://asthma.ca).

