

Easing restrictions for the May long weekend:

People uncomfortable participating in many reopening activities

Confusion generating uncertainty, stress + calls for guidance + clarity from leaders

Behavioural science insights are key to sustainable epidemiological & economic outcomes

(MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO - May 15, 2020) -- In the lead up to the May long weekend many government and public health leaders announced details on easing restrictions, but new research is showing that developments are leaving some confused, adding stress, complexity and more uncertainty to people's lives, and are leaving most uncomfortable participating in many of the activities that are opening up.

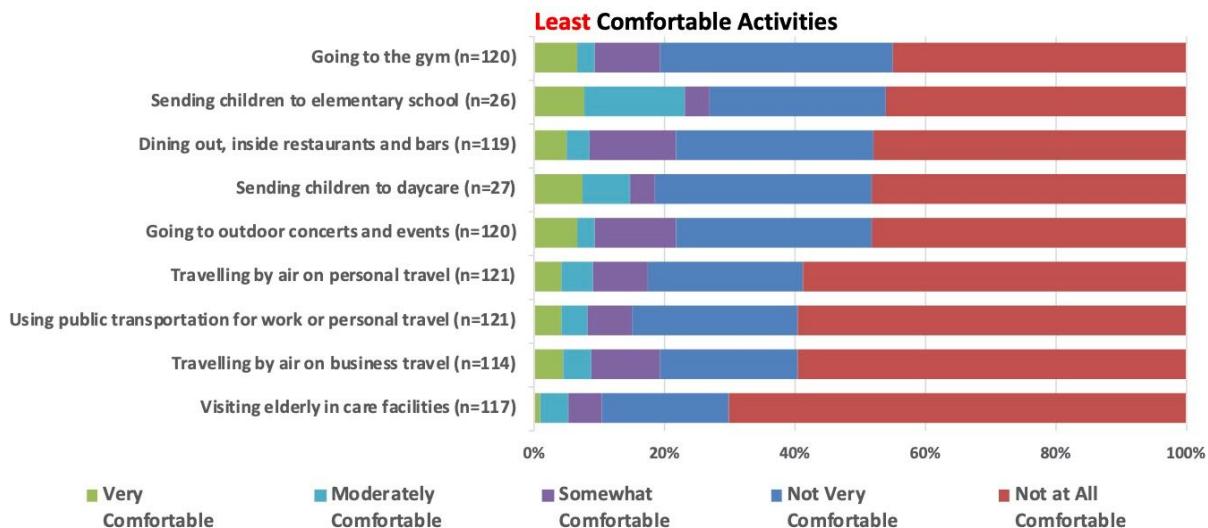
"People are listening to their government leaders and public health experts and are weighing the risks, benefits, and trade-offs of leaving the security of self-isolation, but most of our respondents are cautious and continue to believe current restrictions are appropriate so they want assurances that decisions about opening up have been made based on facts and future considerations that will keep them safe," said Sarah Thorne, President and CEO of Decision • Partners.

Thorne, and her team of social scientists, researchers and management consultants, just released results from their [7th weekly COVID-19 Coping Survey \(May 4-10\)](#). The survey is a voluntary, opt-in behavioural research initiative, and weekly results are shared online. (details below)

"Respondents are feeling the least comfortable going places where the most vulnerable could be infected - such as senior care facilities, daycares and schools - and to environments where there are more people and they have less control, such as public transit, air travel, events, restaurants or gyms. They feel most comfortable with activities involving fewer people, more freedom of movement and personal control such as shopping online with curb-side pickup, and walking, hiking, biking in public spaces."

**COVID-19 Coping Survey:
May 4-10**

Q: As restrictions are loosened in your area, how comfortable would you feel in the next 2 weeks participating in the following activities?

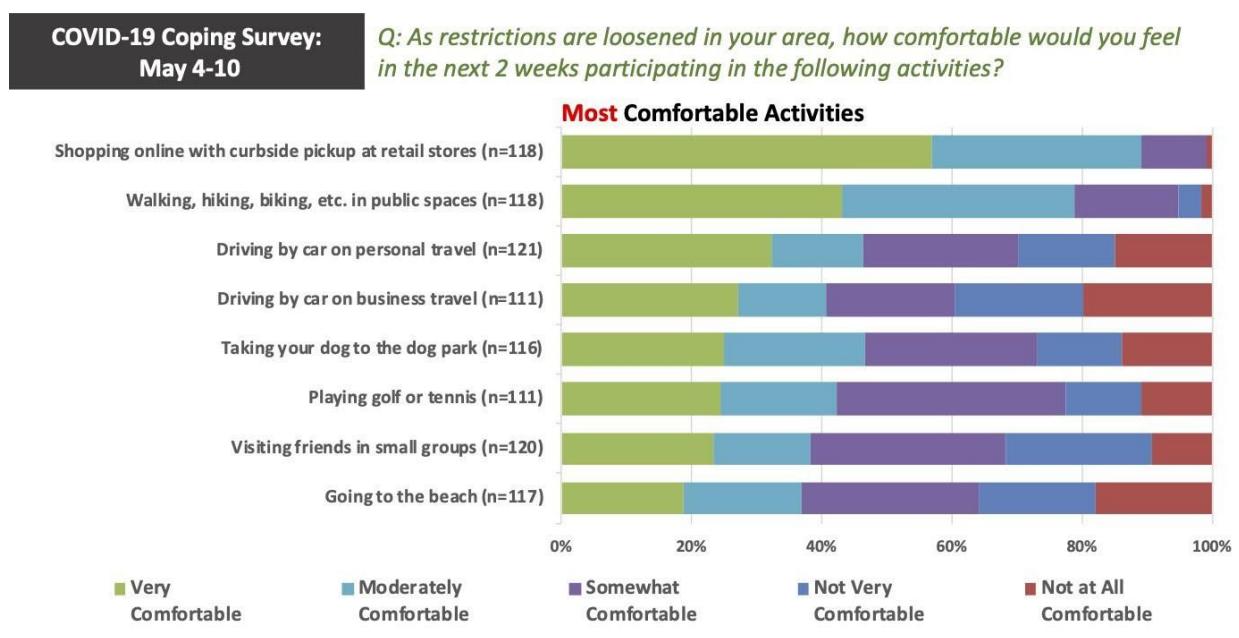


Thorne said the initial pandemic response guidelines to stay home and wash your hands were a direct, uniform, low-risk proposition that most people accepted, and the result has been a flattened curve in many jurisdictions. Now, as restrictions are easing and provinces, states and municipalities are reopening to varying degrees with differing guidelines it is a much more complex proposition.

"We're hearing people are struggling to make personal risk-benefit assessments about what is and isn't acceptable to them. They want to stay safe, they sure don't want another pandemic wave and they want clear guidance. They also want to understand the rationale, *why* some things are opening up now, while the virus is still present."

The bottom line from Survey #7 (May 4-10):

- Respondents are **carefully weighing the risks, benefits and tradeoffs** of what they feel comfortable doing as restrictions ease and society reopens amid continued uncertainty.
- Most are **cautious** and continue to believe **current restrictions are appropriate**
- Most are **not entirely comfortable** participating in many of the activities that are opening up:
 - Respondents are the **least comfortable** being in **places where the most vulnerable could be impacted** and the environments where there are **more people** and **less individual control**, including:
 - Visiting **senior care facilities**
 - Sending children to **daycares and schools**
 - Using **public transit and flying**
 - Going to **events, restaurants, gyms**
 - Respondents are **most comfortable** with activities with **fewer people**, more **freedom of movement** and **personal control**, including
 - Shopping online with curb-side pickup
 - **Walking, hiking, biking in public spaces**



- The **loosening of restrictions** is confusing for some, **adding stress, complexity** and **more uncertainty** to people's lives.
 - Every jurisdiction has different approaches, different timing and different messages.
- Respondents report they are **tired this week**. For many, the ongoing uncertainty is **stressful** and **frustrating**.
- Respondents are looking for guidance and clarity from their public health and government leaders.
 - They are **paying close attention** to leaders' decision making about opening up, and their **behaviour**.
 - They **want assurances** that government and health experts are **making decisions based on best available information** – "the virus is still here" – **to protect people's health "from a second wave"**
 - Reported **trust in Dr. Tam and Dr. Fauci continues to increase** among our respondents.
- Respondents are **most grateful for** family, health friends and work.
- Their **advice to others this week**: take care of your mental health.

Thorne says that as we begin to transition to a "new normal" – likely an evolving new normal – every individual will have to make decisions about what is acceptable to them personally, and what is not. The decisions they make and actions they take will be largely driven by who they trust and how they perceive the risks and benefits of changing their behaviour.

"Government leaders and public health experts who understand and acknowledge the challenges and complexity for citizens, employees and customers as they make decisions in this fluid situation will make better-informed decisions as they open up their businesses and communities. Navigating the evolution to new behaviour and new norms is stressful for everyone. We hope that our research provides valuable insight to leaders as they begin to open up and hope employees, customers and citizens decide to re-enter their spaces," Thorne said.

Please visit the COVID-19 Coping Survey initiative site: <http://decisionpartners.co/Survey.html>

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Media Inquiries and Interviews

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About Sarah Thorne, President and CEO, Decision • Partners

Thorne is recognized globally for her expertise in the field of behavioural research and its application to organizational decision making in the areas of strategy, policy and communication. She works with organizations across a broad range of areas including public health, emergency preparedness, energy and infrastructure, organizational transformation, stakeholder engagement, climate change, sustainability and resilience.

She is Executive in Residence at the Ivey School of Business, and a regular contributor to the scientific and management literature on decision and behaviour-focused strategy and communications. She was a member and co-author of the Canadian Standards Association's Technical Committee on Risk Assessment and Communication, which developed the state-of-the-science *Q850 Risk Management: Guideline for Decision-Makers*, lead author of the Health Canada and Public Health Agency of Canada *Strategic Risk Communication Framework and Handbook* and co-author of the book *Mental Modeling Approach: Risk Management Application Case Studies*, which was published in 2017.

About the COVID-19 Coping Survey

Each week, Decision Partners' COVID-19 Coping Survey asks what people are concerned about, what they are grateful for, their coping and protective behaviours, knowledge of and adherence to public health policies and what sources they trust for information about the pandemic.

Each Wednesday afternoon highlights from the previous week's survey are posted online and participants are recruited through convenience and snowball sampling. As such, Decision Partners makes no claims about the representativeness of the survey of any specific population, but believes results provide meaningful insights into people's experiences, beliefs and behaviour during these difficult times.

Decision Partners adheres to all standards for conducting research, confidentiality and ensuring people's privacy. Each week the survey results are aggregated, and no one will be identified as the source of any responses. The firm does not retain, sell, or pass along any personally identifiable information that respondents may provide.

About Decision • Partners

The Decision Partners team believes our world is a better place when people make better decisions. The firm's proven Mental Modeling Insight™ (MMI™) approach helps people do just that. MMI™ is an evidence-based, science-informed management process for systematically understanding the influences on people's judgment, decision making and behaviour. By identifying the full range of people's thinking on complex issues, the Decision Partners team works with their client partners to develop policies, strategies, interventions and communications that effectively address their stakeholders' needs, values, interests and priorities. The results – based on insight into people's judgment – are measurable and sustainable. Visit www.decisionpartners.co.