

COVID-19 Coping Survey #8 Results

Confusion around reopenings have people feeling uncertain, stressed + tired

Want cautious, science-based plans, clarity + guidance from gov + pub health leaders

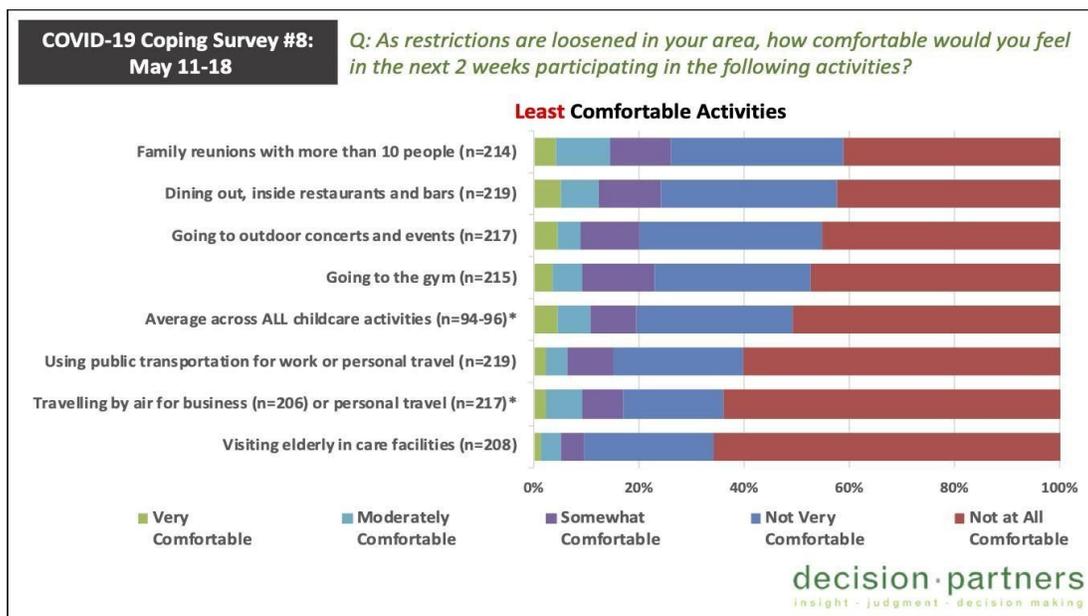
Behavioural science insights are key to sustainable epidemiological & economic outcomes

(MISSISSAUGA, ONTARIO - May 27, 2020) -- As news reports across North America have shown many people flocking to public and commercial spaces and ignoring local government and public health guidance on physical distancing, new research is confirming recent findings that confusion around loosening restrictions is adding stress, complexity and more uncertainty to people’s lives.

“While 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, most of our respondents continue to believe current restrictions are appropriate. But how restrictions are being eased in some jurisdictions has created uncertainty around what is and isn’t opening, and why, is confusing for people, adding stress and, for some, frustration, to this already difficult time. People want clarity, guidance and assurances from government, public health and business leaders and experts that their reopening plans 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 [8th weekly COVID-19 Coping Survey \(May 11-18\)](#). The survey is a voluntary, opt-in behavioural research initiative, and weekly results are shared online. (details below)

“Government leaders and public health experts who understand and acknowledge the challenges and complexity facing citizens, employees and customers as they make everyday decisions will make better-informed decisions themselves in support of reopening economies and communities. Navigating the evolution to new norms that require new behaviours is stressful for everyone. We hope that our research provides valuable insight to leaders at all levels as things open up” Thorne said.



“Respondents continue to feel 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 curbside pickup, and walking, hiking, biking in public spaces.”

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

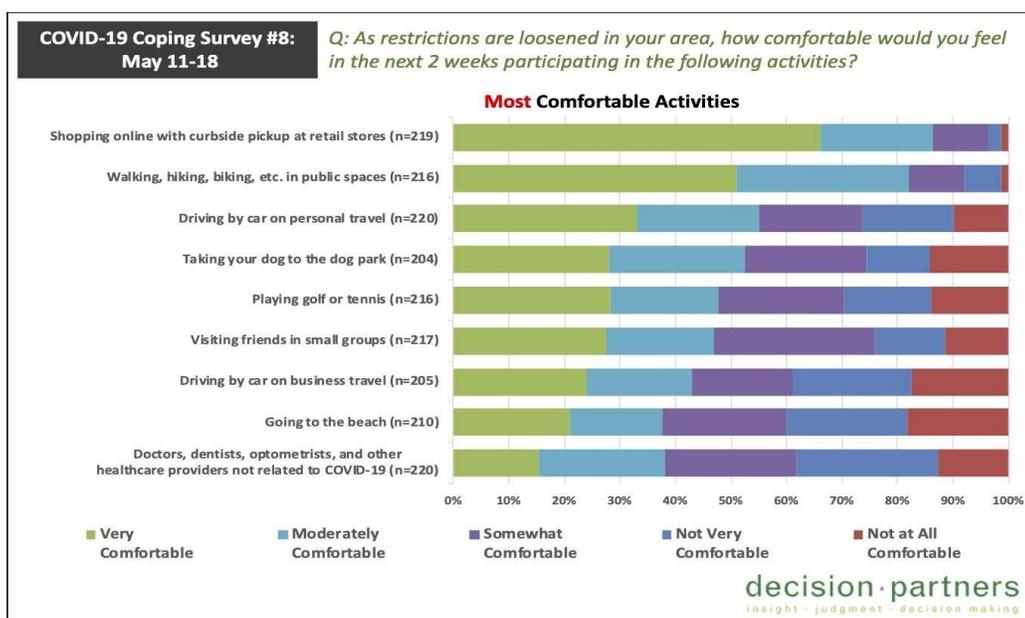
“We’re hearing that people are struggling to make personal risk-benefit assessments about what is and isn’t acceptable to them. They want to stay safe, they sure don’t want another pandemic wave and they want clear guidance. They also want to understand the rationale, why some things are opening up now,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

The bottom line from Survey #8 (May 11-18): ([more report highlights available here](#))

Current mood + concerns

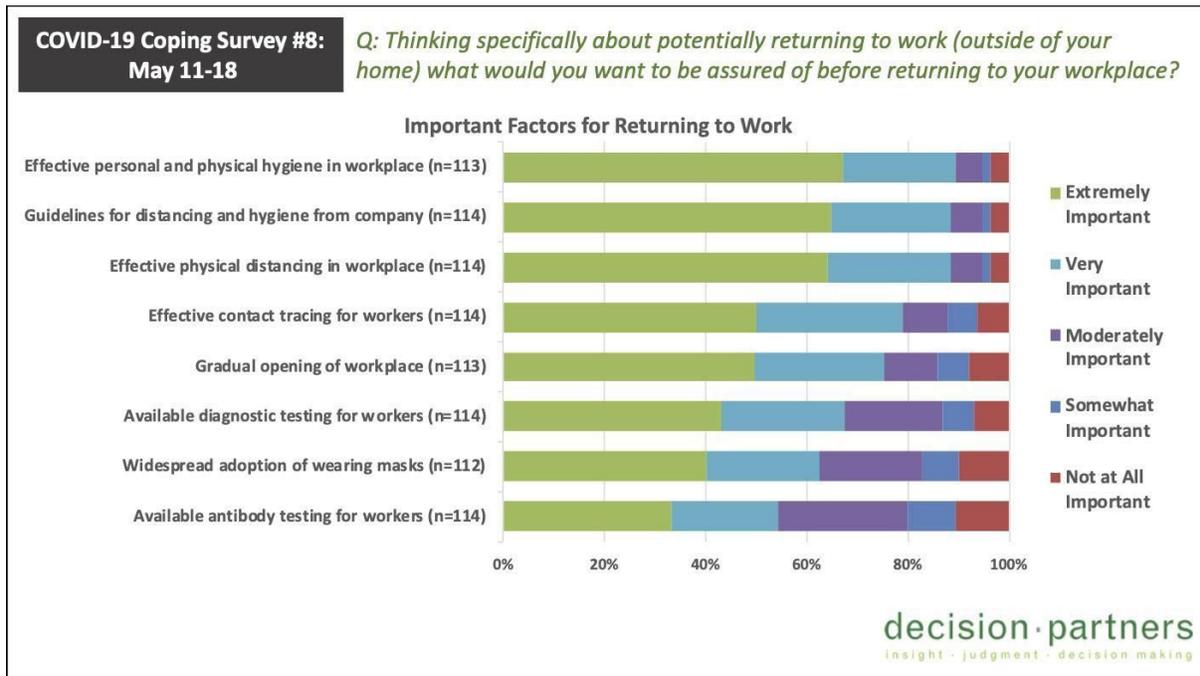
- **Staying healthy** continues to be the number one concern, followed by **uncertainty about the future**. Now, many weeks into the pandemic, the ongoing uncertainty continues to be **stressful and frustrating**. Respondents reported they are tired – and as one summed it up ... “gaaaaaaahhhh”.

 - **Loosening restrictions** is adding new concerns and frustration for some:
 - “More acquaintances are expressing their confusion as to the current rules in general, e.g. distancing; what is opening and how; and the reliability of published stats. I think the unasked question is, ‘what else don’t we know they have gotten wrong?’”
 - Most remain **cautious about opening up**.
 - Most respondents (71%) believe that **current restrictions in their area are appropriate**, emphasizing that opening up must be done **slowly and carefully**.
 - Some (18%) believe restrictions are too loose. They want **leaders to proceed with care and caution**.



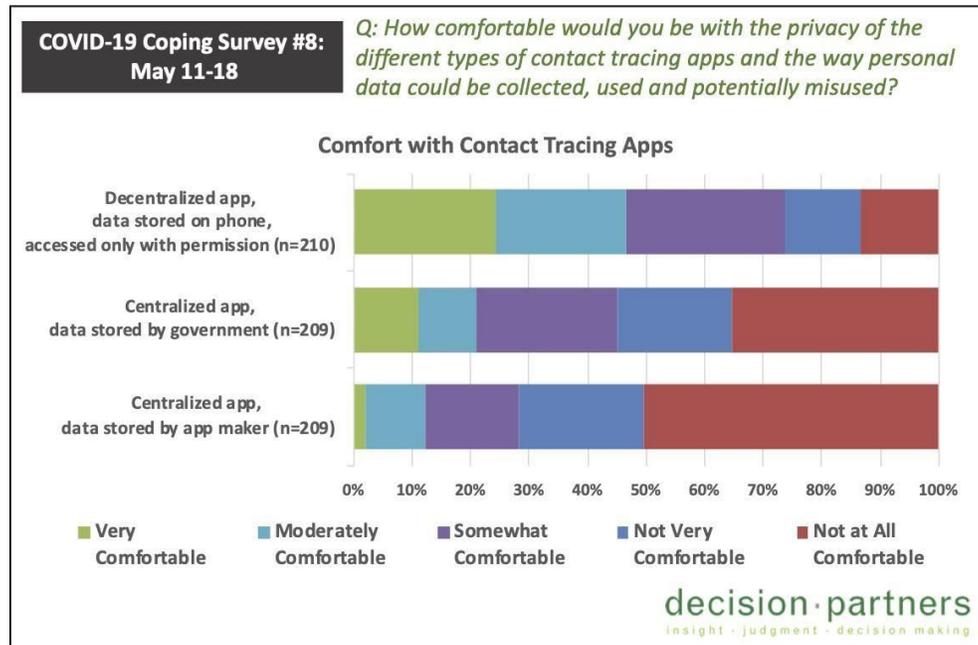
Leadership + trust

- Respondents continue to **look for guidance and clarity from their public health and government leaders**. Dr. Tam, in Canada, and Dr. Fauci, in the US, continue to be the north stars.
- Respondents are looking for **details from leaders about how they are making decisions about opening up**. And they want **assurances that decisions are based on science, not politics**:
 - “Don’t waste my time with talk. Listen to the science. Make policy based on that.”
 - “I will look to assurances from officials as long as they are traceable to documented facts.”



Contact tracing

- This week and last week 85-90% of respondents told us contact tracing was ‘very’ or ‘extremely important’ for them to feel more comfortable in returning to activities that they have been avoiding. So we asked them some questions about contact tracing apps that are being used in some Asian and European countries and were recently introduced in Alberta.
 - Respondents were **more positive about decentralized tracing apps** that store the data on phones. This was the only option that more than 50% of respondents said they were at least ‘somewhat comfortable’ with the privacy and ‘somewhat likely’ to use.
 - Many expressed the need to “control” or “protect” their data and voiced concerns about **maintaining their privacy**. A few said tracing apps are “invasive” and “a violation of their rights”:
 - “Privacy is sacred and must not be violated or at risk.”
 - Most respondents (51%) didn’t know if apps were being considered in their area.



Gratitude + advice for others

- Respondents continue to be most grateful for **family, health, friends** and **being able to work**.
- Their advice to others this week: **take care of yourself physically** – get exercise and fresh air – **and mentally** – pace yourself and get help if you need it.

Thorne says that during the transition through the current and evolving “new normal” each person will face and 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.

Survey pause + return

“We’ve been doing the Coping Survey for 8 weeks. We’ve heard how people are coping with self-isolation, and now how they are coping as things start to open up -- and particularly, what they feel comfortable doing. We’re going to take a little break and come back mid-June to find out what people are actually doing, and how they are coping and adjusting to more freedom, less isolation and perhaps more risk.”

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

For the past 8 weeks, Decision Partners' COVID-19 Coping Survey has been asking 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.