

# Incidental impacts of COVID-19 series:

# Food insecurity

## Health indicator report

### Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has had incidental impacts on health and well-being. **Incidental impacts of COVID-19** are defined as unintended effects that may be related to fear of exposure to COVID-19, the diversion of healthcare or public health resources, or measures to curtail viral transmission or harm (e.g., travel restrictions, physical distancing requirements, the closure of non-essential services). The indicators in this report can help to examine potential effects in Halton.

### Key findings

This report contains information about food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the responses of Halton adults aged 18 and over who participated in the 2020 COVID-19 Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) survey. RRFSS data were collected during October and November 2020 and represent a snapshot in time. Continued monitoring is required to examine impacts over time including during the recovery period.



#### Canada

**Food insecurity** refers to the inability of an individual or household to access adequate and nutritious food due to a lack of money.<sup>1</sup> Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.<sup>2</sup>

During the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in fall 2020, **10% of Canadians** reported that they had experienced household food insecurity in the past 12 months.<sup>3</sup> This was **lower than in 2017-18**, during which 13% of Canadians reported household food insecurity in the past 12 months.<sup>3</sup>

Among Canadians, those with children living in the household and those absent from work due to a business closure, layoff or personal circumstance have been **more likely** to report food insecurity during the pandemic.<sup>4,6,7</sup>

In February 2021, 21% of Canadians said they found it difficult to afford **basic necessities** such as food.<sup>4</sup>

Estimates obtained early during the pandemic may **underestimate** the prevalence of food insecurity and the full impact of COVID-19 may not be seen immediately.<sup>5,7</sup>



#### Halton

##### In October and November of 2020:

Thirteen percent of Halton respondents said they could not afford **balanced meals** over the past 30 days, while 11% said that **food bought did not last** and 9% said they **ate less** than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money to buy more food.

Thirty-nine percent of Halton respondents said that they found it somewhat or a lot harder to pay for **one or more household expenses**, such as enough food or the quality or variety of food they wanted, during the pandemic.

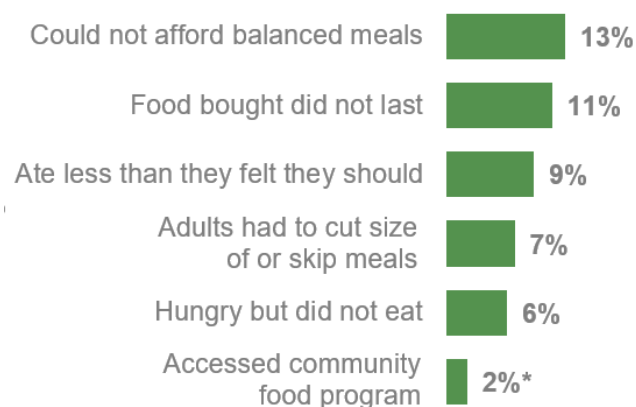
Seventeen percent of Halton respondents said they were worried about the **loss of food programs or services** for themselves or their household. Respondents aged 25 to 44 were the most likely to indicate that they were worried.



# Incidental impacts of COVID-19: Food insecurity

## Indications of food insecurity

- In October and November of 2020, Halton respondents were asked about the food situation in their household over the past 30 days.
- Thirteen percent of respondents said that they could not afford balanced meals over the past 30 days, while 11% said that food bought did not last and there wasn't any money to buy more. Nine percent of respondents said they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food.
- Two percent of respondents indicated that they had accessed a community food program within the past month. This finding is consistent with research suggesting that the vast majority of food insecure households in Canada have not accessed any charitable food assistance during the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>



Indications of household food insecurity, respondents aged 18 and over, Halton Region, October/November 2020



## Incidental impacts of COVID-19: Food insecurity

### Difficulty paying for household expenses such as food

- In October and November of 2020, 39% of Halton respondents indicated that they found it somewhat or a lot harder to pay for one or more of the following household expenses during the pandemic:
  - Enough food to feed themselves or family members in their household
  - The quality or variety of food they wanted
  - Rent or mortgage
  - Bills such as utilities or car payments
  - Debts such as credit cards or student loans.



**39%**

of respondents said it was harder to pay for one or more household expenses

Percentage of respondents aged 18 and over who reported it was somewhat or a lot harder to pay for one or more household expenses during the pandemic, Halton Region, October/November 2020

### Concern about the loss of food programs or services

- In October and November of 2020, 17% of respondents indicated that in the past month, they had worried about the loss of food programs or services for themselves or others in their household.
- Respondents aged 25 to 44 were more likely than those aged 45 to 64 to indicate that they were concerned about the loss of food programs or services (not shown). This difference was **statistically significant**.



**17%**

Somewhat or very worried

Concern about loss of food programs or services by Halton respondents aged 18 and over, Halton Region, October/November 2020

# About the COVID-19 Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) survey

- The COVID-19 Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) survey was conducted by the Institute of Social Research at York University. Data were collected from October 27<sup>th</sup> 2020 to November 15<sup>th</sup> 2020 among adults aged 18 and over living in Halton Region.
- Data were collected using an online survey panel sample (400 respondents) and convenience sample (834 respondents). For the panel sample, Canadian census data were used in an effort to generate samples that were representative of the population and incentives were used for survey participation. For the convenience sample, a link to the survey was promoted through the Halton Region website ([Halton.ca](http://Halton.ca)) and social media accounts.
- Data for this report were analyzed with the convenience sample and panel sample combined, with the exception of 'difficulty paying for household expenses including food', where only the panel sample was used due to differences in the way questions were asked between the convenience and panel samples.
- It is important to keep in mind that the survey respondents may not be representative of the population of Halton Region in terms of sex, age, income, education and other sociodemographic characteristics. Weights were used to adjust for differences in the age and sex distributions of the sample populations compared to the population of Halton Region.
- Statistical significance between groups was determined using non-overlapping confidence intervals. Statistically significant differences are differences that are unlikely to be due to chance alone.

## Data notes

**Data Source:** COVID-19 Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System [2020], Halton Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University.

Estimates marked with an asterisk (\*) should be interpreted with caution due to high variability.

### References

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7. National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools. 2020. Rapid Review: Food security. What is the impact of COVID-19 and related public health measures? Retrieved May 2021 from <https://www.nccmt.ca/uploads/media/media/0001/02/1f27c86a7f6d91cd045ae063326a3f3c92467422.pdf>
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For more health indicator and health status reports, visit the Halton Health Statistics webpage at [halton.ca](http://halton.ca).

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