



COVID-19 CHILD AND YOUTH WELL-BEING STUDY: Canada Phase One Executive Report



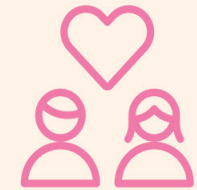
Prepared by Maximum City
June 2020





Listen to kids now so we can help them later.

TAKE THE COVID-19
WELL-BEING SURVEY
For ages 9-15 and a parent



maximumcity.ca/wellbeing

Maximum City is a multidisciplinary team of designers, teachers and urban planners who are committed to a better urban future. We have worked on child and youth engagement, urbanism and education issues in Ontario and beyond for over a decade. For more information, please visit: maximumcity.ca

Canada Phase One Executive Report

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The full report is available for download at:
maximumcity.ca/wellbeing

Introduction

There is no precedent for what children and youth experienced in the spring of 2020 during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Illness, isolation, economic insecurity, school closures and mobility restrictions turned daily life upside down in a matter of a few weeks for kids and teens around the globe. In order to mitigate the impact of this disruption, the United Nations has recognized that efforts must be made to safeguard young people's development and well-being, both during and emerging from the pandemic. It is critical that data are collected and used to inform an effective and equitable response and recovery strategy, recognizing the unique impacts of COVID-19 physical distancing, school closures and social disconnection on vulnerable populations such as children and youth.

This study collects and analyzes the behaviours, feelings and opinions of Canadian children and youth during the COVID-19 pandemic, as reported by children and youth themselves. The goal of the study is to listen directly to kids and teens in order to help understand the impacts of COVID-19 disruptions, uncover gaps in support, and promote healthy development. Ultimately, the study findings and recommendations offer an understanding of some of the policy implications of self-reported behaviours and well-being outcomes for children and youth in different regions and segments of the population in Canada.

The downstream impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and youth must be measured and understood in order to be effectively addressed. More engagement and consultation with children and youth should take place on COVID-19-related matters that affect them so deeply.

A total of 616 nine- to 15-year-olds across Canada participated in this study by completing a thorough online survey in May 2020, for a combined total of 932 participants including the parallel Toronto-based study. The findings and recommendations from the study are being provided directly to government agencies, school boards and other organizations that support child well-being and development. They will also be submitted for presentation and publication.

Methodology Highlights

- The online survey was conducted in English and French from May 8 to 28.
- 616 Canadian residents ages nine through 15 and a parent or guardian were recruited from Canadian Viewpoint's online panel.
- The online survey included 15 background and demographic questions for a parent or guardian, and over 50 questions for one child or teen per household to self-report on their experiences and opinions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Survey respondent demographics closely align with household income levels, racial backgrounds and provincial population distribution across Canada. A breakdown of respondent demographics is available in Appendix A: Methodology of the full report.
- This Phase One Report presents the overall findings of the study, while a deeper analysis of the data by regions and segments will continue throughout the summer of 2020.
- A parallel study of the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area was conducted at the same time and was reported on separately.

For questions, please contact the study lead
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Child and Youth Engagement

A guiding principle of Maximum City's work is to ensure the inclusion and meaningful participation of children's voices in data collection and decision-making processes that can impact their lives. In times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this principle becomes a deeper moral responsibility. Our study recognizes children's right to participate and be heard,¹ and spells out the urgency and necessity of including their input in COVID-19 recovery policy and practice. While many studies seek participation and input from other demographics and cohorts, this research focuses on collecting and amplifying children's voices so that their authentic lived experience can be used as evidence in the recovery strategy. Their testimony will inform the best way forward to mitigate negative impacts on their daily lives and behaviours, and enhance their development and well-being.

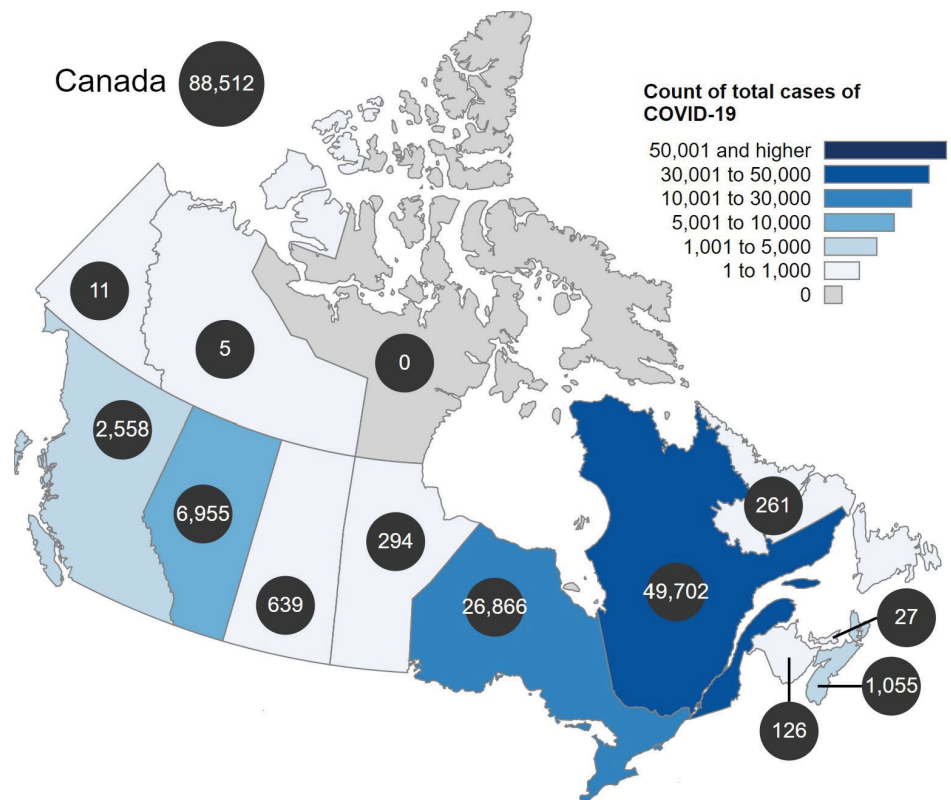
COVID-19 in Canada

The first Canadian case of the novel coronavirus was reported in late January 2020 and by March 22 every province and territory had declared a state of emergency, with school closures and restrictions on travel and non-essential trips outside the home. This continued until the middle of May or longer in most provinces. In Quebec, with the exception of Montreal, elementary schools began reopening on May 11. Schools in other provinces remained closed until after this study's survey closed in late May, when provinces were at various initial stages of a phased re-opening.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

As of May 28 when the study's survey closed, Canada had 88,512 cases and 6,877 deaths.² According to Public Health Canada, fewer than 100 children and teens had to be hospitalized due to COVID-19, and no Canadian under the age of 19 had died because of it.

Canada's COVID-19 Cases on May 28, 2020



² <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection.html>

Key Findings

According to Canadian children and youth, the experience of living through the COVID-19 pandemic impacted them differently, to varying degrees, and both positively and negatively. The resulting changes in behaviour and well-being outcomes, and levels of school engagement, were distinct among groups and at times nuanced within individuals. Clear patterns and lessons emerged, however. Some kids and teens reported doing just fine, while some thrived under their new academic, social and family circumstances. Others struggled with the lack of school support and structure, increased time with technology, restricted mobility, reduced physical activity and social disconnection.

These differences are important to understand individually but in the aggregate point to one overarching recommendation for policy- and decision-makers: all children and youth will need a response and recovery strategy that is not simply a return to what was considered normal before COVID-19. A strong recovery must focus broadly on social reconnection for all young Canadians and intentionally on the mental, emotional and physical health of those who were most adversely impacted. It should also capitalize on the momentum of discoveries revealed by those who were the most resilient or reached their potential. Making the response a blunt instrument when the impacts are so varied and unevenly distributed, and the circumstances still dynamic, would be a mistake.

In terms of how their behaviour has changed during the pandemic, the majority of Canadian children and youth are sleeping more while almost a third are spending more time trying to fall asleep. An overwhelming majority are spending more time using technology and more than half are less physically active. With the disruption of conventional routines caused by the pandemic, some kids and teens are spending more time doing things that make them happy. Almost half of kids and teens are going out less once a

day, and the same amount feel like they are not spending enough time outside or connecting with nature. Kids and teens want time away from screens, more time outside, more time playing and exercising, and more time for social interaction with their peers.

In terms of what they are feeling during the pandemic, some Canadian children and youth are worrying more, and many are specifically worried that someone they care about will get COVID-19. They are also experiencing a range of feelings more intensely — boredom, sadness, happiness, calm, and worry. More than a quarter of kids and teens report positive effects of the pandemic on their lives, such as more time with family, less stress at school, or more freedom to pursue their interests. Many kids and teens feel like they are missing important life events or moments because of COVID-19.

Schooling during the pandemic is missing the mark for many Canadian children and youth, while others are enjoying remote learning. The majority of kids and teens are spending less time on schoolwork and almost half find school less interesting than before COVID-19. Some kids and teens do not have what they need to effectively complete their schoolwork at home, and what is often missing is a computer or lessons. Other kids miss the dynamism that in-person school offers: interaction with teachers and peers, extra- and co-curricular activities, rigor and variety. Many kids and teens want improved and more engaging online instruction, along with more structured and personalized support to improve remote learning. Some are worried that next year will be harder because of filling the learning gap, and are anxious about the uncertainty of how school will be delivered.

Quality family time is increasing across many Canadian households during the pandemic, resulting in better relationships. Many children and youth appreciate the extra time and deeper connection with

Key Findings continued

family members and are getting along within their household more than before COVID-19. Some kids and teens are not spending enough time talking or connecting with friends, while a quarter are spending too much time alone. An overwhelming majority of kids and teens report having an adult family member they can talk to about how they are feeling, and many have a friend who can play the same role.

Many kids and teens want Canadian government and school leaders to keep things closed as long as necessary to prioritize safety above everything else, including the economy and their schooling. Others want things opened up as soon as possible, especially parks and schools. Many kids and teens expressed words of encouragement for the good job their leaders are doing but want improved and more engaging online instruction as part of any ongoing remote learning. Some kids and teens want the government to enforce physical distancing more strictly and provide more financial support to those in need.

When providing advice to their peers, Canadian kids and teens suggested the three most important strategies to get through this challenging time are to stay calm and positive, to do your part to stop the spread of COVID-19, and to make time to have fun or do something you enjoy. They also suggested strategies such as connecting with friends to talk about what you are feeling, and treasuring additional time with family. Many kids and teens showed empathy and a desire to help their peers and society more broadly.

Children and youth want to be engaged and asked about their experiences and opinions during a time of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. They have important perspectives to contribute, and the

process of talking through and sharing these perspectives in the survey questionnaire was beneficial for many of them. The following comments are common examples of the type of feedback received:

- “I feel like this survey is a good way to think and reflect on what we are doing at this difficult time.”
- “More surveys where kids can express themselves.”
- “This is good for all of us. Thank you.”

Finally, the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the behaviour and well-being outcomes of Canadian children and youth are worse in big cities like Toronto. Compared to other Canadian kids and teens, young people in Toronto have fewer places to play or exercise outside of their home and less space to play inside. They go outside less frequently and feel less safe when they do go outside. Toronto kids and teens are less physically active and spend more time worrying compared to their Canadian peers, and are more worried about their families having enough food and a safe place to live. Their self-reported well-being outcomes, such as negative feelings they are having more strongly since the pandemic began, are also slightly to moderately worse.

All of this is troubling for an urban nation like Canada where over 80% of the population lives in cities and nearly two in five people live in the country's 15 largest municipalities. A dedicated policy response is necessary for large urban areas. A deeper analysis of this data by small, medium and big cities is underway and will be reported on later in the summer of 2020.

Feelings and Emotions



Many kids and teens **77% are worried** that someone they care about will get COVID-19 while more than half **58% are worried** they will get it themselves.



An overwhelming majority of kids and teens **87%** feel like they **understand** what is happening with COVID-19 and where to **find information** they can understand and trust **83%**.



An overwhelming majority of kids and teens **90%** prefer to get **information about COVID-19 from their parents** while some **16%** prefer to get it **from social media**.



More than a quarter of kids and teens **26%** feel that the COVID-19 pandemic has had **some positive effects on their lives**, with the most commonly cited positive effects being **more time with family** and **more time to pursue their interests**.



Almost a third of kids and teens **32%** are **worrying more**.



Kids and teens are feeling a range of emotions more intensely during COVID-19. Some kids and teens report feeling more **bored 34%**, **worried 27%**, **calm 29%**, **rested 28%**, and **happy 24%** than before the pandemic. **15%** are feeling **sadder and more tired**.



Many kids and teens **77%** feel like they are **missing important life events or moments**.

Activities



The majority of kids and teens **51%** are **sleeping more** while almost a third **31%** are spending **more time trying to fall asleep**.



An overwhelming majority of kids and teens **83%** are spending **more time using technology** while more than half **53%** are spending **less time being physically active**.



Some kids and teens **40%** feel like they are spending **too much time using technology**.



Some kids and teens **42%** are spending more time **doing things that make them happy**.



Over a quarter of kids and teens **26%** feel like they are **not spending enough time playing**.



Nearly half of kids and teens **49%** feel like they are **not spending enough time being physically active**.



Almost half of kids and teens **47%** are **going outside less than once a day** while more than half **57%** are **going outside at least once a day**.



Nearly half of kids and teens **47%** feel like they are **not spending enough time outside** or **49%** **connecting with nature**.



Many kids and teens **83%** report that they have **enough places to play or exercise outside of their home** or **82%** **inside their home**.



When they do go outside, few kids and teens are going outside alone **10%** or with friends **7%**.



Many kids want **more help staying physically active** or exercising, and **greater access to activities and more effective schooling** to improve their time at home.

School and Learning



The majority of kids and teens **53%** are spending **less time on schoolwork**.



The majority of kids and teens **52%** with extra support needs are **not receiving the supports** they need during COVID-19.



Some kids **41%** **enjoyed school a lot** before the COVID-19 pandemic.



Some kids and teens **45%** find school during the pandemic **less interesting** while others **16%** find it **more interesting**.



Some kids and teens **32%** find schoolwork **less stressful** while others **30%** find it **more stressful**.



Some kids and teens **39%** find it **harder to concentrate** on schoolwork and learning during the pandemic.



An overwhelming majority of kids and teens **95%** have **someone who can help with their schoolwork** to some degree, and the helper is usually a **parent or guardian**.



Some kids **19%** **do not have everything they need** to complete their schoolwork and learning at home, and what is often missing is a computer or lessons.



More than three quarters of kids and teens **76%** have a **space at home** where they can concentrate, work on their schoolwork, and learn.



The majority of kids and teens **51%** are **worried about missing school** because of the COVID-19 pandemic while some **39%** are **not worried about missing school**. Kids and teens who are worried about missing school are most worried about missing their friends and teachers. They are also worried about falling behind in their learning or failing a class or grade.



Many kids and teens want time to connect with their peers during online learning and want synchronous lessons where they can see and interact with their teachers.



Many kids want improved and more engaging online instruction.



Some kids and teens would like more varied learning strategies that reach and engage all learners.



Many kids and teens want more structured and personalized support to improve remote learning.



Some kids want more accountability and rigor, along with clear expectations, in their remote learning.

People and Relationships



Many kids and teens **71%** feel like the amount of **time they are spending with family is just right.**



Some kids and teens **38%** feel like they are **not spending enough time talking or connecting with friends.**



A quarter of kids and teens **25%** feel like they are **spending too much time alone.**



An overwhelming majority of kids and teens **92%** have an **adult family member they can talk to about how they are feeling.**



Many kids and teens **77%** have a friend they **can talk to about how they are feeling.**



Many kids and teens **61%** have a pet **who helps them feel better.**



More than half of kids and teens **55%** report **feelings of empathy for others** during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Some kids and teens **23%** are **getting along more** with their household during the COVID-19 pandemic while others **12%** are **getting along less** with their household during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Many kids and teens want to help their friends by talking and listening to them.

61% of Canadian Kids and Teens Have a Pet Who Helps Them Feel Better During COVID-19

Needs



Many kids **69%** want to get help during COVID-19 from online videos or written materials while some **11%** want to get help from an online peer support group.



Almost a quarter of kids **24%** are worried about their family having enough food to eat and a safe place to live.



Some kids and teens **11%** do not have enough places to play or exercise outside their home or **11%** enough space to play inside their home.



Some kids and teens **15%** do not feel safe when they go outside.



Recommendations

The following is a working document of recommendations that will be expanded as the study's analysis continues. They focus on what we heard from kids and teens across the country and are intended to be complementary to other evidence-based guidance and recommendations for a strong response and recovery strategy. They presume that most Canadian schools in September 2020 will include hybrid learning and cohorting.

AVOID	INCLUDE	INCREASE	INVEST IN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 🚫 A return to the status quo 🚫 Waiting to act until things return to normal 🚫 Assuming that impacts are evenly distributed 🚫 Assuming that impacts are all negative 🚫 Rushing to fill the learning gap 🚫 Quantity over quality of school instruction 🚫 Overprogramming of life beyond school 🚫 One-size-fits-all solution for different contexts 🚫 Inconsistent messaging or unclear expectations 🚫 Opening up services or schools again before it is safe to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 👍 Focus on what can be done differently and better right away 👍 Time and support to talk about experiences 👍 Time and support for play and other activities 👍 Time outside and in nature 👍 Time away from screens 👍 Time for social connection with friends and community 👍 Time with family 👍 Celebration of milestones and achievements 👍 Opportunities to continue passion projects 👍 Opportunities to continue social impact projects 👍 Monitoring and re-assessing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Synchronous learning and collaboration + Interaction with teachers and among peers + Rich and deep learning tasks + Outdoor lessons + Project-based learning + Play-based learning + Place-based learning and neighbourhood inquiry projects + Variety of instructional strategies and tools + Student choice and voice + Authenticity and agency + Rigor, accountability and meaningful assessment + Understanding of well-being + Resources for students with extra support needs + Programs and activities for remote and in-person participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$ Outdoor classrooms, naturalized playgrounds, and play equipment \$ High speed internet and computers \$ Online videos, materials and forums for support \$ Mental and emotional health and well-being supports \$ Training and support for teachers and program staff \$ Peer mentors and councillors \$ Health and safety protocols \$ Parks and public spaces \$ Community partnerships for sharing outdoor and indoor spaces \$ Walkable communities \$ Streets for play \$ Financial support for families in need

Canadian Kids and Teens Speak Up to Government Leaders about COVID-19

Make high-speed internet available in all communities.
Drumheller, AB

Caring about others who have less is what a good Premier should do.
Toronto, ON

Please understand that even though we are home to be safe, many kids are starting to stress about not being able to see other faces at all.
Calgary, AB

Please help the people who are deeply affected by COVID.
Regina, SK

I think more sophisticated bike lanes would help the city.
Toronto, ON

Open the playgrounds and parks. We need to play and exercise.
Toronto, ON

Keep up the great work!!
Vancouver, BC

Don't let kids back unless it is safe.
Winnipeg, MB

Find a solution to help single parents because rent is very expensive!
Toronto, ON

Think about the people first, not the economy.
Halifax, NS

I would like our government to be prepared next time, so fewer of my friends and businesses in the community are left scrambling.
Pincher Creek, AB

Thank you for keeping us safe.
Kitchener, ON

Give advice to young people on how to stay physically active.
Laval, QC

Too much conflicting information. First we were told no masks, then they told us to wear them. Now no one knows...
Lakeshore, ON

Be honest and give us the information we need to stay safe.
Montreal, QC

Canadian Kids and Teens Speak Up to School Leaders about COVID-19

If our school decisions could respect students' individuality and unique needs more, that would be great.

Pincher Creek, AB

Remember this: don't just go back to what was normal beforehand.

Pincher Creek, AB

You are working hard. We thank you!

Toronto, ON

To the school principal: thank you for sending emails every week and caring about the kids!

Toronto, ON

Your professional guys should speak to us children and then organize online classes differently.

Toronto, ON

Don't make us go back to school until it's safe. I want to see my Grammy this summer, but I can't if we get sick.

Prince Rupert, BC

We need a better learning system. I will be going into high school next year and I don't feel ready with this online learning.

Toronto, ON

Kids need different ways of learning. Not just a computer.

Medicine Hat, AB

Make it possible for parents and children to work and do school from home more regularly after Covid. It was much more relaxed, less stressful and quality family time was spent.

Richmond, BC

Make sure that when we go back to school, we have lots of opportunities to connect socially with our friends. We have missed each other!

Calgary, AB

I am afraid of going back to school in the fall because of COVID-19. I think the government should have options for kids to continue with online learning at home with help from the teachers.

Burlington, ON

We are living for real instead of just going to school. I am finally doing interesting stuff and learning new things.

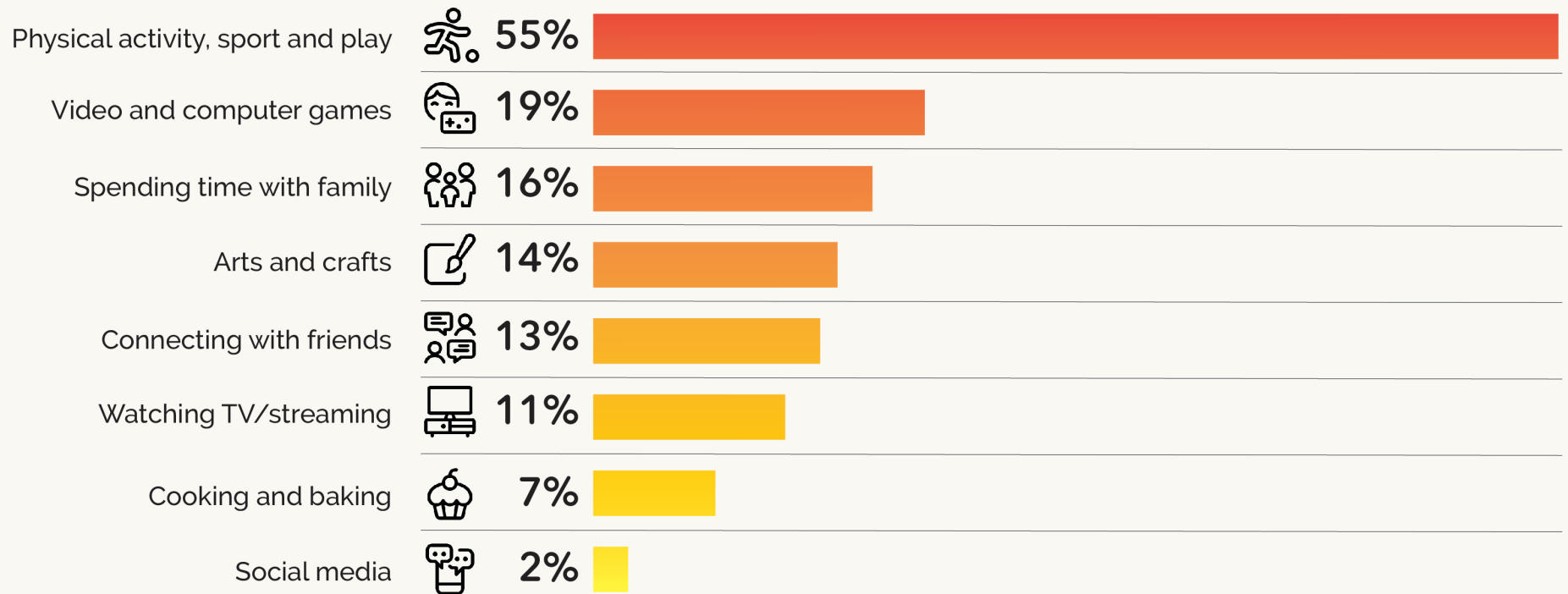
Senneterre, QC

I need my school.
Saint John, NB



What Activities Make You Happy During COVID-19? (Combining Physical Activity and Play)

Respondents could provide multiple answers.





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