



Survey Results

COVID-19

Public Notices and Communications

Are Canadian authorities doing enough to keep the public informed during the COVID-19 crisis?

April 3, 2020

Public Emergency Alerting Services Inc
888 4 Ave SW #1906
Calgary, AB T2P 0V2
p: (403) 970-9585
e: info@peasi.com
www.peasi.com

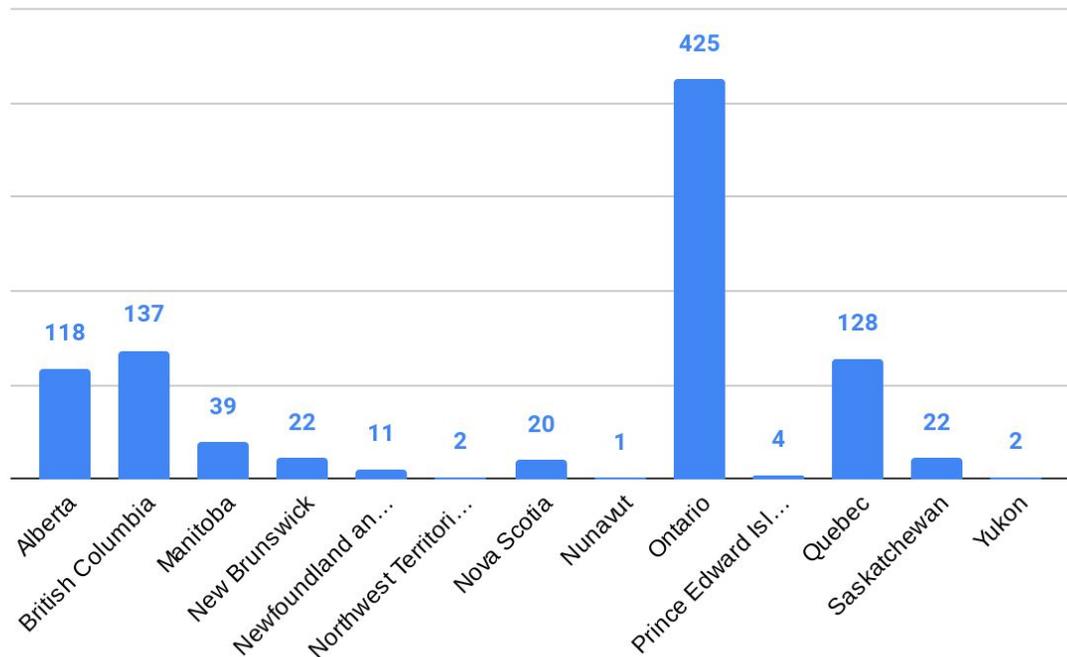
Summary

On March 27 2020, Public Emergency Alerting Services Inc (PEASI) launched an online survey to gauge how effectively COVID-19 notices and information are being communicated to the Canadian public. The survey was open to English and French respondents for 4 days and was promoted via the Alertable app and social media. In total, 931 responses were received from Canadians in every Province and Territory. The online survey questions are provided in the appendix.

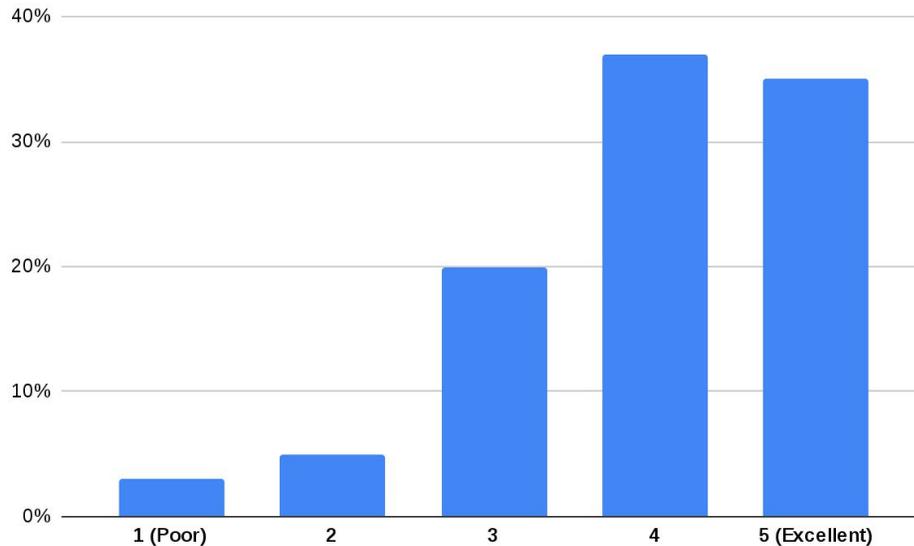
PEASI has previously conducted numerous national surveys, such as after the bi-annual public tests of Canada’s national public alert system, Alert Ready. These public test alerts are sent via radio, television, compatible wireless devices, and other emergency alert distribution channels such as social media and mobile apps. The feedback received from these earlier tests has helped to improve Alert Ready messaging and PEASI believed there could also be potential improvements to COVID-19 pandemic public notices and communications.

Results

- **A total of 931 survey responses were received.** 45% of the survey responses came from Ontario, 14% from British Columbia, 13% from Quebec, 12% from Alberta, and the remainder from the other provinces and territories.



- **72% of respondents reported being satisfied with COVID-19 communications** they were receiving from the government. The most satisfied were from Saskatchewan with 81% and the least satisfied were from Manitoba with 54%.



- 63% of respondents felt they were getting the right amount of information, while 26% felt they were getting too little and 11% feeling overwhelmed with too much information. This aligns with results from a recent Nanos Research survey (Project 2020-1604/1605) where “nearly two-thirds of Canadians say the Government’s response to Covid-19 has been very good”. Saskatchewan had the highest percentage of respondents who felt they were receiving the **right amount** of information at 77%. On the other hand, 64% of New Brunswick respondents, and 49% of Manitoba respondents felt they were getting **too little** information. **Ontario residents were the most likely to feel overwhelmed** with 12% of respondents indicating this.
- **84% of respondents thought that Canada’s national public alert system, Alert Ready, should be used** to notify the public of COVID-19 alerts and information, while 9% were against using the system and 6% had no opinion.



- 36% of respondents reported receiving false information about COVID-19. Respondents in **Nova Scotia and New Brunswick were the most likely** to report false information, at 55% and 54% respectively. Saskatchewan and Quebec had the fewest reports of false information, with 22% and 25%.
- Of the respondents who reported receiving false information, **Facebook was identified as the primary source**, followed by friends and family, the media, and emails. There were 40 respondents who reported receiving fraudulent phone calls, as well.
- Of the respondents who received false information, 76% were able to subsequently obtain correct and accurate information from their local government agencies. Nova Scotia had the best success rate with 100% while Saskatchewan and British Columbia had the lowest success rate with 60%. That does leave a significant number of respondents across the country who were **unable to find accurate information** upon receiving what they suspected to be false information.
- The top 5 suggestions for decreasing the amount of false information were:
 - Sending alert bulletins with links to government websites
 - The creation of a list of trusted sources
 - Daily updates from trusted sources
 - Severe fines and penalties (including imprisonment) for those who spread misinformation
 - Public education about verification of information
- Respondents identified receiving alerts for **stay at home orders** and **closures and restrictions** in their communities as their top priorities. A large majority also wanted to receive alerts for food/drug/product shortages and new cases of COVID-19 in their community. A smaller majority (57%) wanted to receive alerts for deaths in their community. Many respondents replied that they wanted to be notified about any and all local information related to COVID-19, and only a small number (less than 1% of respondents) indicated they did not wish to be notified at all.
- **Direct notification** to their mobile devices was the preferred method of COVID-19 communication, followed by traditional news media. The majority of respondents would prefer to be notified in more than one way, with less than 17% preferring to receive only one type of notification. Many respondents indicated that a **single source of information from all levels of government** would be preferred.
- For the majority of respondents that wanted Alert Ready to be used for COVID-19 alerts, the primary reason was that **Alert Ready is already a trusted source** and could help stop the spread of misinformation. For the small number of respondents that were

against Alert Ready being used, the reasons included **information overload**, causing an increase in panic, leaving the system open for severe weather and Amber alerts, and the fact that there are **other ways to access information** about COVID-19 including government websites that may be more specific to individual areas. The small number that did not choose either yes or no thought Alert Ready should be used in some cases but not others, and were worried about **diluting other important alerts**.

- Regarding improvements to pandemic communications, almost half of respondents wanted to have an **official, single source of information** that was consistently updated. Stopping the spread of false information was a key concern and suggestions included shutting down websites with false information, fines, increases to cyber security and online monitoring, and alerting the public to active scams. **Open and honest communications** from government officials was cited as an improvement by a majority of respondents.

More Information

If you would like more information regarding the survey, please submit your inquiry here:
<https://peasi.com/contact/>

If you would like more information on the public emergency alerting platform, Alertable, that was used to conduct this survey and that provides alert and notification services to over 1,000 municipalities across Canada, please visit <https://alertable.ca>

Appendix

Survey Questions

1. What Province/Territory are you located in?
2. How would you rate government communications to the public regarding COVID-19? (scale of 1=Poor to 5=Excellent)
3. Do you think that the amount of information you are getting is? (Too Little, Just Right, Too Much)
4. What local events related to COVID-19 would you like to be notified about? Check all that apply. (Closures and restrictions in your community, Re-openings and resumption of services in your community, Stay At Home orders, Food/Drug/Product shortages, Deaths from COVID-19 in your community, New cases of COVID-19 in your community, Other)
5. How would you prefer to be notified about COVID-19 events in your community? Check all that apply. (News media, Government websites, Social media, Direct to your mobile device via services such as Alertable <https://alertable.ca>, Door to door notices, Telephone hotlines, Smart home devices, Other)
6. Some governments like Saskatchewan and Ontario have chosen to send a Province Wide emergency alert for COVID-19, while others have chosen to use more traditional channels. Do you think that the national Alert Ready emergency system should be used to send COVID-19 wireless alerts? (Yes, No, Don't know/No opinion)
7. Have you received any information about COVID-19 that later turned out to be false or misleading? This includes scams, fake pleas for help, and other fraudulent attempts to exploit the pandemic. (Yes, No)

If Yes:

1. Did the false, misleading, or fraudulent information that you received come from any of these sources? Check all that apply. (Friends or family, News media, Facebook, Phone calls, Emails, Government agencies, Websites, Other)
 2. Were you able to get correct and accurate information from local government agencies? (Yes, No, Other)
 3. How would you improve handling this false information?
8. Please tell us why you thought the national Alert Ready emergency system should be, or should not be, used to send COVID-19 wireless alerts.

9. Please tell us any other communication improvements that could be made for this pandemic.