

## **Answering Your Questions about COVID-19**

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### **Question 1: Is the federal government collecting data on the rate of COVID-19 infection for persons with disabilities?**

Currently, [the Government of Canada's website](#) doesn't have any data on people with disabilities and COVID-19, and it looks like they aren't collecting any either. There is a COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group made up of "individual experts from the disability community" who advise the federal government "on the real-time lived experiences of persons with disabilities during this crisis on disability-specific issues, challenges and systemic gaps."\* However, the information they are sharing is not on the website.

There is some data on people with disabilities and COVID-19 thanks to [Abilities Centre](#). With partner organizations, they made a [COVID-19 Disability Survey](#) and a report that shows the data that they collected between June 18, 2020 and December 18, 2020 from 713 people.

Both the survey and report are available in: English, Plain Language, French, and ASL. Click [here](#) to read the report, and/or complete the survey. This survey is still open to people with disabilities and able-bodied caregivers and family members of people with disabilities.

The results of these surveys "will be posted on [their] website to help support government, community organizations, and service providers in responding to the needs."\* Feel free to share this survey and report on social media! If you have any questions, you can reach them at 1-866-639-1858 or [disabilitysurvey@abilitiescentre.org](mailto:disabilitysurvey@abilitiescentre.org).

### **Question 2: What does "viral load" mean?**

According to infectious disease expert Dr. Michelle Doll, "[v]iral load refers to the amount of virus that can be detected in an infected person. High viral loads are concerning because they can mean the person is more infectious."\* In other words, the higher your viral load, the more likely you are to spread the disease.

### **Question 3: Do vaccinated and unvaccinated people have the same amount of viral load?**

The studies that are being published on COVID-19 are very recent, and the results haven't been verified and reviewed by other experts yet. Think of these studies as rough drafts that only become final drafts after the science is fact-checked.

This disclaimer also applies to the study which was published on July 31, 2021, which claims that “vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals have similar viral loads in communities with a high prevalence of the SARS-CoV-2 delta variant.”\*

Dr. Doll summarizes this study’s findings by saying: “the viral loads were similar between those vaccinated and unvaccinated, suggesting that vaccinated individuals who develop breakthrough infections are very capable of transmitting the infection to others.”\*

The study notes “Our results, while preliminary, suggest that if vaccinated individuals become infected with the Delta variant, they may be sources of SARS-CoV-2 transmission to others.”\* In other words, unlike other variants of COVID-19, the Delta variant may be so transmissible that it gives a high viral load to fully-vaccinated people, meaning that fully-vaccinated people can still carry and spread the disease.

Dr. Doll affirms that “the vaccine continues to offer protection from severe disease. In general, those who are vaccinated but go on to develop breakthrough infections are less likely to be hospitalized or develop severe disease. Of course, other factors can affect severity of disease, such as underlying medical conditions and the ability of the immune system to respond to the vaccine.”\*

Before this study was released, scientists thought that, after vaccination, “the viral load is reduced 4-fold for infections occurring 12-28 days after the first dose of vaccine. These reduced viral loads hint to lower infectiousness, further contributing to vaccine impact on virus spread.”\*. This information may still be true about the original COVID-19 virus and its variants. Once again, it’s important to note that even this older study, which was published in February 2021, hasn’t been verified either. Unfortunately, it’s still too early to have a definite answer to this question.

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If you think you may be experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, take the self-assessment at [www.ontario.ca/coronavirus](http://www.ontario.ca/coronavirus). Follow all directions from your medical provider or your local health unit at the following phone numbers:

Telehealth Ontario: 1-866-797-0000

Toronto Public Health: 416-338-7600

Peel Public Health: 905-799-7700

Durham Region Health Department: 905-668-7711

York Region Public Health: 1-877-464-9675