



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec
Environmental Health Association of Québec

The data from the 2022 CCHS reported a significant drop in MCS cases compared to the 2021 CCHS. The data has been verified and the estimates were produced correctly.

That said, here are a few possible reasons for the drop in number of MCS cases in 2022:

1. Beginning in 2022, people were allowed to complete the survey online by themselves. About half of the people filled out the survey online and about half were contacted by an interviewer through telephone to complete the survey. This was not the case in 2021 when all of the surveys were conducted by telephone because of the ongoing lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic and the online option not yet being available. This change in how the survey was conducted may have impacted the MCS numbers in 2022. People who completed the survey online did not have the assistance of an interviewer who could have better explained, followed-up, and helped them with the question on MCS.

2. In 2021, interviewers had a visible **help text** (see below) when they asked the question on MCS. This information could also be provided to survey participants who required more information on MCS.

INTERVIEWER: Multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) is a chronic condition where people are sensitive to low levels of multiple unrelated chemicals such as smoke or perfume - levels that do not cause symptoms in most people. He/she may experience symptoms such as fatigue, asthma, blocked nose or sore eyes.

However, in 2022, this help text was **only available if** the interviewers/survey participants clicked on the "help" button next to the MCS question:

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66. #[_DT_DOVERB_C] #[_DT_YOU1] have multiple chemical sensitivities (MCS)?



Among people who completed the survey online by themselves, the prevalence of MCS was 0.7% compared to 2.4% for those contacted by an interviewer through telephone. While there are other factors as to why a respondent may self-report online or be interviewed by telephone, this likely suggests that many people who completed the survey online may not have used the "help" button, possibly leading to confusion and misunderstanding about MCS for them. If people are unsure about a medical condition, they are more likely to say that they do not have that particular condition which may help explain the significant drop in MCS cases in 2022.

In 2025, the survey will show the help text on-screen **before** the MCS question to avoid this issue.

- Source: Statistics Canada (2024)