

“Denial is an adaptive response,” Furness said. “If you want your cortisol levels to go down, if you want your blood pressure to go down, if you want to be able to sleep, there’s nothing like denying reality that lets you do that.”

For Allen, the findings point to some people’s perception that the virus isn’t something to worry about. This could govern how they navigate their everyday lives, and it poses a concern about how their behaviour will affect others, she added.

“If your perception is that there really isn’t any kind of risk to your health or the wellbeing of others, your perception is also likely to be that this is going to blow over quickly as well,” Allen said, adding that their behaviour to mitigate the risk of infection won’t change, likely to their detriment “and perhaps the detriment of others.”

At the time the survey was conducted and shortly afterwards, COVID-19 cases reached unprecedented highs in Toronto and Ontario. On Wednesday, Ontario **broke another record with more than 1,400 daily cases reported**. In Toronto, daily case numbers have exceeded the 500 mark, prompting the city to enter the “**red zone**” **on Saturday with additional restrictions on gathering**.

For the majority of Canadian workers who do take COVID-19 seriously, their mental health has been hurt by the recent spike in cases, the Morneau Shepell survey revealed. Anxiety, depression, work productivity and optimism levels have all worsened since Morneau Shepell’s last mental health survey in September.

Canadian’s overall mental health has declined 11.4 per cent from pre-pandemic rates, inching closer to mental health rates in April and May when the impact of the pandemic was first felt. Allen said this number is even more worrisome in October due to the prolonged pandemic-induced stress people have been feeling for months.

While 90 per cent of those surveyed said they are handling the health and safety risk of the pandemic well, 35 per cent didn’t have that same confidence in their neighbours, and that percentage of people reported lower mental health scores overall.

But Furness offers some perspective: the small percentage of people that don’t believe in the risk of COVID-19 are likely not the main drivers of the uptick in infection; rather, he believes it is the behaviour of the majority who are confused about mixed-messaging from public health officials.