

Powering the permanent new normal:

How COVID-19 changed British Columbians' daily habits and electricity use.



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This month marks three years since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Back in March 2020 lives were changed as stay-at-home measures were introduced and many British Columbians altered their routines, especially on weekdays. From staying up late and sleeping in, to cooking more and showering less, many made significant changes to their daily routines during the pandemic, and new BC Hydro data reveals some of the shifts that happened in residential electricity use have become the norm for many British Columbians.

Highlights

- New BC Hydro data shows a shift in how British Columbians use electricity at home that started because of the COVID-19 pandemic remains similar three years later.
- When the pandemic began, data showed weekday electricity use peaking later in the morning and earlier in the evening, more closely resembling typical weekend patterns.
- Although this trend rebounded slightly in the late summer and early fall of 2020 when stay-at-home measures were lifted, current data still shows electricity use patterns never quite returned to what they once were.
- A recent survey¹ conducted on behalf of BC Hydro shows this shift can be explained by some British Columbians permanently changing their daily routines because of societal changes such as remote work.
- The data shows routines remain changed for over 70% of British Columbians, especially on weekdays—75% said their weekday routine is still different than it was pre-pandemic. And of this group, 31% indicated their routines have changed dramatically.
- Work is one of these permanent changes—51% said their work routine remains changed compared to pre-pandemic.
 - A majority of those who worked from home at least one day a week during the pandemic still do and this might be why some are still sleeping in (26%) and going to bed later (19%) on weekdays. In fact, the main reason given for sleeping in later is working from home and not having a commute (49%).
 - And with less office time, some are grooming less—15% said they are showering less often in the morning and for shorter periods of time than they used to on pre-pandemic weekdays.
- Being home more on weekdays has also changed the frequency and timing of cooking and chores for many British Columbians. For example:
 - 33% are still cooking dinner at home more often and earlier than pre-pandemic.
 - Baking is also a pandemic pastime that has stuck around: 25% are baking more often than they did pre-pandemic.
 - 70% of those who work from home said they do chores during the day on weekdays, including laundry (48%), dishes (44%), cooking (40%) and vacuuming (15%).
- A reliance on streaming services is even stronger than it was in 2020—nearly 56% are watching more TV/streaming services compared to just 29% who were watching more in September 2020.

Solutions

With many habits permanently shifted because of a life changing pandemic, British Columbians can save energy by doing the following:

- If working from home, use energy-saving features on office equipment—energy-saving modes on devices and equipment typically use around 70% less energy.

¹ Online survey conducted by Majid Khoury of 800 British Columbians from Feb 23 to 27, 2023 margin of error 3.46%.

- Cook with smaller appliances such as air fryers and slow cookers that use up to 75% less energy than a conventional oven.
- Switch to a heat pump to heat in the winter and cool in the summer. Rebates up to \$11,000 are available when switching from fossil fuels.
- Track electricity use with MyHydro to see how at-home activities impact a household's electricity use

A look back at 2020

This March marks three years since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. Through the spring of 2020 stay-at-home measures designed to slow the spread of COVID-19 resulted in many British Columbians spending more time at home and adjusting to new daily routines.

At the start of the pandemic, BC Hydro saw an initial increase in residential electricity use in mid-March 2020 when stay-at-home measures were put in place, but by May 2020 things had returned to near predicted levels for the time of year. However, BC Hydro data at the time showed that new routines had emerged and led to a significant shift in how British Columbians were using electricity.

A not-so-new-anymore normal

From staying up late and sleeping in, to cooking more and showering less, many British Columbians made significant changes to their daily routines during the height of the pandemic, and new BC Hydro data reveals some of the shifts that happened in residential electricity use have become the norm for many British Columbians.

When the pandemic began, data showed weekday electricity use peaking later in the morning and earlier in the evening, more closely resembling typical weekend patterns. Although this trend rebounded slightly in the late summer and early fall of 2020 when stay-at-home measures were lifted, and many went back to work in offices or on a job site, current data is still showing a slight shift like spring 2020.

Much like in 2020, a recent survey conducted on behalf of BC Hydro shows this shift can be explained by some British Columbians permanently changing their daily routines because of societal changes such as remote work.

Comparing habits then vs. now

COVID Impact	Then (September 2020)	Now (February 2023)
Sleeping in on weekdays	12%	26%
Making coffee at home more	20%	34%
Making breakfast at home more	16%	28%
Showering less	14%	15%
Cooking dinner more	26%	33%
Baking more	20%	25%
Ordering takeout more	27%	27%
Watching/streaming more TV and movies	29%	56%

Weekday wonders

Most British Columbians (75%) said their weekday routine remains changed from what it was pre-pandemic, and 62% said their weekend routine remains changed.

Most said what remains changed is their home routine (53%) work routine (51%), or school (13%) routine.

ROUTINES THAT HAVE CHANGED PERMANENTLY SINCE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Home routine
53%



Work routine
51%



School routine
13%

A majority of those who worked from home at least one day a week during the pandemic still do and this might be why some are still sleeping in (26%) and going to bed later (19%) on weekdays. For both those sleeping in and waking up later, most are doing so by about one full hour to an hour and a half.

For those sleeping in on weekdays, the main reason is working from home and not having a commute (49%), followed by a change in routine (39%), going to sleep later at night (38%), having become more relaxed since the pandemic (34%) and not needing as much time as they used to for 'grooming' in the morning. Speaking of which, 15% said they are showering less often in the morning and for shorter periods of time than they used to on pre-pandemic weekdays.

Mealtime and chore changes

For many being home more on weekdays at the height of the pandemic changed the frequency and timing of cooking and chores— and this still holds true. At the beginning of the pandemic most restaurants were temporarily closed, or offering limited takeout options, leading many British Columbians to cook more at home. Many also tried their hand at baking bread or desserts to pass the time.

Baking is a pandemic pastime many have kept—25% are still baking more often than they did pre-pandemic. Meals at home have also shifted—to this day, when it comes to breakfast, 28% of British Columbians said they are making it more at home now than they did pre-pandemic, and 34% are skipping the Starbucks and making coffee more at home too. Of those, 30% are still making breakfast and coffee later in the morning than they did pre-pandemic.

There are similar results for dinner—33% are still cooking dinner at home more often and earlier than they did pre-pandemic, which could explain some of the electricity use shifts such as earlier evening electricity peaks.

When it comes to chores, 70% of those who work from home said they do chores during the day on weekdays, including laundry (48%), dishes (44%), cooking (40%) and vacuuming (15%).

Television reliance

A reliance on streaming services is even stronger than it was in 2020—nearly 56% are watching more TV/streaming services compared to just 29% watching more in September 2020, with most watching in the evenings.

Solutions

With many habits permanently shifted because of a life changing pandemic, British Columbians can save energy by using smaller appliances to cook with such as air fryers and slow cookers that use up to 75% less energy than a conventional oven.

If working from home, use energy-saving features on office equipment—energy-saving modes on devices and equipment typically use around 70% less energy. It is also smart to use a laptop instead of a desktop computer, which uses about 20% less energy.

Switching to a heat pump to heat in the winter and cool in the summer can also help make a big difference in energy use. Rebates up to \$11,000 are available when switching from fossil fuels.

Customers can also track electricity use with MyHydro to see how at-home activities impact a household's electricity use.

For more information on saving energy and rebates on heat pumps, visit bchydro.com/clean.

