

Leading indicator of international arrivals to Canada by air, first quarter 2020

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Highlights

According to data collected via electronic kiosks used at selected Canadian airports, the number of international visitors to Canada arriving by air during March 2020 fell by 61% from the same month in 2019.

At these same airports, 32% fewer Canadian residents returned by air from abroad in March compared with March 2019.

The impact of border restrictions and flight suspensions by carriers resulted in plummeting numbers of both foreign visitors and returning Canadians entering by air in the second half of March.

International arrivals to Canada by air

The number of international arrivals, both visitors from abroad and returning Canadians, by plane is a key indicator of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected international trade and tourism.

The leading indicator of international arrivals to Canada by air provides counts of travellers arriving in Canada at nine large airports with electronic Primary Inspection Kiosks (PIK) covering the first quarters of both 2019 and 2020. Users are cautioned that the indicator excludes Toronto Pearson International Airport Terminal 1 and Calgary International Airport (see Note to readers).

At airports with PIKs, the number of travellers to Canada from abroad by air fell 61% from over 407,000 in March 2019 to 160,000 in March 2020. The number of Canadian residents returning from abroad fell 32% in the same month, from over 1.4 million in 2019 to just over 960,000 in 2020.

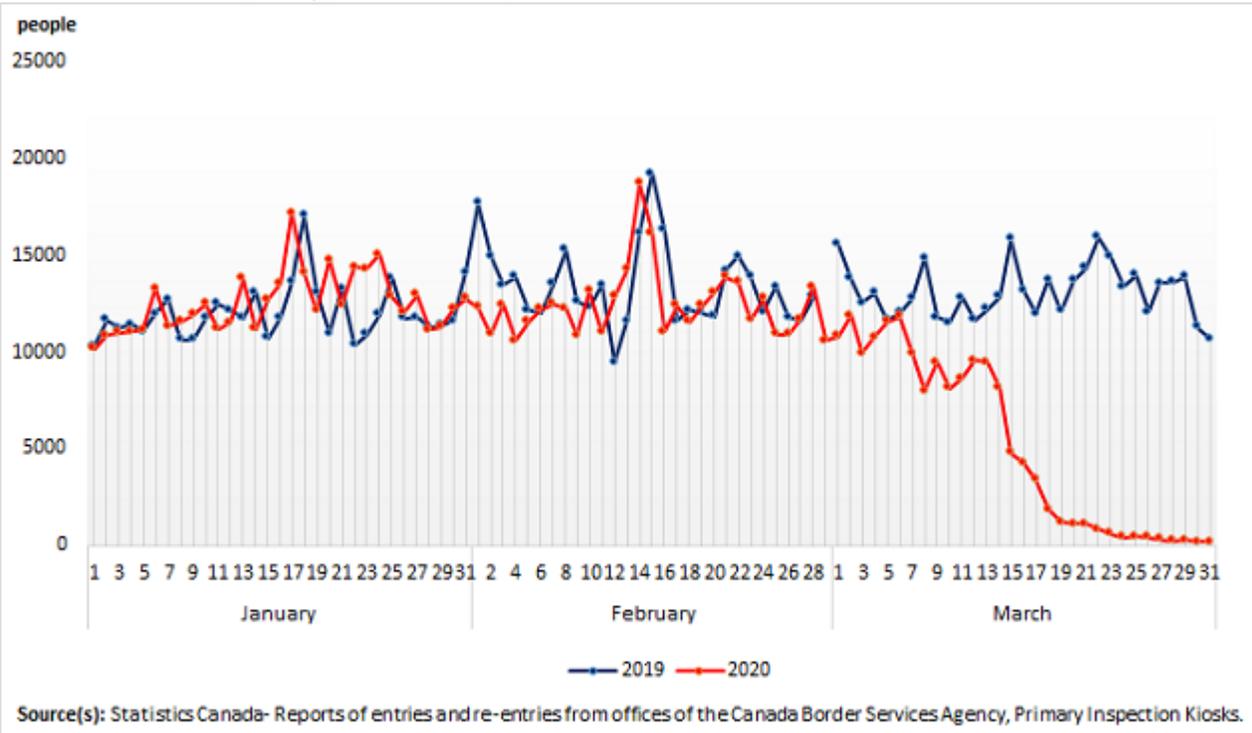
On March 16, 2020, the Government of Canada announced it was closing its international border to people who are not Canadian citizens or permanent residents and, at the same time, restricted international arrivals to four airports starting March 18: Montréal Trudeau, Toronto Pearson, Calgary and Vancouver International airports.

The impact of this restriction was clear. According to the PIK leading indicators, from March 18 to 31, the number of visitors to Canada from abroad declined by 95% for that period in 2020 compared with the same period in 2019. And the number of Canadians returning by air declined by 65% during this same period.

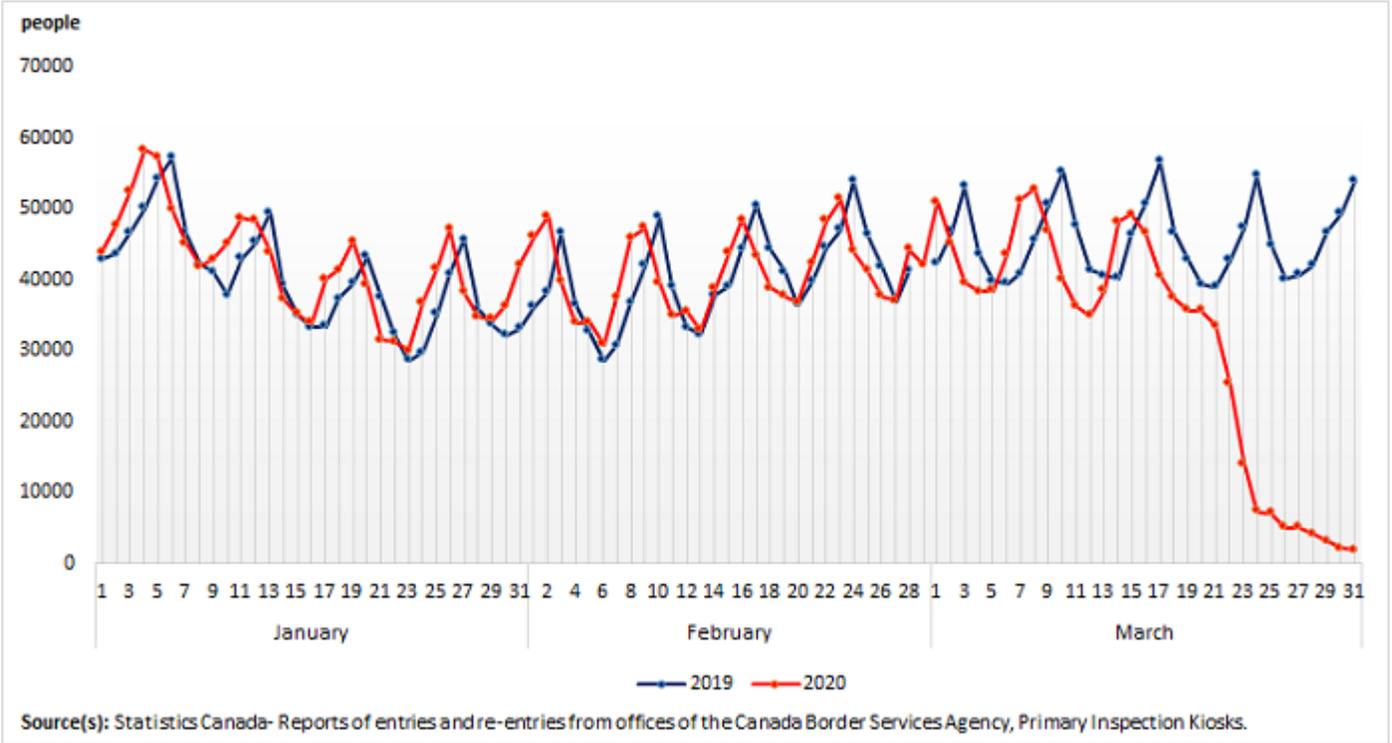
This indicator was used to gain a timely understanding of trends in air arrivals into Canada through the airports where the PIK system is deployed. Again, users are cautioned that the PIK indicator represents only a subset of the total number of international arrivals by air. In 2019, for example, air arrivals captured by PIK at the nine airports used for the indicator represented 57% of total international arrivals by commercial air for Canada.



Infographic 1 – Travellers from abroad entering Canada by plane at airports with primary inspection kiosks, daily, first quarter, 2019 and 2020



Infographic 2 – Canadian residents returning to Canada from abroad by plane at airports with primary inspection kiosks, daily, first quarter, 2019 and 2020



Note to readers

Statistics Canada's Frontier Counts program is produced using administrative data received from the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) on all international travellers who have been cleared for entry or re-entry into Canada. This includes residents of Canada, the United States and overseas entering Canada from abroad.

The CBSA uses various data sources to collect information on travellers entering the country by air. Of these data sources, the Primary Inspection Kiosk (PIK) system yields data on commercial air travellers in an electronic format that requires minimal processing. These data account for the largest share of international travellers entering or returning to Canada by plane.

The electronic PIK system replaced the paper E311 Declaration Cards that were completed by international travellers and submitted to airport border services officers upon arrival in Canada. The PIK indicator is based on nine airports from which there are PIK data covering the first quarters of both 2019 and 2020:

- Halifax International Airport,
- Québec City Jean Lesage International Airport,
- Montréal Pierre Elliott Trudeau International Airport,
- Ottawa International Airport,
- Toronto Pearson International Airport Terminal 3,
- Toronto Island Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport,
- Winnipeg James Armstrong Richardson International Airport,
- Edmonton International Airport, and
- Vancouver International Airport.

Users are advised that the data exclude Toronto Terminal 1 (where PIK has not been fully deployed) and Calgary International Airport (where PIK was not deployed until the second quarter of 2019). The indicator also excludes air travellers who enter Canada using a NEXUS card, as they are not required to complete PIK or E311. These NEXUS travellers are still accounted for in the monthly Frontier Counts statistics on Travel between Canada and other countries.

Data indicating commercial air travellers arriving in Canada in the first quarters of 2019 and 2020 through major airports equipped with system are now available upon request.

Further information on the switch from E311 cards to PIK is available in the document "[Impacts on Statistics Canada travel and tourism data resulting from replacement of E311 declaration cards with Primary Inspection Kiosks](#)".

Finally, data from the PIK system are unadjusted and users making comparisons between February 2019 and February 2020 are advised to note that February 2019 had 28 days, while February 2020 had 29 days.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).