

Retail trade, February 2020

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Tuesday, April 21, 2020

For the month of February, rail blockades and the onset of COVID-19 in Canada affected total seasonally adjusted retail sales by a negligible amount. The push for social distancing, self-isolation and—in some cases—quarantine were only being considered at the time, unlike the current situation where these measures are placing new and evolving pressures on consumers, retailers, producers and their supply chains.

Retail sales rose for the fourth consecutive month, up 0.3% to \$52.2 billion in February. This marked the first time retail sales grew for four months in a row since the period ending in October 2018.

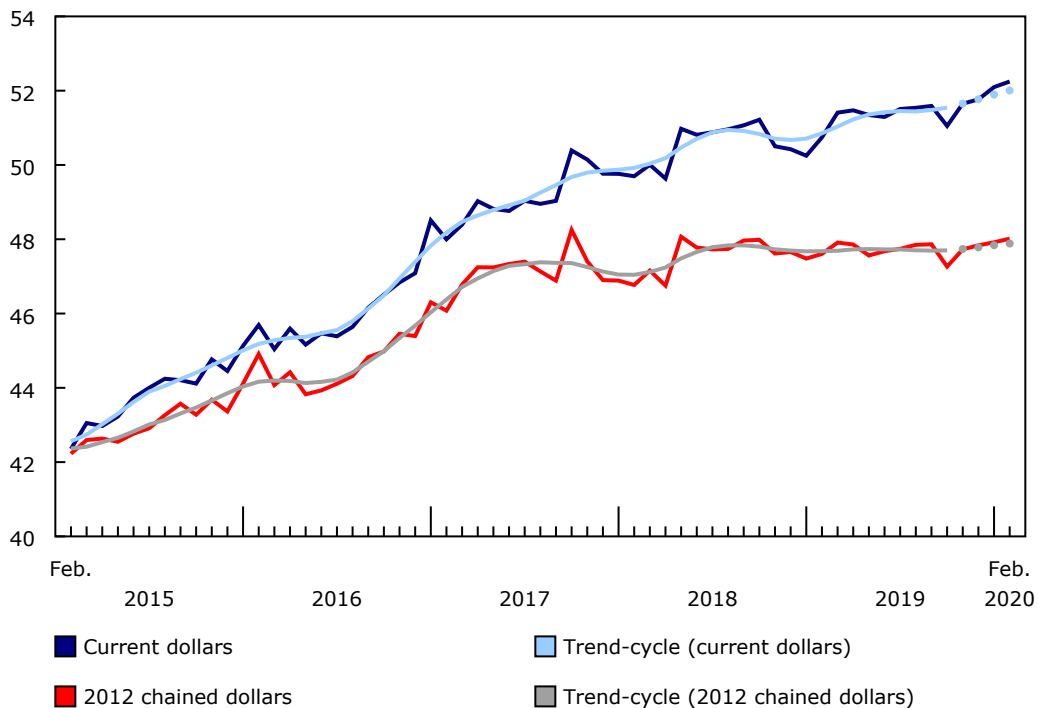
Higher sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers, and general merchandise stores were partially offset by lower sales at food and beverage stores.

Sales were up in 6 of 11 subsectors, representing 62.5% of retail trade.

Retail sales in volume terms increased 0.2%.

Chart 1
Retail sales increase in February

billions of dollars



Source(s): Tables [20-10-0008-01](#) and [20-10-0078-01](#).

Rail blockades and COVID-19

Approximately 25% of Canadian retailers reported that their business activities in February had been affected by the rail blockades and/or COVID-19. While a number of retailers reported impacts on their business activities, less than 0.5% of Canadian retailers were shut down for any period of time in February. Shutdowns ranged in length from 1 to 14 days.

Approximately 12% of retailers reported that both the rail blockades and COVID-19 had negatively affected their sales in February. Negative impacts were more frequently reported by electronics and appliance store retailers as well as gasoline stations. In contrast, 1.6% of retailers reported higher sales as a result of these disruptions, with sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores, building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers and health and personal care stores more commonly reporting a positive impact.

At least 8.7% of retailers reported that their activities had been affected by COVID-19, while 5.2% reported that their activities had been affected by the rail blockades. Both disruptions led to transportation delays, which caused retailers to wait longer to receive their materials and slowed down the movement of products to market. Retailers also noted lower levels of customer traffic in February due to COVID-19.

On an unadjusted basis, the largest estimated impacts on sales in dollar terms were in motor vehicle and parts dealers (-\$171 million), gasoline stations (-\$93 million) and miscellaneous store retailers (-\$68 million). However, it was very difficult for respondents to provide distinct estimates of the respective impacts of the rail blockades, COVID-19, or other specific events on their business activities. Therefore, estimates of impact should be interpreted with caution.

Higher sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers and general merchandise stores

Sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers, which are the retail industry's largest subsector, continued to grow in February (+1.1%), following a 2.1% increase in January. Since the beginning of March, the subsector has been affected by efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19, which could lower sales in coming months.

General merchandise stores sales grew 1.4% in February, their largest increase since June 2019 (+3.0%). Many retailers in this subsector were deemed essential and continued to operate in March, while retailers in other subsectors temporarily closed or increased their e-commerce presence. This will likely drive a shift in consumer demand toward the general merchandise store subsector, which could positively affect its sales.

Sales at gasoline stations were up 0.6%, while they rose 0.3% in volume terms.

Core retail sales, which exclude motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations, fell for the second consecutive month, down 0.1% in February. This was primarily attributable to declines in food and beverage stores (-1.0%), led by supermarkets and other grocery stores (-1.0%).

While many retailers may be negatively affected by COVID-19, grocery stores are facing historically high demand for goods, which could lead to increased sales in March. According to Statistics Canada's analytical article "[Canadian consumers prepare for COVID-19](#)," sales at grocery stores during the week ending on March 15 were 38% higher than the average weekly level in 2019.

Sales increase in five provinces

Retail sales in Ontario rose 0.7% as a result of higher sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers. In the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Toronto, retail sales were up 1.5%.

For the first time in two months, retail sales in Alberta (-0.4%) declined. This was primarily attributable to declines at food and beverage stores and gasoline stations.

Following a 2.2% gain in January, retail sales in Quebec fell 0.4% in February. In the CMA of Montréal, retail sales increased 1.4%.

E-commerce sales by Canadian retailers

The figures in this section are based on unadjusted (that is, not seasonally adjusted) estimates.

On an unadjusted basis, retail e-commerce sales were \$1.6 billion in February, accounting for 3.6% of total retail trade. On a year-over-year basis, retail e-commerce increased 17.8%, while total unadjusted retail sales rose 7.0%.

In March, many Canadian retailers opened or expanded e-commerce platforms in response to social distancing measures and physical store closures. These changes are captured in the Monthly Retail Trade Survey, and will be reported in the March data release. However, purchases by Canadians from foreign e-commerce retailers are not captured in Canadian retail sales data. These purchases are captured as imports in Canadian international merchandise trade data.

Note to readers

All data in this release are seasonally adjusted and expressed in current dollars, unless otherwise noted.

For information regarding cannabis statistics, consult the [Cannabis Stats Hub](#).

Seasonally adjusted estimates for cannabis store retailers are presented in unadjusted form as there is no seasonal pattern established by official statistics yet. Establishing such a pattern requires several months of observed data. In the interim, the seasonally adjusted estimates for cannabis store retailers will be identical to the unadjusted figures.

Statistics Canada's retail e-commerce figures include the electronic sales of two distinct types of retailers. The first type do not have a storefront. These businesses are commonly referred to as pure-play Internet retailers and are classified to North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 45411—Electronic Shopping and Mail Order Houses. The second type have a storefront and are commonly referred to as brick-and-mortar retailers. If the online operations of a brick-and-mortar retailer are separately managed, they too are classified to NAICS 45411.

Some common electronic commerce transactions, such as travel and accommodation bookings, ticket purchases, and financial transactions, are not included in Canadian retail sales figures.

For more information on retail e-commerce in Canada, see "[Retail E-Commerce in Canada](#)."

Total retail sales expressed in volume terms are calculated by deflating current dollar values using consumer price indexes. The retail sales series in chained (2012) dollars is a chained Fisher volume index with 2012 as the reference year.

Real-time tables

Real-time tables 20-10-0054-01 and 20-10-0079-01 will be updated soon.

Next release

Data on retail trade for March will be released on May 22.

Table 1
Retail sales by province, territory and census metropolitan area – Seasonally adjusted

	February 2019	January 2020 ^r	February 2020 ^p	January to February 2020	February 2019 to February 2020
	millions of dollars			% change	
Canada	50,742	52,096	52,247	0.3	3.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	732	742	749	0.9	2.3
Prince Edward Island	205	217	215	-0.7	4.7
Nova Scotia	1,341	1,388	1,389	0.0	3.6
New Brunswick	1,084	1,154	1,134	-1.8	4.6
Quebec	11,017	11,233	11,191	-0.4	1.6
Montréal	5,399	5,342	5,416	1.4	0.3
Ontario	18,866	19,661	19,800	0.7	4.9
Toronto	7,781	8,303	8,431	1.5	8.4
Manitoba	1,766	1,768	1,774	0.4	0.5
Saskatchewan	1,623	1,646	1,644	-0.1	1.3
Alberta	6,732	6,826	6,799	-0.4	1.0
British Columbia	7,204	7,283	7,370	1.2	2.3
Vancouver	3,324	3,314	3,378	1.9	1.6
Yukon	69	75	77	2.9	11.1
Northwest Territories	65	66	66	0.9	2.4
Nunavut	39	39	39	-0.0	-0.7

^r revised

^p preliminary

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.

Source(s): Table [20-10-0008-01](#).

Table 2
Retail sales by industry – Seasonally adjusted

	February 2019	January 2020 ^r	February 2020 ^p	January to February 2020	February 2019 to February 2020
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total retail trade (current dollars)	50,742	52,096	52,247	0.3	3.0
Total retail trade (2012 chained dollars)	47,605	47,917	48,016	0.2	0.9
Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers	36,927	37,963	37,957	-0.0	2.8
Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations	31,744	32,505	32,467	-0.1	2.3
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	13,815	14,134	14,290	1.1	3.4
New car dealers	11,102	11,387	11,465	0.7	3.3
Used car dealers	1,014	1,029	1,073	4.2	5.8
Other motor vehicle dealers	827	863	886	2.7	7.1
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	872	854	866	1.3	-0.7
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,553	1,566	1,569	0.2	1.0
Furniture stores	962	1,000	1,003	0.3	4.2
Home furnishings stores	591	567	566	-0.0	-4.2
Electronics and appliance stores	1,207	1,123	1,117	-0.5	-7.4
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	3,071	3,278	3,277	-0.0	6.7
Food and beverage stores	10,698	10,958	10,848	-1.0	1.4
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	7,352	7,567	7,490	-1.0	1.9
Convenience stores	676	672	665	-1.0	-1.7
Specialty food stores	663	672	658	-2.1	-0.8
Beer, wine and liquor stores	2,007	2,048	2,035	-0.6	1.4
Health and personal care stores	4,000	4,043	4,080	0.9	2.0
Gasoline stations	5,183	5,458	5,491	0.6	5.9
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	2,878	2,941	2,902	-1.3	0.9
Clothing stores	2,231	2,301	2,275	-1.1	2.0
Shoe stores	338	326	326	-0.0	-3.7
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	309	315	302	-4.0	-2.1
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	1,036	1,009	1,056	4.7	1.9
General merchandise stores	5,978	6,071	6,157	1.4	3.0
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,324	1,515	1,459	-3.7	10.2
Cannabis stores ¹	52	154	150	-2.7	190.1

^r revised

^p preliminary

1. Data for this Canadian industry are presented in unadjusted form as there is no seasonal pattern established by official statistics yet.

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.

Source(s): Tables [20-10-0008-01](#) and [20-10-0078-01](#).

Table 3
Retail sales by industry at 2012 constant prices – Seasonally adjusted

	February 2019	January 2020 ^r	February 2020 ^p	January to February 2020	February 2019 to February 2020
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total retail trade at 2012 constant prices¹	47,639	47,920	48,024	0.2	0.8
Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers	35,557	35,804	35,808	0.0	0.7
Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations	30,112	30,353	30,343	-0.0	0.8
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	12,082	12,116	12,216	0.8	1.1
New car dealers	9,672	9,731	9,773	0.4	1.0
Used car dealers	875	871	906	4.0	3.5
Other motor vehicle dealers	716	722	737	2.1	2.9
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	820	792	800	1.0	-2.4
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,490	1,505	1,512	0.5	1.5
Furniture stores	931	979	985	0.6	5.8
Home furnishings stores	559	526	527	0.2	-5.7
Electronics and appliance stores	1,423	1,360	1,355	-0.4	-4.8
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	2,763	2,892	2,893	0.0	4.7
Food and beverage stores	9,534	9,548	9,462	-0.9	-0.8
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	6,586	6,611	6,555	-0.8	-0.5
Convenience stores	551	528	520	-1.5	-5.6
Specialty food stores	575	569	556	-2.3	-3.3
Beer, wine and liquor stores	1,822	1,841	1,831	-0.5	0.5
Health and personal care stores	4,189	4,168	4,206	0.9	0.4
Gasoline stations	5,445	5,451	5,465	0.3	0.4
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	2,791	2,786	2,754	-1.1	-1.3
Clothing stores	2,181	2,188	2,165	-1.1	-0.7
Shoe stores	327	315	315	0.0	-3.7
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	282	284	274	-3.5	-2.8
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	1,005	965	1,010	4.7	0.5
General merchandise stores	5,692	5,724	5,801	1.3	1.9
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,226	1,406	1,351	-3.9	10.2
Cannabis stores ²	49	154	150	-2.6	206.1

^r revised

^p preliminary

1. Calculated using the Laspeyres method.

2. Data for this Canadian industry are presented in unadjusted form as there is no seasonal pattern established by official statistics yet.

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.

Source(s): Table 20-10-0078-01.

Table 4
Retail e-commerce sales – Unadjusted

	February 2019	January 2020	February 2020	February 2020
	millions of dollars			year-over-year % change
Retail trade sales (44-453)	40,157	43,894	42,767	6.5
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses sales (45411)	974	1,283	1,226	25.9
Retail e-commerce ¹	1,328	1,667	1,565	17.8
Retail e-commerce ¹ (% of total retail trade)	3.23	3.69	3.56	...

... not applicable

1. Retail e-commerce includes e-sales from both store retailers included in the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 44-453 and non-store retailers included in electronic shopping and mail order houses (NAICS 45411).

Note(s): For more information on retail e-commerce, see "[Retail E-Commerce in Canada](#)."

Source(s): Table [20-10-0072-01](#).

Available tables: [20-10-0008-01](#), [20-10-0072-01](#) and [20-10-0078-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [2406](#) and [2408](#).

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).