

Selected police-reported crime and calls for service during the COVID-19 pandemic, March to August 2020

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During the first six months of the COVID-19 pandemic, 17 police services across Canada reported that selected criminal incidents were down by almost one-fifth (17%) compared with the same period a year earlier. In contrast, the number of calls for service rose 8%, particularly wellness checks, mental health calls and calls to attend domestic disturbances.

When the physical distancing measures that were introduced in mid-March to control the pandemic started easing in May, and businesses, services and public spaces gradually re-opened throughout the summer, the volume of crimes and calls for service began to rise.

Since the start of the pandemic, Statistics Canada has committed to measuring the impact of COVID-19 on our daily lives. Examining levels of police-reported crime and calls for service is an important part of understanding the well-being of individuals and communities during this difficult time. This analysis follows the initial release of March to June data in [September 2020](#).

Fewer selected police-reported criminal incidents during the first six months of the pandemic

A special monthly data collection from 17 police services shows that there were 17% fewer criminal incidents for select offences during the first six months of the pandemic compared with the same period one year earlier. Collectively, these police services reported fewer incidents in 12 of the 13 crime types surveyed from March to August. The lone exception was uttering threats by a family member, with police reporting 4% more incidents during the first six months of the pandemic compared with the year before.

These 17 police services are some of the largest nationally and serve over half (59%) of the population of Canada. Nevertheless, these results are not representative of overall police-reported crime in Canada and caution should be exercised when interpreting the findings from this data collection activity. The criminal offences surveyed include several serious offences such as sexual assaults, assaults, robbery and break and enter (see the note to readers for further explanation of the police services and crimes included).

Fewer violent crimes and property crimes reported to the police services during the pandemic

During the early months of the pandemic, the 17 police services reported a 20% decrease in sexual assaults, including those committed by non-family members (-20%) and family members (-13%) compared with the same period a year earlier. The number of reported assaults also declined, including those committed by non-family (-8%) and family members (-3%).

Victimization surveys have shown that rates of reporting to the police are lower for sexual assaults and spousal violence than for other types of crimes. For those experiencing violence, especially within the home, previous releases have shown that [accessing services during the pandemic](#) may be more difficult because of restricted contact with networks and sources of formal (schools, counsellors, victim services) and informal (family and friends) support.

With cities and communities shut down and Canadians staying at home, it is perhaps not surprising that police reported a drop in some of the more common types of property crime. Police services in this study reported that shoplifting was down by half (-50%), residential breaking and entering down by one-quarter (-25%) and motor vehicle theft down by nearly one-fifth (-19%) from March to August compared with the same period the year before.



Crime fell in April but then rose as businesses, services and public spaces began re-opening

The police services in this study reported a decline in almost all types of crimes from March to April 2020, when non-essential businesses were closed and most Canadians stayed at home. However, as businesses, services and public spaces began to re-open, police reported that crime increased from April to May (+3%), May to June (+11%) and again from June to July (+12%), with violent crime starting to rise in May and property crime starting to grow in June.

Most types of violent crimes covered by this study increased in May, while property crimes continued to fall. However, in June and July, more violent and property crimes were reported. Although the Ontario Provincial Police were unable to report August data for this release, collectively, the remaining 16 police services reported a 1% decrease in crimes in August.

Calls for service to police up during the first six months of the pandemic compared with the same period a year earlier

Police perform many duties, including responding to events that are directly related to public safety and well-being, even if they are not criminal in nature. These events are referred to as calls for service.

Police services in this study responded to 8% more calls for service from March to August than they did over the same period in 2019. Most notably, police services that were able to report data on calls for service responded to more calls related to general well-being checks (+12%), domestic disturbances (+10%) and mental health-related calls such as responses to a person in emotional crisis or apprehensions under the *Mental Health Act* (+10%).

Calls to police classified as domestic disturbances or domestic disputes can involve anything from a verbal quarrel to reports of violence at a residence.

More calls for service reported throughout the summer

Looking at the month-to-month trend during the pandemic, police in this study reported a drop in overall calls for service from March to April. However, during this time, well-being checks rose 10%, and the high volume of domestic disturbance calls edged down 1%. Thereafter, calls for service rose by 10% in May, 2% in June and 4% in July (**correction**), with domestic disturbance and well-being checks rising steadily throughout the summer.

Police involved in enforcing measures related to managing the pandemic

The police, along with by-law and public health officers, have been responsible for enforcing legislation related to containing the pandemic. These included enforcing municipal by-laws, provincial and territorial emergency health acts and the federal *Quarantine Act*. However, local police do not usually enforce by-laws and the enforcement of provincial or territorial emergency health acts is shared with public health officers. As such, data on these enforcements are a reflection of police involvement and not necessarily the number of occurrences.

From mid-March to July, the 15 police services that provided data on the enforcement of provincial/territorial pandemic-related legislation reported involvement in 14,303 infractions against these acts. Spikes in provincial/territorial pandemic infractions were noted at two periods. The first occurred in April toward the beginning of the pandemic (+250%) and again in July (+18%) when more businesses began to re-open and larger social 'bubbles' were permitted between households (month-to-month comparisons are not made with August due to incomplete data).

To limit the spread of COVID-19, the Government of Canada implemented emergency orders in March 2020 requiring mandatory 14-day quarantine or isolation for all travellers entering Canada. As of August 31, according to data from the Public Health Agency of Canada, the Agency had sent the RCMP 86,640 high and medium priority referrals with only a small minority requiring a physical police check. Of the 15,960 law enforcement

follow-ups conducted by August 31, 2020 that have been reported to the Public Health Agency of Canada, 47 have resulted in fines for offences under the *Quarantine Act*, and 2 in court summons for charges laid under the *Quarantine Act*.

Note to readers

The Canadian Centre for Justice and Community Safety Statistics is conducting a special survey collection from a sample of police services across Canada to measure the impact of COVID-19 on selected types of crimes and calls for service. In addition, counts of police responses to infractions against municipal by-laws or provincial / territorial acts related to the containment of the COVID-19 pandemic were requested. This report includes findings from March to August 2020 compared with the same period a year earlier. Data will continue to be collected monthly until December 2020 and reported regularly.

This is the second release of this special data collection by Statistics Canada. Please note that data published this September for the March to June period have been revised.

For this reference period of March to August, 17 police services provided data on a voluntary basis. These include: Calgary Police Service, Edmonton Police Service, Halton Regional Police Service, Kennebecasis Regional Police Force, London Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police (OPP), Ottawa Police Service, Regina Police Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Royal Newfoundland Constabulary, Saskatoon Police Service, Toronto Police Service, Vancouver Police Department, Victoria Police Department, Waterloo Regional Police Service, Winnipeg Police Service, and York Regional Police.

Police services that responded to this survey serve over half (59%) of the Canadian population. The RCMP, Edmonton Police Service and Winnipeg Police Service were unable to provide calls for service data, therefore, police services providing these data serve one-third (32%) of the Canadian population. At the time of this release, the OPP was unable to provide August data.

Selected crime types include: assaults; sexual assaults; assaults against a peace or public officer, uttering threats; robbery; dangerous operation causing death or bodily harm, impaired driving or impaired driving causing death or bodily harm; breaking and entering; motor vehicle theft; shoplifting; fraud / identity theft / identity fraud, and; failure to comply with order.

Calls for service are defined as calls received by police services that are citizen-generated or officer initiated, and required the tasking of police resources (such as a call to a 9-1-1 emergency line that resulted in the dispatch of an officer).

Correction note

On April 22, 2021, data for "Calls for service, overdose"; "Calls for service, child welfare check"; "Calls for service, child custody matter – domestic"; and "Total calls for service" for all reference periods were corrected due to an error in the application of selected response categories.

Table 1
Selected police-reported crime and calls for service during the COVID-19 pandemic, March 2020 to August 2020 (correction)

	March to August 2019	March to August 2020	Difference from 2019	Difference from 2019
	number		percent change	
Selected violations and calls for service^{1,2}				
Selected violations				
Total criminal incidents	392,391	324,041	-68,350	-17.4
Total assaults (levels 1, 2, 3)	87,096	80,306	-6,790	-7.8
Assaults by non-family (levels 1, 2, 3)	51,116	46,879	-4,237	-8.3
Assaults by family (levels 1, 2, 3)	21,422	20,706	-716	-3.3
Assaults where relationship type is unknown	14,558	12,721	-1,837	-12.6
Total sexual assaults (levels 1, 2, 3)	9,635	7,739	-1,896	-19.7
Sexual assaults by non-family (levels 1, 2, 3)	6,028	4,819	-1,209	-20.1
Sexual assaults by family (levels 1, 2, 3)	1,628	1,409	-219	-13.5
Sexual assaults where relationship type is unknown	1,979	1,511	-468	-23.6
Uttering threats	17,779	16,834	-945	-5.3
Uttering threats by non-family	10,234	9,454	-780	-7.6
Uttering threats by family	2,342	2,439	97	4.1
Uttering threats where relationship type is unknown	5,203	4,941	-262	-5.0
Assault against peace or public officer (level 1)	3,097	2,840	-257	-8.3
Total robbery	7,297	5,607	-1,690	-23.2
Dangerous operation, causing death or bodily harm	260	194	-66	-25.4
Impaired driving, causing death or bodily harm	298	226	-72	-24.2
Total breaking and entering ³	55,667	45,390	-10,277	-18.5
Breaking and entering, non-residential	29,399	25,621	-3,778	-12.9
Breaking and entering, residential	24,973	18,814	-6,159	-24.7
Motor vehicle theft	29,786	24,167	-5,619	-18.9
Shoplifting	51,223	25,806	-25,417	-49.6
Fraud / identity theft / identity fraud	53,661	50,344	-3,317	-6.2
Fail to comply with order	44,753	36,112	-8,641	-19.3
Impaired driving, operating while impaired	31,839	28,476	-3,363	-10.6
Provincial / Territorial acts related to COVID-19	...	16,826
Selected calls for service^{2,4}				
Total calls for service (correction)	136,842	147,480	10,638	7.8
Domestic disturbances/disputes	56,375	61,739	5,364	9.5
Total mental health	37,412	41,228	3,816	10.2
Mental Health Act (MHA) apprehension	16,522	17,673	1,151	7.0
Mental health - other	20,890	23,555	2,665	12.8
Suicide / attempted suicide	16,699	15,370	-1,329	-8.0
Overdose ⁵ (correction)	3,141	3,100	-41	-1.3
Child welfare check (correction)	293	351	58	19.8
Wellness check - general	22,548	25,195	2,647	11.7
Child custody matter - domestic (correction)	374	497	123	32.9

... not applicable

- Includes data reported by a sample of seventeen police services across Canada. At the time of this report, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) were unable to provide a submission for the month of August.
- Calls for service (CFS) are defined as calls received by police services that are citizen-generated or officer initiated, and required the tasking of police resources (e.g., a call to a 9-1-1 emergency line that resulted in the dispatch of an officer). Calls for service information was reported by 14 police services.
- Total incidents of breaking and entering does not equal the sum of incidents of breaking and entering reported by residential and non-residential location type, as some police services were unable to report the location type for all cases.
- Some police services who provided CFS information overall were not able to report for every call type. In addition, police services in some cases were unable to separate the call types as presented, and provided counts that combine one or more call type together. For example, calls for domestic disputes may include child welfare situations, and calls for other mental health may include some *Mental Health Act* (MHA) apprehensions. Interpret calls for service data with caution.
- Overdose counts do not reflect all overdose incidents occurring within police service boundaries as response is frequently by paramedics. Where police do not attend, the occurrence will not appear in police records.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Special police-reported crime statistics - Special COVID-19 report to Statistics Canada

Table 2
Selected police-reported crime and calls for service during the COVID-19 pandemic, March 2020 to July 2020 (correction)

	March	April	March to April	May	April to May	June	May to June	July	June to July
	number		percent change	number	percent change	number	percent change	number	percent change
Selected violations and calls for service^{1,2}									
Selected violations									
Total criminal incidents	56,626	47,743	-15.7	49,026	2.7	54,325	10.8	60,728	11.8
Total assaults (levels 1, 2, 3)	12,521	11,088	-11.4	13,036	17.6	13,994	7.3	15,828	13.1
Assaults by non-family (levels 1, 2, 3)	7,287	6,375	-12.5	7,604	19.3	8,380	10.2	9,266	10.6
Assaults by family (levels 1, 2, 3)	3,268	3,152	-3.5	3,490	10.7	3,464	-0.7	3,927	13.4
Assaults where relationship type is unknown	1,966	1,561	-20.6	1,942	24.4	2,150	10.7	2,635	22.6
Total sexual assaults (levels 1, 2, 3)	1,322	879	-33.5	1,160	32.0	1,401	20.8	1,560	11.3
Sexual assaults by non-family (levels 1, 2, 3)	827	539	-34.8	719	33.4	887	23.4	986	11.2
Sexual assaults by family (levels 1, 2, 3)	222	194	-12.6	221	13.9	251	13.6	270	7.6
Sexual assaults where relationship type is unknown	273	146	-46.5	220	50.7	263	19.5	304	15.6
Uttering threats	2,570	2,429	-5.5	2,827	16.4	2,962	4.8	3,291	11.1
Uttering threats by non-family	1,425	1,397	-2.0	1,605	14.9	1,608	0.2	1,854	15.3
Uttering threats by family	347	336	-3.2	428	27.4	450	5.1	488	8.4
Uttering threats where relationship type is unknown	798	696	-12.8	794	14.1	904	13.9	949	5.0
Assault against peace or public officer (level 1)	484	444	-8.3	513	15.5	518	1.0	499	-3.7
Total robbery	1,272	770	-39.5	749	-2.7	807	7.7	1,010	25.2
Dangerous operation, causing death or bodily harm	19	30	57.9	31	3.3	24	-22.6	40	66.7
Impaired driving, causing death or bodily harm	25	21	-16.0	34	61.9	21	-38.2	33	57.1
Total breaking and entering ³	8,684	8,536	-1.7	6,765	-20.7	6,859	1.4	7,171	4.5
Breaking and entering, non-residential	5,220	5,408	3.6	3,866	-28.5	3,751	-3.0	3,706	-1.2
Breaking and entering, residential	3,382	3,078	-9.0	2,841	-7.7	3,051	7.4	3,424	12.2
Motor vehicle theft	4,352	3,996	-8.2	3,454	-13.6	3,766	9.0	4,357	15.7
Shoplifting	7,284	3,300	-54.7	2,908	-11.9	3,405	17.1	4,346	27.6
Fraud / identity theft / identity fraud	8,657	7,377	-14.8	7,003	-5.1	9,051	29.2	9,796	8.2
Fail to comply with order	5,755	5,426	-5.7	5,798	6.9	6,220	7.3	6,757	8.6

Table 2 - continued
Selected police-reported crime and calls for service during the COVID-19 pandemic, March 2020 to July 2020 (correction)

	March	April	March to April	May	April to May	June	May to June	July	June to July
Impaired driving, operating while impaired	3,681	3,447	-6.4	4,748	37.7	5,297	11.6	6,040	14.0
Provincial / Territorial acts related to COVID-19									
Selected calls for service^{2,4}	1,351	4,734	250.4	3,317	-29.9	2,248	-32.2	2,653	18.0
Total calls for service (correction)	23,615	23,259	-1.5	25,590	10.0	26,083	1.9	27,084	3.8
Domestic disturbances/disputes	10,141	10,088	-0.5	10,828	7.3	10,937	1.0	11,557	5.7
Total mental health <i>Mental Health Act</i> (MHA)	6,449	6,171	-4.3	7,148	15.8	7,574	6.0	7,332	-3.2
apprehension	2,846	2,647	-7.0	3,155	19.2	3,285	4.1	3,408	3.7
Mental health - other	3,603	3,524	-2.2	3,993	13.3	4,289	7.4	3,924	-8.5
Suicide / attempted suicide	2,874	2,504	-12.9	2,839	13.4	2,539	-10.6	2,793	10.0
Overdose ⁵ (correction)	519	512	-1.3	545	6.4	461	-15.4	538	16.7
Child welfare check (correction)	50	50	0.0	43	-14.0	76	76.7	67	-11.8
Wellness check - general	3,504	3,846	9.8	4,128	7.3	4,407	6.8	4,691	6.4
Child custody matter - domestic (correction)	78	88	12.8	59	-33.0	89	50.8	106	19.1

1. Includes data reported by a sample of seventeen police services across Canada.
2. Calls for service (CFS) are defined as calls received by police services that are citizen-generated or officer initiated, and required the tasking of police resources (e.g., a call to a 9-1-1 emergency line that resulted in the dispatch of an officer). Calls for service information was reported by 14 police services.
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5. Overdose counts do not reflect all overdose incidents occurring within police service boundaries as response is frequently by paramedics. Where police do not attend, the occurrence will not appear in police records.

Source(s): Statistics Canada, Special police-reported crime statistics - Special COVID-19 report to Statistics Canada

Available tables: [table 35-10-0169-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: [survey number 3302](#).

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).