

Retail Commodity Survey, October 2020

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in *The Daily*, Tuesday, January 12, 2021

Retail sales totalled \$56.7 billion in October, up 8.2% from the same month a year earlier. This was the sector's fifth consecutive year-over-year increase in sales. Higher sales were reported in 13 of the 19 commodity categories.

Looking ahead to November, the advance estimate provided by the [Monthly Retail Trade Survey](#) suggests that unadjusted total retail sales increased by 5.1%. Owing to its preliminary nature, this figure is expected to be revised.

Sales of food remain strong

With COVID-19 restrictions related to the second wave implemented across several provinces, diminished options for dining out further bolstered growth in food sales, which were up 11.4% from the same month a year earlier. This was the largest gain in dollar terms among all product categories. Seven of the nine products within the category posted increases in October, with the largest gains recorded for fresh fruit and vegetables (+17.7%), packaged food dry goods, not elsewhere categorized (+12.7%), and fresh meat and poultry (+14.1%). In the product category, cookies, confectionery and snack food (-1.0%) saw the largest decline, as COVID-19 restrictions related to Halloween resulted in declining demand for candy and other Halloween-related treats.

Higher sales in soft drinks and alcoholic beverages (+13.1%) were largely attributable to increases in the sale of alcoholic beverages (+13.2%).

Renovation supplies build on growth

In October, Canadian retailers saw continued growth on spending in home improvement materials and upgrades around the house. Hardware, tools, and renovation and lawn and garden products continued to show strong growth (+27.7%), marking the sixth consecutive month of year-over-year gains for the product category. Sales of lumber and other renovation materials and supplies (+28.4%) led the category, sustained by continued demand into October.

Sales of major home appliances increased 43.3% to \$750 million in October, marking a record high for the product category. Sales of small home appliances (+22.1%) were also up in the month.

Used vehicles drive automotive sales

Motor vehicle sales increased for the third consecutive month, rising 8.0% compared with the same month a year earlier. Growth in the product category was largely driven by the sale of used motor vehicles, up 19.9% in October. The sale of new motor vehicles continued to lag behind the lower-cost alternative, increasing a modest 2.3% in the month. Sales of new motor vehicles were dampened by declining sales of new passenger automobiles (-15.8%), which offset the gain in sales of new minivans, sport utility vehicles and light trucks (+6.6%).

For the sixth consecutive month, automotive fuels sales recorded the largest decrease in the sector, down 21.9% on a year-over-year basis. Lower prices and stagnant demand contributed to the lackluster sales.

Sales activity grows at electronic shopping and mail-order houses

With pandemic-related measures leading various store types to shutter their physical locations, consumers were forced to find alternative methods to shop. Over the second and third quarters of 2020, sales at the electronic shopping and mail-order houses within the non-store retailer's subsector accounted for 3.9% of retail trade, up from 2.5% in the same two quarters the previous year. Sales totalled \$6.0 billion in the third quarter of 2020, up 45.7% compared with the same quarter in the previous year. As restrictions began to lift in certain regions in the third quarter of 2020, sales fell 7.0% compared with the second quarter.



Table 1
Sales by type of commodity, all retail stores - Seasonally unadjusted

	October 2019 ^r	September 2020 ^r	October 2020 ^p	October 2019 to October 2020
	millions of dollars			% change
Total commodities, retail trade commissions and miscellaneous services	52,425,670	55,671,168	56,708,936	8.2
Food	9,267,699	9,860,850	10,320,110	11.4
Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages	2,958,524	3,254,742	3,345,403	13.1
Cannabis products	129,980	257,035	270,030	107.7
Clothing	2,815,590	2,341,588	2,527,872	-10.2
Footwear	649,370	618,675	622,012	-4.2
Jewellery and watches, luggage and briefcases	403,357	330,423	348,660	-13.6
Home furniture, furnishings, housewares, appliances and electronics	4,353,191	5,078,318	5,136,564	18.0
Sporting and leisure products (except publications, audio and video recordings, and game software)	774,381	990,759	1,014,311	31.0
Publications	251,977	275,356	236,882	-6.0
Audio and video recordings, and game software	104,486	71,634	80,167	-23.3
Motor vehicles	10,725,197	12,326,673	11,580,916	8.0
Recreational vehicles	571,479	833,658	726,856	27.2
Motor vehicle parts, accessories and supplies	2,299,530	1,903,949	2,463,320	7.1
Automotive and household fuels	4,648,790	3,659,524	3,646,287	-21.6
Home health products	3,229,504	3,534,297	3,743,732	15.9
Infant care, personal and beauty products	1,168,667	1,192,567	1,212,156	3.7
Hardware, tools, and renovation and lawn and garden products	3,745,927	4,800,052	4,783,819	27.7
Miscellaneous products	2,476,206	2,708,425	2,700,813	9.1
Total retail trade commissions and miscellaneous services	1,851,816	1,632,644	1,949,025	5.2

^r revised

^p preliminary

Note(s): Data may not add up to totals due to rounding.

Source(s): Table 20-10-0017-01.

Note to readers

The Retail Commodity Survey collects national-level retail sales data by commodity, from the same businesses surveyed in the Monthly Retail Trade Survey. No data have been seasonally adjusted. All percentage changes are year over year.

New retail commodity data for e-commerce now available!

Estimates from the [Retail Commodity Survey](#) are now available for the electronic shopping and mail-order houses industry (North American Industry Classification System code 454110).

E-commerce figures of brick-and-mortar retailers are included with the commodity sales of the retailer. If the online operations of a brick-and-mortar retailer are separately managed, they are classified to North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) 45411—Electronic Shopping and Mail Order Houses. Businesses that are commonly referred to as pure-play Internet retailers are also classified to NAICS 45411. Total retail sales figures do not include sales from retailers that are classified to NAICS 45411.

New Quarterly Retail Commodity Survey data visualization tool

Check out the latest Quarterly Retail Commodity Survey estimates in a new interactive way. The new [Retail Commodity Survey Data Visualization Tool](#) allows users to view, customize and interpret quarterly sales data more easily.

Available tables: [20-10-0016-01](#) and [20-10-0017-01](#).

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [2008](#).

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).