

# Retail Commodity Survey, December 2020

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Retail sales totalled \$56.8 billion in December, up 4.5% compared with the same month the previous year. This was the sector's seventh consecutive year-over-year increase. Higher sales were reported in 13 of the 19 commodity categories.

Looking ahead to January, the advance estimate provided by the [Monthly Retail Trade Survey](#) suggests that unadjusted total retail sales decreased 2.9%. Owing to its preliminary nature, this figure will be revised.

## Holiday spending leads to gains for food and beverage retailers

Canadian retailers saw their largest gains come from food sales (+14.3%), as many consumers prepared for the holiday season at home because of restrictions related to social gatherings and travel. All product categories recorded higher sales, led by packaged food and dry goods not elsewhere classified (+17.7%), as demand remained high for chocolate and other baking supplies related to the Christmas season. Strong sales were also seen for fresh fruit and vegetables (+16.8%) and fresh meat and poultry (+16.3%) as more Canadians prepared holiday dinners as a result of the pandemic.

Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages posted a 9.1% increase, due largely to sales of alcoholic beverages (+8.5%), which represented 75.3% of the gain in beverages in December.

## Automotive sales rise

Motor vehicle sales rose for the fifth consecutive month, rising 3.3% compared with the same month a year before. Gains within the category were attributable to the sale of used motor vehicles (+10.7%), which posted its seventh consecutive year-over-year increase. Sales of new motor vehicles decreased 0.5%, as consumer preferences continued to shift away from new passenger vehicles (-13.1%) and toward new minivans, sport utility vehicles and light trucks (+3.1%).

With many consumers looking for outdoor activities, sales of recreational vehicles (+67.7%) recorded their seventh consecutive monthly increase on a year-over-year basis. Gains were primarily driven by higher sales of new recreational vehicles (+72.9%), in particular new snowmobiles and personal off-road vehicles (+78.5%).

Sales of automotive fuels continued to stagnate in December, down 21.4% from the same month the previous year. This was the eighth consecutive month during which automotive fuels posted the largest decline in the sector, as lower demand and prices (-21.3%) continued to restrict sales.

## Home for the Holidays

Despite limitations by certain provinces on social gatherings during the holiday season, consumers continued to spend on Christmas-related decorations, with sales of decorative home furnishings up 9.0%. Santa Claus still visited many young children, as sales of toys and games increased 12.3%. Higher sales were also seen for live plants, seeds and other home and garden supplies (+39.8%), in part as a result of higher sales of real Christmas trees.

Products associated with home improvement projects continued to be in demand, with renovation materials and supplies (+28.1%), major home appliances (+47.5%) and hardware and tools (+31.6%) posting strong sales increases compared with the same month a year before.



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

	December 2019 <sup>r</sup>	November 2020 <sup>r</sup>	December 2020 <sup>P</sup>	December 2019 to December 2020
	millions of dollars			% change
<b>Total commodities, retail trade commissions and miscellaneous services</b>	<b>54,328,294</b>	<b>55,587,827</b>	<b>56,781,350</b>	<b>4.5</b>
Food	10,084,771	9,920,163	11,524,966	14.3
Soft drinks and alcoholic beverages	3,625,886	3,200,351	3,954,887	9.1
Cannabis products	147,885	261,042	298,442	101.8
Clothing	3,870,268	2,773,321	2,921,386	-24.5
Footwear	740,608	674,491	624,727	-15.6
Jewellery and watches, luggage and briefcases	817,522	465,167	647,223	-20.8
Home furniture, furnishings, housewares, appliances and electronics	6,026,705	6,311,778	6,426,103	6.6
Sporting and leisure products (except publications, audio and video recordings, and game software)	1,451,367	1,506,053	1,660,263	14.4
Publications	461,516	275,026	357,924	-22.4
Audio and video recordings, and game software	247,818	146,411	160,458	-35.3
Motor vehicles	8,426,147	10,030,277	8,704,948	3.3
Recreational vehicles	415,419	668,368	696,764	67.7
Motor vehicle parts, accessories and supplies	1,683,632	2,351,825	1,882,981	11.8
Automotive and household fuels	4,205,031	3,298,555	3,306,259	-21.4
Home health products	3,374,823	3,624,759	3,683,253	9.1
Infant care, personal and beauty products	1,516,837	1,321,715	1,626,109	7.2
Hardware, tools, and renovation and lawn and garden products	2,938,665	4,340,123	3,744,717	27.4
Miscellaneous products	2,669,032	2,611,430	2,855,270	7.0
Total retail trade commissions and miscellaneous services	1,624,361	1,806,974	1,704,671	4.9

<sup>r</sup> revised

<sup>P</sup> preliminary

**Note(s):** Data may not add up to totals because of 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 [NAICS] 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 NAICS code 45411—electronic shopping and mail-order houses. Businesses that are commonly referred to as pure-play Internet retailers are also classified to NAICS code 45411. Total retail sales figures do not include sales from retailers that are classified to NAICS code 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.

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**Available tables:** table [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](mailto:STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca)) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; [STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca](mailto:STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca)).