

Retail trade, February 2021

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Retail sales were up 4.8% to \$55.1 billion in February. Sales increased in 9 of 11 subsectors, led by higher sales at motor-vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations.

Core retail sales—which exclude gasoline stations and motor-vehicle and parts dealers—rose for the first time in three months, increasing 3.8% in February on higher sales at general merchandise stores and at clothing and clothing accessories stores.

In volume terms, retail sales increased 4.3% in February.

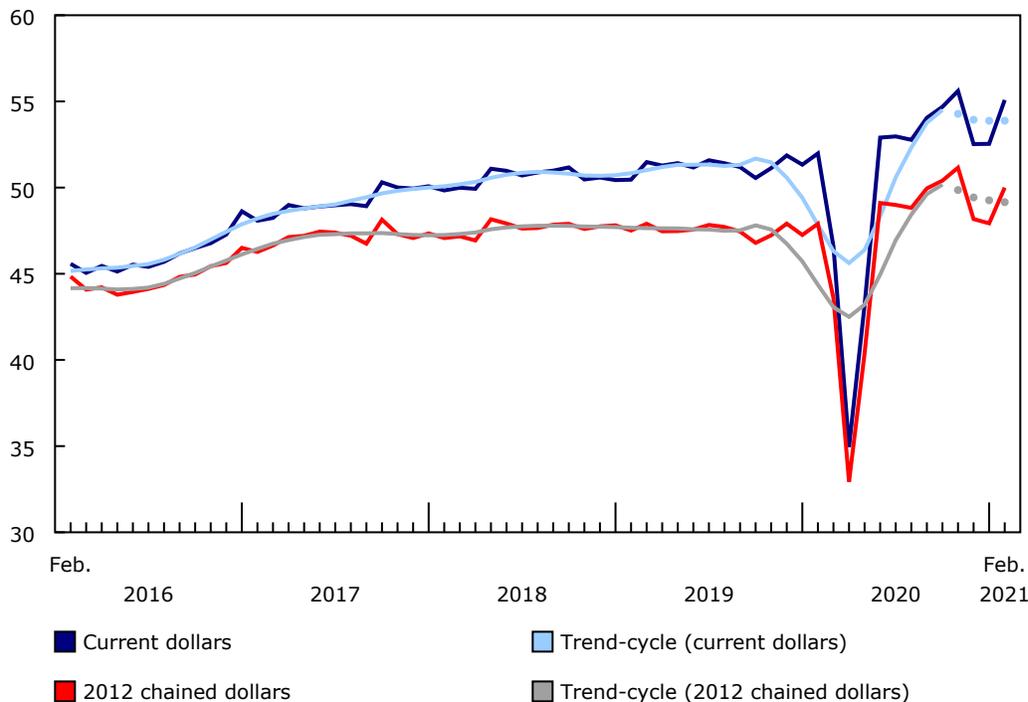
Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, provincial governments continued to enact public-health measures in several regions across the country that directly affected the retail sector. Based on respondent feedback, approximately 12% of retailers were closed during February. The average length of the shutdown was two business days. Despite these challenging times, most respondents reported their sales figures, and Statistics Canada thanks them for their continued cooperation.

Given the rapidly evolving economic situation, Statistics Canada is providing an advance estimate of retail sales, which suggests that sales increased 2.3% in March. Owing to its preliminary nature, this figure will be revised.

This unofficial estimate was calculated based on responses received from 65% of companies surveyed. The average final response rate for the survey over the previous 12 months has been 90.4%.

Chart 1
Retail sales increase in February

billions of dollars



Note(s): The higher variability associated with the trend-cycle estimates is indicated with a dotted line on the chart for the current reference month and the three previous months. For more information, see the note to readers.

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

Sales at motor-vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations post consecutive gains

Sales at motor-vehicle and parts dealers increased for the second consecutive month, rising 5.0% in February. The increase was mostly because of higher sales at new car dealers (+5.6%) and automotive parts, accessories and tire stores (+9.2%), some of which were closed in January as a result of lockdowns in select regions. In contrast, sales at other motor vehicle dealers contracted 2.3% in February.

Sales at gasoline stations also increased for the second month in a row, rising 12.3% in February—their largest increase since June 2020. Contributing to the increase were [higher gasoline prices](#), which were up on a month-over-month basis. In volume terms, sales at gasoline stations rose 6.8% following four consecutive declines.

Core retail sales up on higher sales at general merchandise stores and non-essential retailers

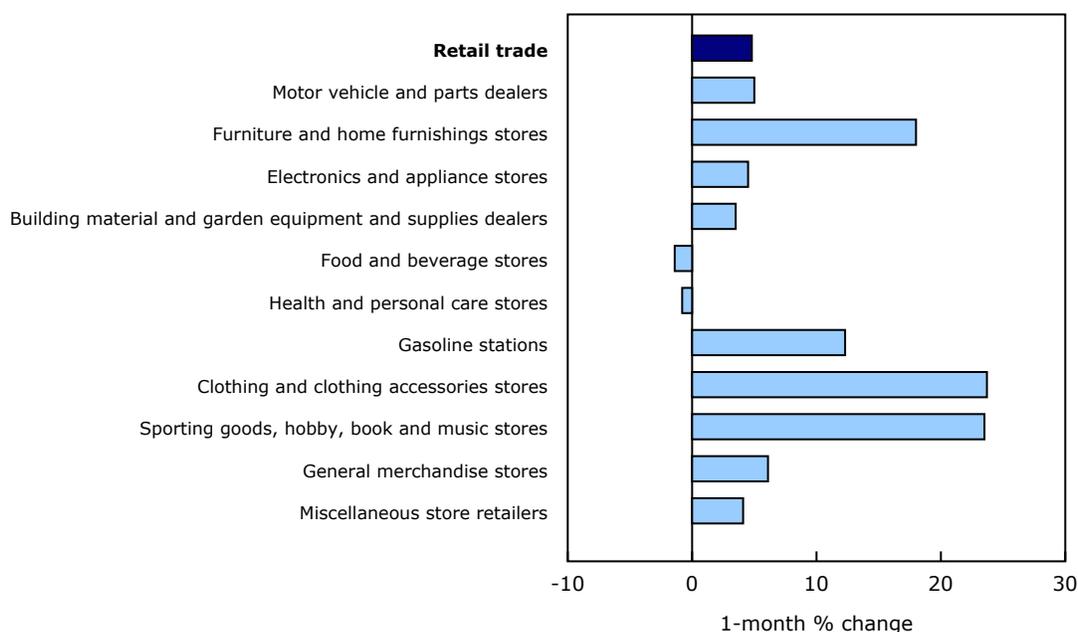
After two consecutive months of declines, core retail sales increased 3.8% in February, led by higher sales at general merchandise stores (+6.1%).

Clothing and clothing accessories stores also contributed to the increase in core retail, rising 23.7% in February—its first gain since September 2020. Sales were up in all three subcategories, coinciding with the easing of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions on non-essential retailers and malls in many parts of the country. In February, approximately 39% of clothing and clothing accessories stores reported having been closed for an average of 6 days, compared with 48% of those retailers who reported closures for an average of 13 days in January.

On the heels of two consecutive declines, sales increased at furniture and home furnishings stores (+18.0%) and sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores (+23.5%) in February.

In contrast, sales at food and beverage stores were down 1.4% in February. The decrease was mostly driven by lower sales at specialty food stores (-12.7%).

Chart 2
Sales up in 9 of 11 subsectors



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

Sales up in six provinces

Sales were up in six provinces in February, with Quebec and Ontario leading the gain.

In Quebec, sales rose by almost one-fifth in February (+19.0%)—their largest increase since June 2020. Motor-vehicle and parts dealers in the province reported higher sales, leading the gain amid the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in February. In the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Montréal, sales were up 20.4%.

In Ontario, sales rose 2.3% on increased sales at gasoline stations and at clothing and clothing accessories stores. Sales fell 1.9% in the CMA of Toronto, coinciding with the continuation of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions in the region.

Retail e-commerce in Canada

On an unadjusted basis, retail e-commerce sales were up 92.0% year over year to \$3.1 billion in February, accounting for 6.8% of total retail trade. The share of e-commerce out of total retail sales was 1.3 percentage points lower in February, as more brick-and-mortar stores were allowed to open their doors to in-person shopping.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, retail e-commerce fell 5.7% in February.

Note to readers

With this release, unadjusted monthly data were revised back to January 2020, while seasonally adjusted data (including retail e-commerce) were revised back to January 2017. Factors influencing revisions include the late receipt of respondent information, the correction of information in the data provided, the replacement of estimated figures with actual values (once available), the re-classification of companies within, into, and out of the retail trade sector, and updates to seasonal factors.

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

Seasonally adjusted data are data that have been modified to eliminate the effect of seasonal and calendar influences to allow for more meaningful comparisons of economic conditions from period to period. For more information on seasonal adjustment, see [Seasonally adjusted data – Frequently asked questions](#).

The percentage change for the advance estimate of retail sales is calculated using seasonally adjusted data and is expressed in current dollars.

This early indicator is a special product being provided in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to offer Canadians timely information on the retail sector. The data sources and methodology used are exactly the same as those outlined in the [Monthly Retail Trade Survey information page](#).

Trend-cycle estimates are included in selected charts as a complement to the seasonally-adjusted series. These data represent a smoothed version of the seasonally-adjusted time series and provide information on longer-term movements, including changes in direction underlying the series. For information on trend-cycle data, see [Trend-cycle estimates – Frequently asked questions](#).

Both seasonally adjusted data and trend-cycle estimates are subject to revision as additional observations become available. These revisions could be extensive and could even lead to a reversal of movement, especially for the reference months near the end of the series or during periods of economic disruption.

Seasonally adjusted estimates for cannabis-store retailers are presented in unadjusted form since 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 does not have a storefront. These businesses are commonly referred to as pure-play Internet retailers and are classified to the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code 45411—electronic shopping and mail-order houses. The second type has a storefront and is commonly referred to as a brick-and-mortar retailer. If the online operations of a brick-and-mortar retailer are separately managed, they, too, are classified to NAICS code 45411.

Some common e-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.

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 21.

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

	February 2020	January 2021 ^r	February 2021 ^p	January to February 2021	February 2020 to February 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Canada	51,980	52,537	55,083	4.8	6.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	762	869	775	-10.8	1.7
Prince Edward Island	214	245	251	2.5	17.3
Nova Scotia	1,365	1,495	1,538	2.9	12.7
New Brunswick	1,144	1,216	1,197	-1.5	4.6
Quebec	11,190	10,429	12,408	19.0	10.9
Montréal	5,472	4,672	5,626	20.4	2.8
Ontario	19,589	18,850	19,282	2.3	-1.6
Toronto	8,438	7,485	7,341	-1.9	-13.0
Manitoba	1,792	1,916	2,044	6.7	14.1
Saskatchewan	1,634	1,724	1,720	-0.3	5.2
Alberta	6,765	7,361	7,444	1.1	10.0
British Columbia	7,342	8,227	8,223	-0.1	12.0
Vancouver	3,327	3,595	3,658	1.8	10.0
Yukon	75	80	82	1.8	8.6
Northwest Territories	68	78	74	-4.0	10.3
Nunavut	41	47	46	-2.4	12.7

^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 2020	January 2021 ^r	February 2021 ^p	January to February 2021	February 2020 to February 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total retail trade (current dollars)	51,980	52,537	55,083	4.8	6.0
Total retail trade (2012 chained dollars)	47,896	47,927	49,999	4.3	4.4
Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers	37,984	38,787	40,646	4.8	7.0
Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations	32,746	34,468	35,793	3.8	9.3
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	13,996	13,750	14,437	5.0	3.2
New car dealers	11,184	10,657	11,255	5.6	0.6
Used car dealers	1,052	1,048	1,076	2.7	2.3
Other motor vehicle dealers	908	1,107	1,081	-2.3	19.0
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	852	938	1,024	9.2	20.3
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,642	1,482	1,749	18.0	6.5
Furniture stores	1,053	899	1,143	27.1	8.5
Home furnishings stores	588	583	606	3.9	3.0
Electronics and appliance stores	1,129	1,319	1,379	4.5	22.2
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	3,261	4,064	4,207	3.5	29.0
Food and beverage stores	10,891	12,368	12,189	-1.4	11.9
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	7,491	8,560	8,484	-0.9	13.3
Convenience stores	659	736	731	-0.8	10.8
Specialty food stores	680	859	750	-12.7	10.2
Beer, wine and liquor stores	2,060	2,212	2,225	0.6	8.0
Health and personal care stores	4,070	4,282	4,248	-0.8	4.4
Gasoline stations	5,239	4,320	4,852	12.3	-7.4
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	2,907	1,666	2,060	23.7	-29.1
Clothing stores	2,255	1,277	1,543	20.8	-31.6
Shoe stores	337	169	242	43.1	-28.2
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	315	220	276	25.4	-12.5
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	1,037	838	1,035	23.5	-0.2
General merchandise stores	6,328	6,727	7,135	6.1	12.8
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,482	1,721	1,791	4.1	20.9
Cannabis stores ¹	151	279	263	-5.9	74.4

^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 2020	January 2021 ^r	February 2021 ^p	January to February 2021	February 2020 to February 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total retail trade at 2012 constant prices¹	47,925	47,780	49,911	4.5	4.1
Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers	35,962	36,308	37,902	4.4	5.4
Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations	30,656	31,929	33,225	4.1	8.4
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	11,963	11,472	12,009	4.7	0.4
New car dealers	9,534	8,860	9,329	5.3	-2.2
Used car dealers	889	865	884	2.2	-0.6
Other motor vehicle dealers	750	891	863	-3.1	15.1
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	791	856	934	9.1	18.1
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,591	1,391	1,636	17.6	2.8
Furniture stores	1,041	858	1,081	26.0	3.8
Home furnishings stores	550	533	555	4.1	0.9
Electronics and appliance stores	1,382	1,602	1,670	4.2	20.8
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	2,878	3,508	3,637	3.7	26.4
Food and beverage stores	9,502	10,667	10,505	-1.5	10.6
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	6,557	7,419	7,341	-1.1	12.0
Convenience stores	514	560	563	0.5	9.5
Specialty food stores	575	718	625	-13.0	8.7
Beer, wine and liquor stores	1,856	1,969	1,976	0.4	6.5
Health and personal care stores	4,211	4,468	4,406	-1.4	4.6
Gasoline stations	5,306	4,379	4,677	6.8	-11.9
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	2,769	1,645	2,049	24.6	-26.0
Clothing stores	2,159	1,290	1,571	21.8	-27.2
Shoe stores	329	172	246	43.0	-25.2
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	281	183	232	26.8	-17.4
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	1,005	814	1,063	30.6	5.8
General merchandise stores	5,956	6,253	6,618	5.8	11.1
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,362	1,582	1,641	3.7	20.5
Cannabis stores ²	151	301	284	-5.6	88.1

^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 2020	January 2021	February 2021	February 2021
	millions of dollars			year-over-year % change
Retail trade sales (44-453)	42,944	43,284	43,907	2.2
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses sales (45411)	1,234	2,191	1,970	59.6
Retail e-commerce ¹	1,628	3,699	3,127	92.0
Retail e-commerce ¹ (% of total retail trade)	3.69	8.14	6.82	...

... not applicable

1. Retail e-commerce includes e-sales from both store retailers included in North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes 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).