

Retail trade, March 2021

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Retail sales were up 3.6% to \$57.6 billion in March, led by higher sales at building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers, and clothing and clothing accessories stores. Sales at food and beverage stores declined.

Sales increased in 10 of 11 subsectors, representing 79.1% of retail trade.

Core retail sales—which exclude sales at gasoline stations, and motor vehicle and parts dealers—rose 4.7%.

In volume terms, retail sales increased 3.2% in March.

Retail sales were up 1.8% in the first quarter—the third consecutive quarterly increase. In volume terms, quarterly sales were up 0.5%.

Amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, provincial governments continued to enact public health measures in several regions across the country, which directly affected the retail sector.

Based on respondent feedback, 2.1% of retailers were closed at some point in March. The average length of the closure was less than one day. This represented a widespread reopening of the economy between the second and third waves of the pandemic. In February, 12.0% of retailers were closed for an average of two days.

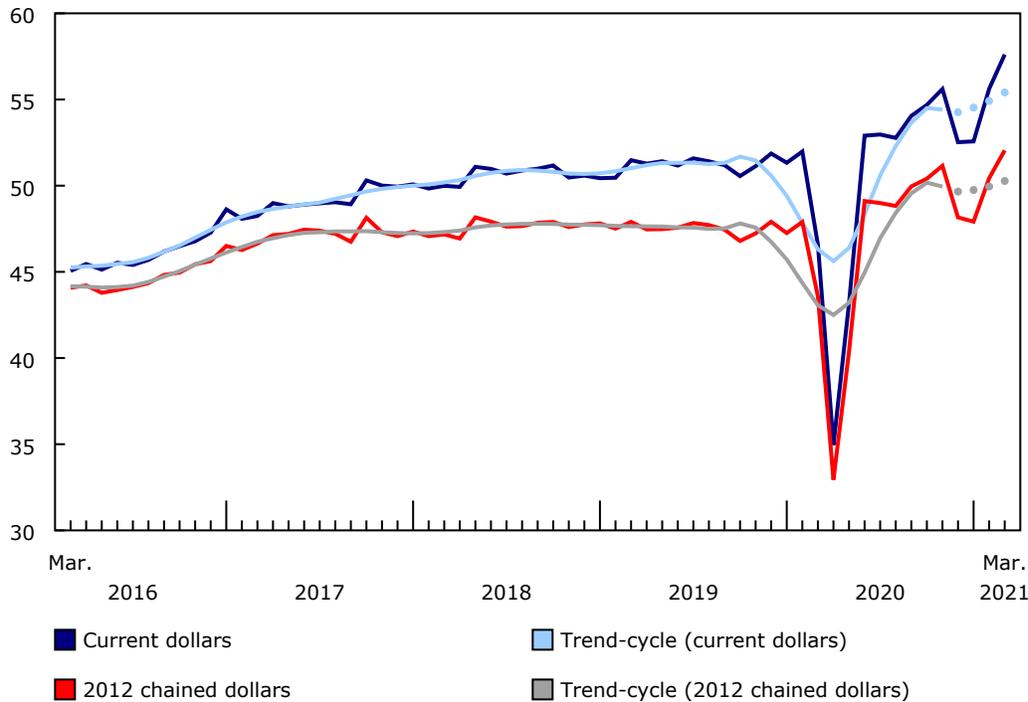
Despite these challenging times, most respondents reported their sales figures, and Statistics Canada thanks them for their continued collaboration.

Given the rapidly evolving economic situation, Statistics Canada is providing an advance estimate of retail sales, which suggests that sales declined 5.1% in April. Owing to its preliminary nature, this figure will be revised. This unofficial estimate was calculated based on responses received from 46% of companies surveyed. The average final response rate for the survey over the previous 12 months has been 90.7%.



Chart 1
Retail sales increase in March

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](#).

Core retail sales rise as stores reopen

Core retail sales rose for the second consecutive month, up 4.7% in March on higher sales at building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers (+19.8%). This was the largest increase since May 2020 and coincided with warmer-than-typical March weather and the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions in some areas of the country.

Sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores rose for the second straight month, up 23.6% in March, to their highest level since the beginning of the pandemic. The increase in March is attributable to higher sales at clothing stores (+25.0%) and shoe stores (+42.8%). Sales at jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores edged down 0.1%. In March, 5.1% of clothing and clothing accessories stores were closed for an average of one day; in February, 38.8% were closed for an average of six days.

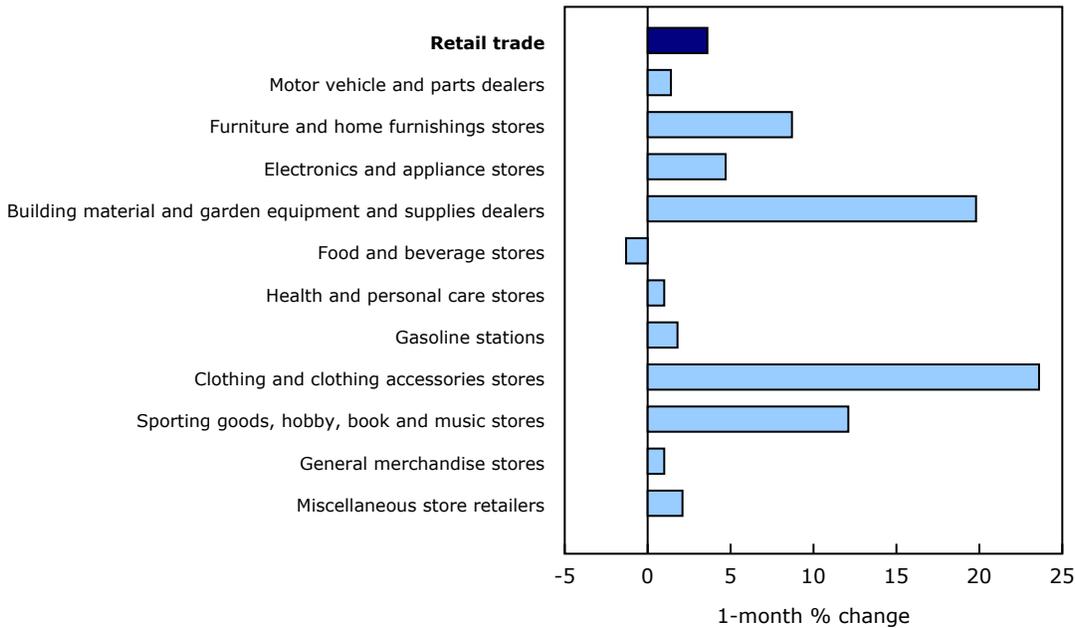
The lone decline in March was at food and beverage stores (-1.3%), where sales decreased for the third time in four months on lower sales at supermarkets and other grocery stores (-1.6%) and specialty food stores (-12.0%). These declines were partially offset by higher sales at beer, wine and liquor stores (+3.1%).

Sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations rise for the third consecutive month

Sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers increased for the third consecutive month, up 1.4% in March. The growth is mostly attributable to higher sales at other motor vehicle dealers (+11.8%) and new car dealers (+0.7%).

Sales at gasoline stations also increased for the third month in a row, rising 1.8% in March on [higher gasoline prices](#). In volume terms, sales at gasoline stations declined 0.8%.

Chart 2
Sales up in 10 of 11 subsectors



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

Sales up in six provinces

Sales were up in six provinces in March, with Ontario accounting for the majority of the increase.

In Ontario, sales rose 9.0% on higher sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores, and building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers. This was the largest monthly increase in Ontario since June 2020, when sales were up 32.3%. Sales rose 6.8% in the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Toronto, coinciding with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions.

Quebec (+2.2%) posted the second-largest provincial increase, on higher sales at building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers, and general merchandise stores. In the CMA of Montréal, sales were up 4.1%.

Retail e-commerce in Canada

On an unadjusted basis, retail e-commerce sales were up 58.5% year over year to \$3.7 billion in March, accounting for 6.3% of total retail trade. The share of e-commerce sales out of total retail sales fell 0.7 percentage points in March 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 1.5% in March.

Note to readers

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 April will be released on June 23.

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

	March 2020	February 2021 ^r	March 2021 ^p	February to March 2021	March 2020 to March 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Canada	46,578	55,617	57,609	3.6	23.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	753	789	856	8.5	13.6
Prince Edward Island	186	256	256	-0.3	37.1
Nova Scotia	1,217	1,561	1,578	1.1	29.7
New Brunswick	1,016	1,215	1,220	0.4	20.1
Quebec	9,297	12,546	12,824	2.2	37.9
Montréal	4,424	5,638	5,871	4.1	32.7
Ontario	18,012	19,514	21,269	9.0	18.1
Toronto	7,419	7,356	7,857	6.8	5.9
Manitoba	1,627	2,048	2,023	-1.2	24.3
Saskatchewan	1,459	1,738	1,749	0.6	19.9
Alberta	5,917	7,502	7,471	-0.4	26.3
British Columbia	6,911	8,246	8,158	-1.1	18.0
Vancouver	3,130	3,711	3,638	-2.0	16.3
Yukon	73	81	80	-1.8	9.3
Northwest Territories	68	74	81	8.5	18.6
Nunavut	42	46	45	-2.0	7.8

^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

	March 2020	February 2021 ^r	March 2021 ^p	February to March 2021	March 2020 to March 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total retail trade (current dollars)	46,578	55,617	57,609	3.6	23.7
Total retail trade (2012 chained dollars)	43,581	50,433	52,048	3.2	19.4
Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers	37,751	41,046	42,827	4.3	13.4
Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations	33,486	36,244	37,936	4.7	13.3
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	8,827	14,571	14,782	1.4	67.5
New car dealers	6,672	11,296	11,374	0.7	70.5
Used car dealers	682	1,127	1,144	1.5	67.7
Other motor vehicle dealers	664	1,104	1,235	11.8	85.9
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	809	1,044	1,030	-1.3	27.3
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,188	1,787	1,942	8.7	63.4
Furniture stores	749	1,123	1,259	12.1	68.0
Home furnishings stores	439	664	683	2.9	55.7
Electronics and appliance stores	1,144	1,427	1,493	4.7	30.5
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	3,328	4,207	5,041	19.8	51.5
Food and beverage stores	13,316	12,190	12,026	-1.3	-9.7
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	9,563	8,410	8,274	-1.6	-13.5
Convenience stores	668	724	722	-0.2	8.2
Specialty food stores	691	804	707	-12.0	2.4
Beer, wine and liquor stores	2,395	2,252	2,323	3.1	-3.0
Health and personal care stores	4,225	4,321	4,363	1.0	3.3
Gasoline stations	4,265	4,802	4,890	1.8	14.7
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	1,399	2,162	2,672	23.6	91.0
Clothing stores	1,074	1,633	2,041	25.0	90.0
Shoe stores	164	237	339	42.8	107.2
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	161	292	292	-0.1	80.9
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	804	1,125	1,261	12.1	56.8
General merchandise stores	6,580	7,164	7,238	1.0	10.0
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,500	1,861	1,900	2.1	26.6
Cannabis stores ¹	181	262	298	13.8	65.0

^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

	March 2020	February 2021 ^r	March 2021 ^P	February to March 2021	March 2020 to March 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total retail trade at 2012 constant prices¹	43,805	50,371	52,048	3.3	18.8
Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers	36,224	38,250	39,803	4.1	9.9
Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations	31,198	33,656	35,245	4.7	13.0
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	7,581	12,121	12,245	1.0	61.5
New car dealers	5,697	9,372	9,407	0.4	65.1
Used car dealers	575	925	934	1.0	62.4
Other motor vehicle dealers	559	872	966	10.8	72.8
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	750	952	938	-1.5	25.1
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,144	1,678	1,812	8.0	58.4
Furniture stores	736	1,070	1,189	11.1	61.5
Home furnishings stores	408	608	624	2.6	52.9
Electronics and appliance stores	1,406	1,735	1,806	4.1	28.4
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	2,934	3,634	4,360	20.0	48.6
Food and beverage stores	11,646	10,502	10,382	-1.1	-10.9
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	8,388	7,287	7,201	-1.2	-14.2
Convenience stores	516	549	537	-2.2	4.1
Specialty food stores	578	666	585	-12.2	1.2
Beer, wine and liquor stores	2,164	2,000	2,059	3.0	-4.9
Health and personal care stores	4,381	4,493	4,527	0.8	3.3
Gasoline stations	5,026	4,594	4,558	-0.8	-9.3
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	1,325	2,144	2,676	24.8	102.0
Clothing stores	1,021	1,657	2,076	25.3	103.3
Shoe stores	161	242	350	44.6	117.4
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	143	245	250	2.0	74.8
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	784	1,136	1,248	9.9	59.2
General merchandise stores	6,199	6,635	6,690	0.8	7.9
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,378	1,700	1,746	2.7	26.7
Cannabis stores ²	181	283	322	13.8	77.9

^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

	March 2020	February 2021	March 2021	March 2021
	millions of dollars			year-over-year % change
Retail trade sales (44-453)	43,373	44,278	55,295	27.5
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses sales (45411)	1,663	2,081	2,518	51.4
Retail e-commerce ¹	2,303	3,228	3,650	58.5
Retail e-commerce ¹ (% of total retail trade)	5.11	6.96	6.31	...

... 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).