

# Retail trade, December 2021

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Retail sales fell 1.8% to \$57.0 billion in December. Lower sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores (-9.5%) and furniture and home furnishings stores (-11.3%) led the decline, which coincided with concerns over the spread of the COVID-19 Omicron variant in December.

Sales were down in 8 of 11 subsectors, representing 62.9% of retail trade.

Core retail sales—which exclude gasoline stations and motor vehicle and parts dealers—decreased 2.4%.

In volume terms, retail sales were down 2.5% in December.

Retail sales were up 1.7% in the fourth quarter of 2021, marking its second consecutive quarterly increase. In volume terms, quarterly retail sales increased 0.4%.

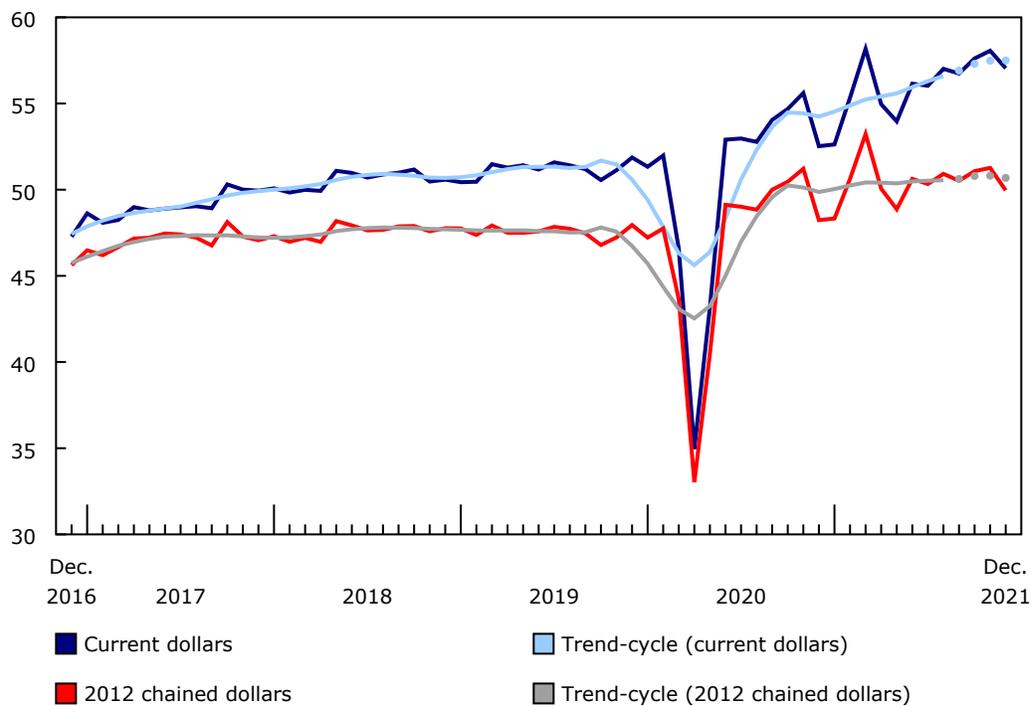
Severe flooding in British Columbia and the Atlantic provinces in November 2021 damaged infrastructure and led to evacuations in affected regions, resulting in major disruptions to the business operations of retailers across the country. Based on respondent feedback, 15% of retailers continued to be impacted in December by the floods and evacuations in British Columbia and the Atlantic provinces. Disruption in transportation continued to be the most impacted business operation in December, with 13% of retailers reporting it as an issue, in contrast to 16% of retailers reporting this in November.

Given the rapidly evolving economic situation, Statistics Canada is providing an advance estimate of retail sales, which suggests that sales increased 2.4% in January 2022. Owing to its early nature, this figure will be revised. This unofficial estimate was calculated based on responses received from 41.7% of companies surveyed. The average final response rate for the survey over the previous 12 months has been 90.0%.



**Chart 1**  
**Retail sales decrease in December**

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 previous three months. For more information, see the Note to readers.

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

## Core retail falls on lower sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores

Core retail sales fell 2.4% in December, the largest decline recorded since April 2021, when regions across the country implemented heightened COVID-19 restrictions. Lower sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores contributed the most to the decline in retail sales, falling 9.5% in December. The decrease in this subsector was observed in all three store types. Most of the decline was attributable to clothing stores (-11.7%) after increasing in each of the previous two months.

Sales were down at furniture and home furnishings stores (-11.3%), which fell for the second consecutive month. Lower sales at furniture stores (-10.2%) contributed the most to the subsector decrease.

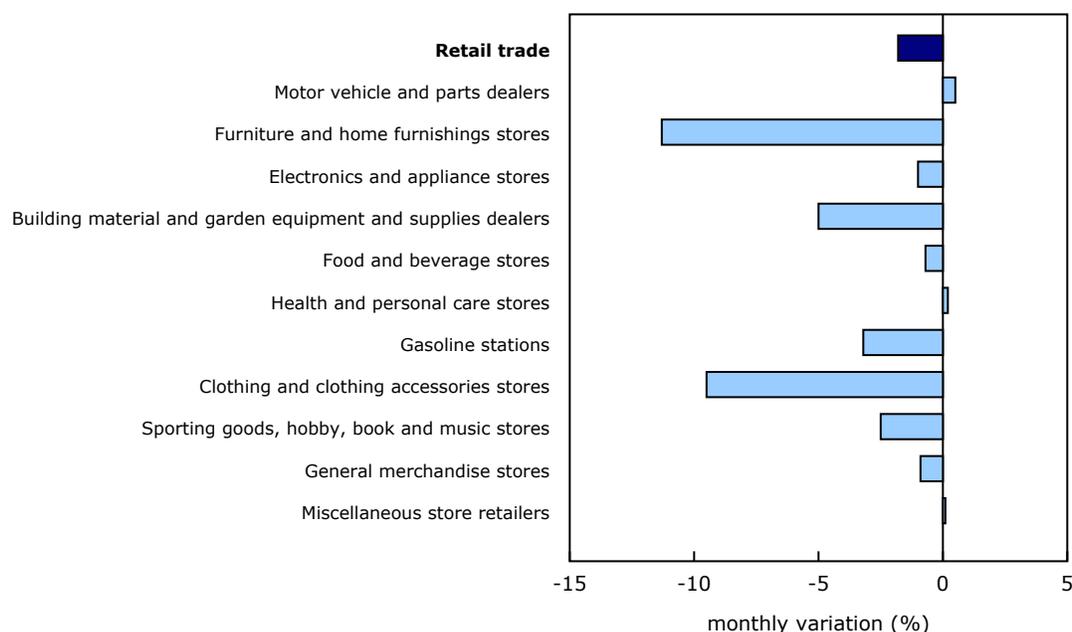
Following four consecutive monthly gains, sales at building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers fell 5.0% in December. The decrease comes following higher sales in November, when this subsector experienced its fastest pace of growth (+5.0%) since March 2021. Despite the decrease in December, the level of sales in this subsector remained elevated compared with pre-pandemic levels recorded in December 2019.

## Sales at gasoline stations fall for the first time in three months

Recording its first decrease in three months, sales at gasoline stations fell 3.2% in December. In volume terms, sales were down 3.4% as the tightening of public health restrictions due to the Omicron variant weighed on demand for gasoline.

Sales at motor vehicle and parts dealers increased 0.5% in December. The increase was largely the result of gains at automotive parts, accessories and tire stores (+9.1%), which recorded its largest increase since February 2021 as vehicle retention rates remain elevated. Sales were also up at other motor vehicle dealers (+8.1%), while receipts at new car dealers (-0.4%) and used car dealers (-4.1%) posted their second consecutive declines.

## Chart 2 Sales decrease in 8 of 11 subsectors in December



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

## Sales decrease in every province for the first time since December 2020

Retail sales were down in every province in December for the first time since one year prior when many regions across the country faced increased public health restrictions due to increasing COVID-19 case counts.

Leading the decrease among the provinces were lower sales in Ontario (-1.8%). Contributing to this decline were lower sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores as well as building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers. In the census metropolitan area (CMA) of Toronto, sales were down 1.4%.

Sales in Alberta fell 2.3% in December, led by lower sales at food and beverage stores. This was the largest decline in Alberta since December 2020 when retail sales fell 4.1%.

Sales in Quebec fell 1.1% in December. In the CMA of Montréal, sales were down 1.2%.

## Retail e-commerce in Canada

On a seasonally adjusted basis, retail e-commerce sales fell 10.3% in December.

On an unadjusted basis, retail e-commerce sales were down 14.2% year over year to \$4.1 billion in December, accounting for 6.5% of total retail trade. The share of e-commerce sales out of total retail sales fell 1.7 percentage points compared with December 2020.

## **Retail sales in 2021**

The COVID-19 pandemic continued to impact the retail landscape in 2021. The easing of public health measures and increasing vaccination rates allowed consumers greater access to retailers at various points throughout the year, resulting in a rebound of households' retail spending. However, increased demand for consumer goods as the economy re-opened coincided with global supply chain constraints, impacting the price and availability of products sold at retailers across the country.

Canadian retailers finished 2021 with \$674 billion in sales, up 11.6% from 2020 with increases observed in all subsectors. This increase comes in the wake of a decline in 2020, when retail sales experienced its largest drop since the 2009 global financial crisis. In volume terms, retail sales increased 8.4% in 2021.

Sales were up in all provinces in 2021, with Ontario (+9.1%), Quebec (+13.0%) and British Columbia (+12.6%) leading the national increase.

## **Motor vehicle and parts dealers lead the gain in retail sales**

Leading the gain in retail sales was motor vehicle and parts dealers (+17.9%). Sales at new car dealers were up 18.5% and accounted for about one-fifth of retail sales in 2021. The gains recorded at new car dealers coincided with a rebound in household spending and higher prices of passenger vehicles, the latter of which was largely attributable to the global shortage of semiconductor chips that impacted the supply of new motor vehicles throughout much of 2021. Sales at used car dealers were up 21.7% in 2021 amid limited new vehicle inventory and higher rates of vehicle retention.

Sales at gasoline stations were up by nearly one-quarter (24.2%) in 2021 after falling 18.5% in 2020. Higher gasoline prices in 2021 contributed to this increase. In volume terms, sales at gasoline stations were up 8.4% in 2021, as demand for fuel increased with eased public health restrictions and greater vaccine availability.

## **Core retail sales up on higher sales at general merchandise stores and building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers**

Core retail sales increased 7.7% in 2021, a faster pace than that of 2020 (+4.4%), largely due to the resumption of in-person shopping in the second half of 2021. The increase in core retail was led by gains at general merchandise stores (+8.6%), which were considered essential retailers during lockdowns.

Consumers continued to spend on home improvement projects as higher sales at building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers (+14.1%) contributed to the overall increase in retail trade. Record levels of sales in this subsector were recorded in March, when consumers across the country took advantage of good weather and fewer in-store restrictions to focus on household projects. This increase coincided with a surge in the price of lumber in the late winter and early spring of 2021. Higher sales of lumber, renovation materials and supplies continued to bolster sales in this subsector above their pre-pandemic levels throughout the summer months.

Retail sales of clothing and clothing accessories stores rose 20.6% in 2021 after falling 26.7% in 2020. Higher sales were recorded at all three store types and were led by increases at clothing stores, coinciding with eased restrictions on social gatherings and in-person shopping at non-essential retailers in the latter half of 2021. However, despite reaching pre-pandemic levels for the first time in July 2021, annual sales at clothing and clothing accessories stores have not yet recovered to pre-pandemic levels observed in 2019 due to lower sales in the first half of 2021.

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## Retail e-commerce

Retail e-commerce increased 14.2% in 2021 as online shopping continued to be an attractive and accessible alternative to in-store shopping. Retail e-commerce sales accounted for 6.2% of total retail sales in 2021, up from a share of 6.1% in 2020.

### 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 on 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 under 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 under 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.

Find more [statistics on retail trade](#).

### 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 January 2022 will be released on March 18, 2022.

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

	December 2020	November 2021 <sup>r</sup>	December 2021 <sup>p</sup>	November to December 2021	December 2020 to December 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
<b>Canada</b>	<b>52,524</b>	<b>58,064</b>	<b>57,047</b>	<b>-1.8</b>	<b>8.6</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	768	877	853	-2.7	11.0
Prince Edward Island	223	261	255	-2.4	14.4
Nova Scotia	1,378	1,612	1,558	-3.3	13.1
New Brunswick	1,134	1,333	1,288	-3.4	13.5
Quebec	11,474	12,717	12,573	-1.1	9.6
Montréal	5,305	5,916	5,844	-1.2	10.2
Ontario	19,195	21,201	20,820	-1.8	8.5
Toronto	7,405	8,502	8,387	-1.4	13.3
Manitoba	1,656	2,037	2,017	-1.0	21.8
Saskatchewan	1,687	1,901	1,847	-2.8	9.5
Alberta	6,939	7,688	7,512	-2.3	8.3
British Columbia	7,861	8,238	8,121	-1.4	3.3
Vancouver	3,540	3,874	3,813	-1.6	7.7
Yukon	79	79	80	1.9	1.1
Northwest Territories	79	75	77	2.0	-2.5
Nunavut	51	46	47	0.6	-9.2

<sup>r</sup> revised

<sup>p</sup> 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**

	December 2020	November 2021 <sup>r</sup>	December 2021 <sup>p</sup>	November to December 2021	December 2020 to December 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
<b>Total retail trade (current dollars)</b>	<b>52,524</b>	<b>58,064</b>	<b>57,047</b>	<b>-1.8</b>	<b>8.6</b>
<b>Total retail trade (2012 chained dollars)</b>	<b>48,235</b>	<b>51,264</b>	<b>49,962</b>	<b>-2.5</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers</b>	<b>38,830</b>	<b>43,156</b>	<b>42,058</b>	<b>-2.5</b>	<b>8.3</b>
<b>Total (current dollars) excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations</b>	<b>34,592</b>	<b>37,182</b>	<b>36,276</b>	<b>-2.4</b>	<b>4.9</b>
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	13,693	14,908	14,989	0.5	9.5
New car dealers	10,300	11,620	11,579	-0.4	12.4
Used car dealers	1,112	1,262	1,210	-4.1	8.9
Other motor vehicle dealers	1,313	1,051	1,135	8.1	-13.5
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	969	975	1,064	9.1	9.9
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,709	1,889	1,675	-11.3	-2.0
Furniture stores	1,056	1,203	1,081	-10.2	2.4
Home furnishings stores	653	685	594	-13.4	-9.1
Electronics and appliance stores	1,284	1,211	1,199	-1.0	-6.6
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	4,065	4,128	3,922	-5.0	-3.5
Food and beverage stores	11,975	12,007	11,919	-0.7	-0.5
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	8,366	8,377	8,326	-0.6	-0.5
Convenience stores	718	641	636	-0.8	-11.4
Specialty food stores	739	707	709	0.2	-4.2
Beer, wine and liquor stores	2,150	2,281	2,248	-1.4	4.6
Health and personal care stores	4,288	4,261	4,268	0.2	-0.5
Gasoline stations	4,238	5,974	5,782	-3.2	36.4
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	2,064	3,147	2,849	-9.5	38.0
Clothing stores	1,530	2,478	2,188	-11.7	43.0
Shoe stores	255	323	315	-2.3	23.8
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	280	346	346	-0.2	23.4
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	977	1,128	1,099	-2.5	12.5
General merchandise stores	6,501	7,500	7,431	-0.9	14.3
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,729	1,911	1,914	0.1	10.7
Cannabis stores <sup>1</sup>	297	352	382	8.5	28.5

<sup>r</sup> revised

<sup>p</sup> 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, at 2012 constant prices, by industry – Seasonally adjusted**

	December 2020	November 2021 <sup>r</sup>	December 2021 <sup>p</sup>	November to December 2021	December 2020 to December 2021
	millions of dollars			% change	
<b>Total retail trade at 2012 constant prices<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>48,162</b>	<b>51,396</b>	<b>50,070</b>	<b>-2.6</b>	<b>4.0</b>
<b>Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers</b>	<b>36,600</b>	<b>39,231</b>	<b>37,904</b>	<b>-3.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>
<b>Total excluding motor vehicle and parts dealers and gasoline stations</b>	<b>32,186</b>	<b>33,841</b>	<b>32,698</b>	<b>-3.4</b>	<b>1.6</b>
Motor vehicle and parts dealers	11,562	12,165	12,166	0.0	5.2
New car dealers	8,663	9,420	9,332	-0.9	7.7
Used car dealers	928	1,017	970	-4.6	4.5
Other motor vehicle dealers	1,084	861	916	6.4	-15.5
Automotive parts, accessories and tire stores	886	867	948	9.3	7.0
Furniture and home furnishings stores	1,613	1,695	1,479	-12.7	-8.3
Furniture stores	1,017	1,089	956	-12.2	-6.0
Home furnishings stores	596	606	523	-13.7	-12.2
Electronics and appliance stores	1,594	1,497	1,459	-2.5	-8.5
Building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers	3,504	3,514	3,266	-7.1	-6.8
Food and beverage stores	10,378	10,021	9,900	-1.2	-4.6
Supermarkets and other grocery (except convenience) stores	7,288	6,989	6,912	-1.1	-5.2
Convenience stores	551	476	470	-1.3	-14.7
Specialty food stores	621	557	555	-0.4	-10.6
Beer, wine and liquor stores	1,917	1,999	1,963	-1.8	2.4
Health and personal care stores	4,450	4,363	4,324	-0.9	-2.8
Gasoline stations	4,414	5,390	5,206	-3.4	17.9
Clothing and clothing accessories stores	2,024	3,079	2,771	-10.0	36.9
Clothing stores	1,536	2,416	2,126	-12.0	38.4
Shoe stores	259	350	341	-2.6	31.7
Jewellery, luggage and leather goods stores	229	313	304	-2.9	32.8
Sporting goods, hobby, book and music stores	954	1,094	1,066	-2.6	11.7
General merchandise stores	6,076	6,844	6,682	-2.4	10.0
Miscellaneous store retailers	1,595	1,735	1,751	0.9	9.8
Cannabis stores <sup>2</sup>	318	408	447	9.6	40.6

<sup>r</sup> revised

<sup>p</sup> 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**

	December 2020	November 2021	December 2021	December 2021
	millions of dollars			year-over-year change (%)
<b>Retail trade sales (44-453)</b>	<b>55,844</b>	<b>60,053</b>	<b>60,649</b>	<b>8.6</b>
Electronic shopping and mail-order houses sales (45411)	2,989	2,844	2,699	-9.7
Retail e-commerce <sup>1</sup>	4,825	4,308	4,142	-14.2
Retail e-commerce <sup>1</sup> (% of total retail trade)	8.2	6.8	6.5	...

... 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; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).