Wholesale trade, April 2022

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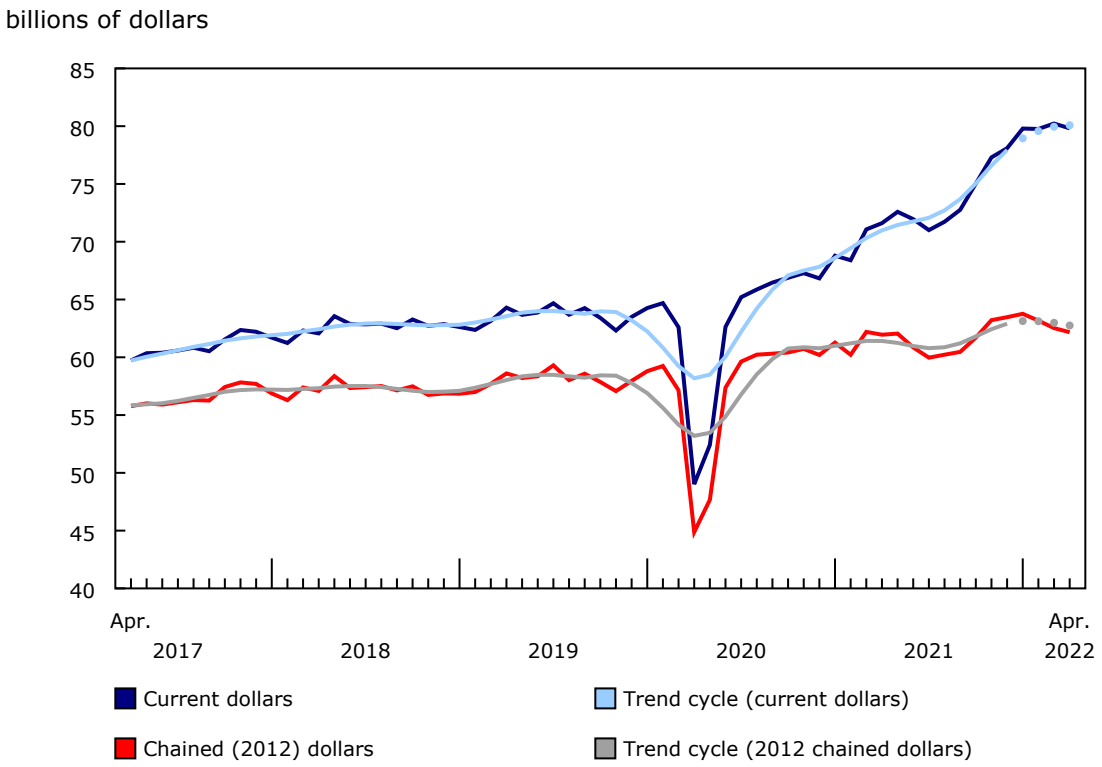
Lower wholesale sales in April

Wholesale sales fell 0.5% in April to $79.8 billion, the second decrease in the past three months. Sales fell in five of seven subsectors comprising more than three-quarters of total wholesale activity in Canada. The largest declines were posted in the miscellaneous goods and the building materials and supplies subsectors. Growth in the machinery equipment and supplies subsector largely offset the declines.

Constant dollar sales fell 0.6% in April.

Chart 1
Wholesale sales decrease in April



Note(s): The higher variability associated with the trend-cycle estimates is indicated on the chart, with a dotted line for the current reference month and the previous three months. For more information, see the Note to readers.
Source(s): Tables 20-10-0074-01 and 20-10-0003-01.

Miscellaneous merchant wholesalers drive decrease in sales for April

After two months of growth for the subsector, sales in the miscellaneous merchant wholesalers declined 3.4% to $11.5 billion in April. The decrease comes despite the fact that three of the five industries within the subsector posted gains for April. The agricultural supplies merchant industry drove the drop as its sales decreased 13.6% to $3.3 billion. The decline in this industry partly reflects a drop in imports of fertilizer from Russia which had more than doubled from 2020 to 2021. Meanwhile, a 7.7% decrease in the chemical (except agricultural) and allied product merchant industry mostly offset the 10.2% gains in the recyclable material merchant industry.

The building material and supplies merchant subsector dropped for the second time in three months, down 1.4% to $14.0 billion in April. The lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies industry generated the bulk of the decline as its sales dropped by 3.8% to $7.5 billion. The decline in April reflected lower prices and volumes in the industry. According to the Industrial Product Price Index, prices for lumber and other wood products decreased 8.2% in April and international trade data showed that exports of lumber and other sawmill products fell 2.6% in April.

Partially offsetting the declines was a 1.8% increase in the sales of machinery, equipment and supplies. Sales in the machinery, equipment and supplies subsector have risen in seven of the past eight months. Three of four industries in the subsector recorded gains in April, led by the farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment industry.

Quebec leads declines in sales

Six provinces reported lower sales in April, accounting for 86% of the national value. The declines were led by Quebec, followed by Ontario.

Sales in Quebec decreased 2.1% to $14.7 billion in April, as all seven subsectors saw reduced sales. Declines were led by the food, beverage and tobacco merchant wholesalers which decreased 5.2% to $2.9 billion and accounted for half of the provincial decrease. The machinery, equipment and supplies merchant wholesalers (-2.5% to $2.4 billion) and the motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories merchant wholesalers (-3.2% to $1.5 billion) also contributed to the decline.

Ontario sales fell 0.4% to $40.4 billion in April. Three of seven subsectors saw a drop in sales. The driving force behind the decline was reduced sales in the miscellaneous merchant wholesalers subsector (-5.0% to $5.1 billion) and the building material and supplies merchant wholesalers (-2.5% to $5.6 billion). Partially offsetting the provincial decrease was the gain in the machinery, equipment and supplies merchant wholesalers, up 1.5% to $8.5 billion.

In April, four provinces and all three territories had increased sales. Among them, a 2.0% increase to $8.7 billion in Alberta partially offset the national decline. The gains in Alberta were largely driven by the machinery equipment and supplies merchant wholesalers which increased 6.8% to $2.6 billion and accounted for 68% of the province's growth. The building material and supplies merchant wholesalers also contributed to the province's growth, up 3.6% to $1.7 billion.

Inventories continue to rise in April

Inventories rose 1.7% to $111.5 billion in April, the third consecutive monthly increase. All seven subsectors reported increased inventories for the first time since May 2019, led by the machinery, equipment and supplies, and the building material and supplies subsectors.

Inventories in the machinery, equipment and supplies subsector increased by 2.0% to $30.3 billion in April. Inventories grew in all component industries in the subsector, with farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment reporting the largest growth.

Also contributing to the increase in inventories was the building material and supplies subsector, which grew 2.2% to $21.5 billion. Stocks of electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies had the greatest growth in the subsector.

Wholesalers of the miscellaneous subsector had gains in inventories of 2.1% to $15.9 billion in April. While all five component industries had greater inventories, 79% of the accumulation was from the miscellaneous and the agricultural supplies industries.

The inventory to sales ratio increased from 1.37 in March to 1.40 in April. This ratio is a measure of the time (in months) required to exhaust inventories if sales were to remain at their current levels.

Table 1
Wholesale merchants' sales by industry – Seasonally adjusted

	April 2021	March 2022[r]	April 2022[p]	March to April 2022	April 2021 to April 2022
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total, wholesale sales (current dollars)	**71,607**	**80,228**	**79,817**	**-0.5**	**11.5**
Total, wholesale sales (2012 chained dollars)	**61,955**	**62,527**	**62,170**	**-0.6**	**0.3**
Total wholesale sales (current dollars), excluding motor vehicle and parts	**61,234**	**68,466**	**68,152**	**-0.5**	**11.3**
Farm product	992	1,120	1,161	3.6	17.0
Food, beverage and tobacco	12,740	13,846	13,806	-0.3	8.4
Food	11,099	12,075	12,136	0.5	9.4
Beverage	823	952	972	2.2	18.2
Cigarette and tobacco product	672	605	500	-17.3	-25.6
Cannabis	147	215	197	-8.4	34.7
Personal and household goods	10,258	11,228	11,223	-0.0	9.4
Textile, clothing and footwear	1,188	1,376	1,501	9.0	26.4
Home entertainment equipment and household appliance	945	959	1,027	7.1	8.7
Home furnishings	742	785	749	-4.5	1.1
Personal goods	1,081	1,194	1,148	-3.8	6.2
Pharmaceuticals and pharmacy supplies	5,329	5,810	5,643	-2.9	5.9
Toiletries, cosmetics and sundries	974	1,104	1,155	4.6	18.6
Motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories	10,372	11,762	11,665	-0.8	12.5
Motor vehicle	7,930	9,084	8,945	-1.5	12.8
New motor vehicle parts and accessories	2,377	2,578	2,634	2.2	10.8
Used motor vehicle parts and accessories	66	100[E]	85	-14.6	28.5
Building material and supplies	12,859	14,181	13,986	-1.4	8.8
Electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies	3,463	3,724	3,823	2.7	10.4
Metal service centres	2,078	2,689	2,692	0.1	29.5
Lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies	7,318	7,768	7,471	-3.8	2.1
Machinery, equipment and supplies	15,198	16,209	16,496	1.8	8.5
Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment	2,270	1,829	1,966	7.5	-13.4
Construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies	4,557	5,591	5,632	0.7	23.6
Computer and communications equipment and supplies	4,965	5,000	4,982	-0.4	0.3
Other machinery, equipment and supplies	3,406	3,788	3,916	3.4	15.0
Miscellaneous	9,187	11,881	11,479	-3.4	24.9
Recyclable material	1,257	1,647	1,814	10.2	44.4
Paper, paper product and disposable plastic product	1,017	1,212	1,245	2.7	22.4
Agricultural supplies	2,694	3,846	3,324	-13.6	23.4
Chemical (except agricultural) and allied product	1,662	2,211	2,040	-7.7	22.8
Other miscellaneous	2,557	2,965	3,055	3.0	19.5

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E use with caution

Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.
Source(s): Tables **20-10-0074-01** and **20-10-0003-01**.

Table 2
Wholesale merchants' sales by province and territory – Seasonally adjusted

	April 2021	March 2022[r]	April 2022[p]	March to April 2022	April 2021 to April 2022
	millions of dollars			% change	
Canada	**71,607**	**80,228**	**79,817**	**-0.5**	**11.5**
Newfoundland and Labrador	401	417	401	-3.8	0.1
Prince Edward Island	124	132	135	2.4	8.9
Nova Scotia	1,188	1,175	1,178	0.3	-0.8
New Brunswick	836	794	820	3.2	-2.0
Quebec	14,522	15,022	14,703	-2.1	1.2
Ontario	35,272	40,559	40,395	-0.4	14.5
Manitoba	1,625	1,794	1,724	-3.9	6.1
Saskatchewan	2,514	3,259	3,252	-0.2	29.4
Alberta	7,473	8,570	8,738	2.0	16.9
British Columbia	7,597	8,459	8,410	-0.6	10.7
Yukon	15	15	17	19.9	18.3
Northwest Territories	27	26	28	7.7	3.6
Nunavut	14	7	16	132.6	16.4

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Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.
Source(s): Table **20-10-0074-01**.

Table 3
Wholesale merchants' inventories by industry – Seasonally adjusted

	April 2021	March 2022[r]	April 2022[p]	March to April 2022	April 2021 to April 2022
	millions of dollars			% change	
Total, wholesale inventories	**93,418**	**109,638**	**111,532**	**1.7**	**19.4**
Farm product	240	266	271	1.7	13.1
Food, beverage and tobacco	10,590	11,952	12,110	1.3	14.4
Food	9,310	10,428	10,571	1.4	13.5
Beverage	705	914	944	3.3	33.8
Cigarette and tobacco product	355	408	391	-4.1	10.2
Cannabis	219	202	204	0.7	-7.0
Personal and household goods	17,093	18,865	19,024	0.8	11.3
Textile, clothing and footwear	3,926	3,890	3,722[E]	-4.3	-5.2
Home entertainment equipment and household appliance	919	1,276	1,336	4.7	45.3
Home furnishings	1,401	1,737	1,865	7.3	33.1
Personal goods	2,196	2,544	2,684[E]	5.5	22.2
Pharmaceuticals and pharmacy supplies	7,542	8,229	8,272	0.5	9.7
Toiletries, cosmetics and sundries	1,109	1,188	1,145	-3.6	3.2
Motor vehicle and motor vehicle parts and accessories	11,815	12,160	12,360	1.6	4.6
Motor vehicle	7,045	6,568	6,693	1.9	-5.0
New motor vehicle parts and accessories	4,674	5,431	5,557	2.3	18.9
Used motor vehicle parts and accessories	F	F	110[E]	F	F
Building material and supplies	15,728	21,053	21,516	2.2	36.8
Electrical, plumbing, heating and air-conditioning equipment and supplies	4,427	6,033	6,282	4.1	41.9
Metal service centres	3,677	5,654	5,740	1.5	56.1
Lumber, millwork, hardware and other building supplies	7,624	9,366	9,493	1.4	24.5
Machinery, equipment and supplies	25,920	29,726	30,313	2.0	17.0
Farm, lawn and garden machinery and equipment	5,597	5,647	5,901	4.5	5.4
Construction, forestry, mining, and industrial machinery, equipment and supplies	11,515	13,549	13,563	0.1	17.8
Computer and communications equipment and supplies	3,107	3,938	4,100	4.1	32.0
Other machinery, equipment and supplies	5,700	6,592	6,749	2.4	18.4
Miscellaneous	12,033	15,616	15,938	2.1	32.5
Recyclable material	1,209[E]	1,441[E]	1,467	1.8	21.3
Paper, paper product and disposable plastic product	1,054	1,257	1,281	1.9	21.6
Agricultural supplies	4,570	6,852	6,977	1.8	52.7
Chemical (except agricultural) and allied product	1,498	1,773	1,791	1.1	19.6
Other miscellaneous	3,702	4,293	4,422	3.0	19.4

r revised
p preliminary
E use with caution
F too unreliable to be published
Note(s): Figures may not add up to totals as a result of rounding.
Source(s): Table **20-10-0076-01**.

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 Section 2: Issues related to analysis and interpretation.

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 (see Section 1: Concepts and definitions) 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 large and could even lead to a reversal of movement, especially for reference months near the end of the series or during periods of economic disruptions.

Total wholesale sales expressed in volume are calculated by deflating current dollar values using relevant price indexes. The wholesale sales series in chained (2012) dollars is a chained Fisher volume index, with 2012 as the reference year. For more information, see "Deflation of wholesale sales".

The Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey covers all industries within the wholesale trade sector, as defined by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), with the exception of oilseed and grain merchant wholesalers (NAICS 41112), petroleum and petroleum products merchant wholesalers (NAICS 412) and business-to-business electronic markets, and agents and brokers (NAICS 419).

Real-time data tables

Real-time data tables 20-10-0019-01, 20-10-0020-01 and 20-10-0005-01 will be updated soon.

Next release

Wholesale trade data for May 2022 will be released on July 15, 2022.

Available tables: 20-10-0003-01, 20-10-0074-01 and 20-10-0076-01.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number 2401.

The product "Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey: Interactive Tool" (**71-607-X**) is available online. This product is based on the data published in the tables of the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey: 20-10-0074-01, 20-10-0076-01 and 20-10-0003-01.

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**) or Media Relations (**statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca**).