

Weekly COVID Update:

**Cross-National Policy Comparisons and Canadian Trends in
Social Distancing, Social Media Activity, and Government
Support**

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Foreword

Canada, like many countries around the world, is beginning to reopen its economy. At the same time, we are still confronting a serious public health threat in the SARS-CoV-2 virus and in COVID-19.

How are we reopening, compared to other countries? And how are we doing as a country at maintaining social distancing and the public support and attention necessary to sustain the fight against COVID-19?

On our Dashboard, we present unique quantitative data on:

- The openness of the economy on nine different dimensions in 52 different jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories.
- Trends in social distancing in Canada.
- Trends in social media attention to COVID-19 and selected other topics.
- Trends in support for federal, provincial, and local government management of COVID-19.

We also provide a weekly qualitative summary of the actions governments are taking and considering taking to reopen their economies and manage the coronavirus.

Our data are updated weekly. You can subscribe to a weekly update by visiting our website: www.reopeningaftercovid.com.

Please direct any questions or comments to peter.loewen@utoronto.ca.

Data Visualizations from Dashboard

Level of Reopening by Sector Among OECD Countries and Selected Canadian Provinces and US States

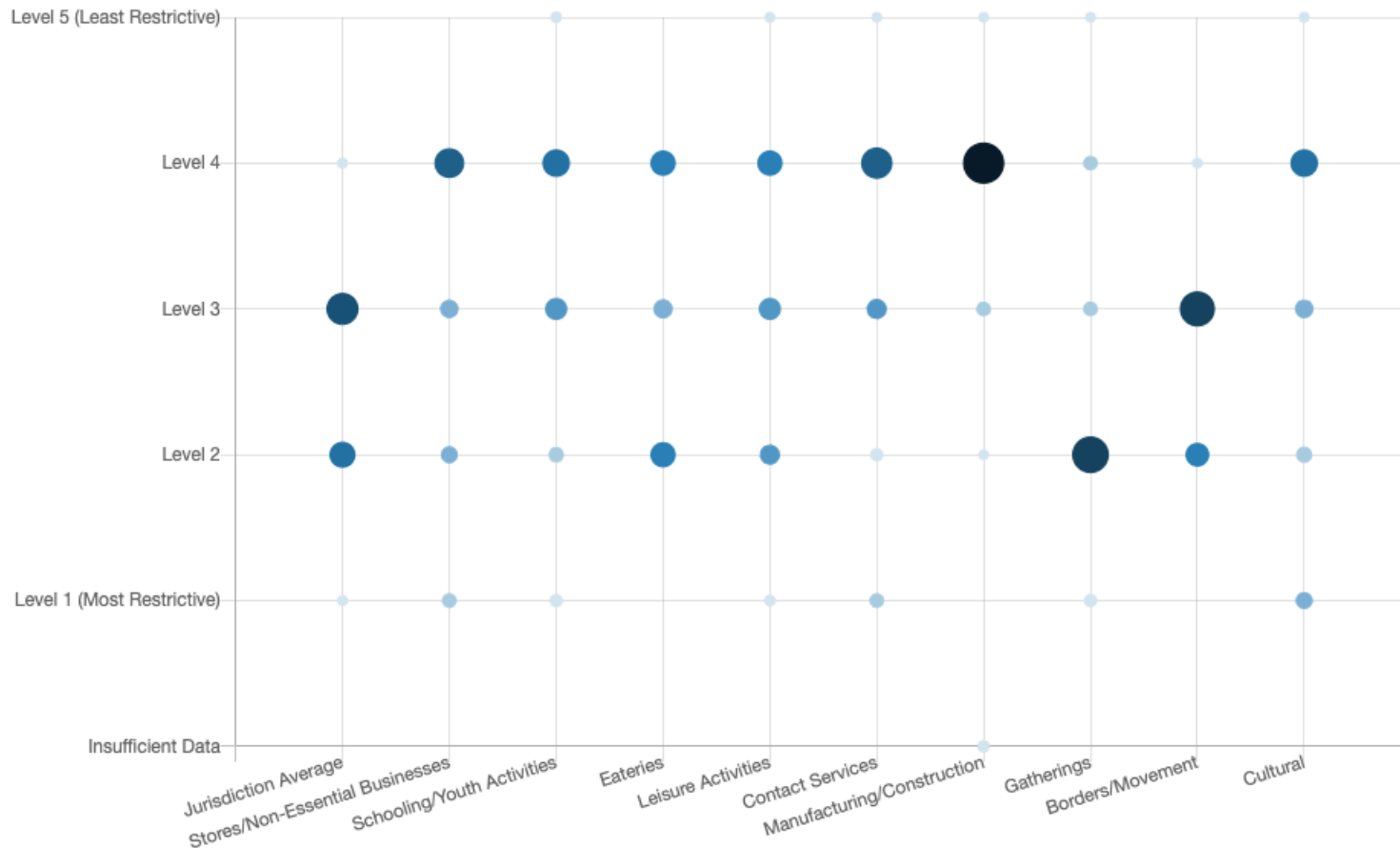


Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of November 23. The reopening policies of 52 jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories. For each jurisdiction, we classify a total of 9 different sectors: Stores/Non-Essential Businesses, Schooling/Youth Activities, Eateries, Leisure Activities, Contact Services, Manufacturing/Construction, Gatherings, Borders/Movement, and Cultural. Each sector is assigned a level of reopening from Level 1 (Complete Lockdown) to Level 5 (Unrestricted Access). The larger and darker a dot is, the more jurisdictions are at that level of reopening. For details, see www.reopeningaftercovid.com.

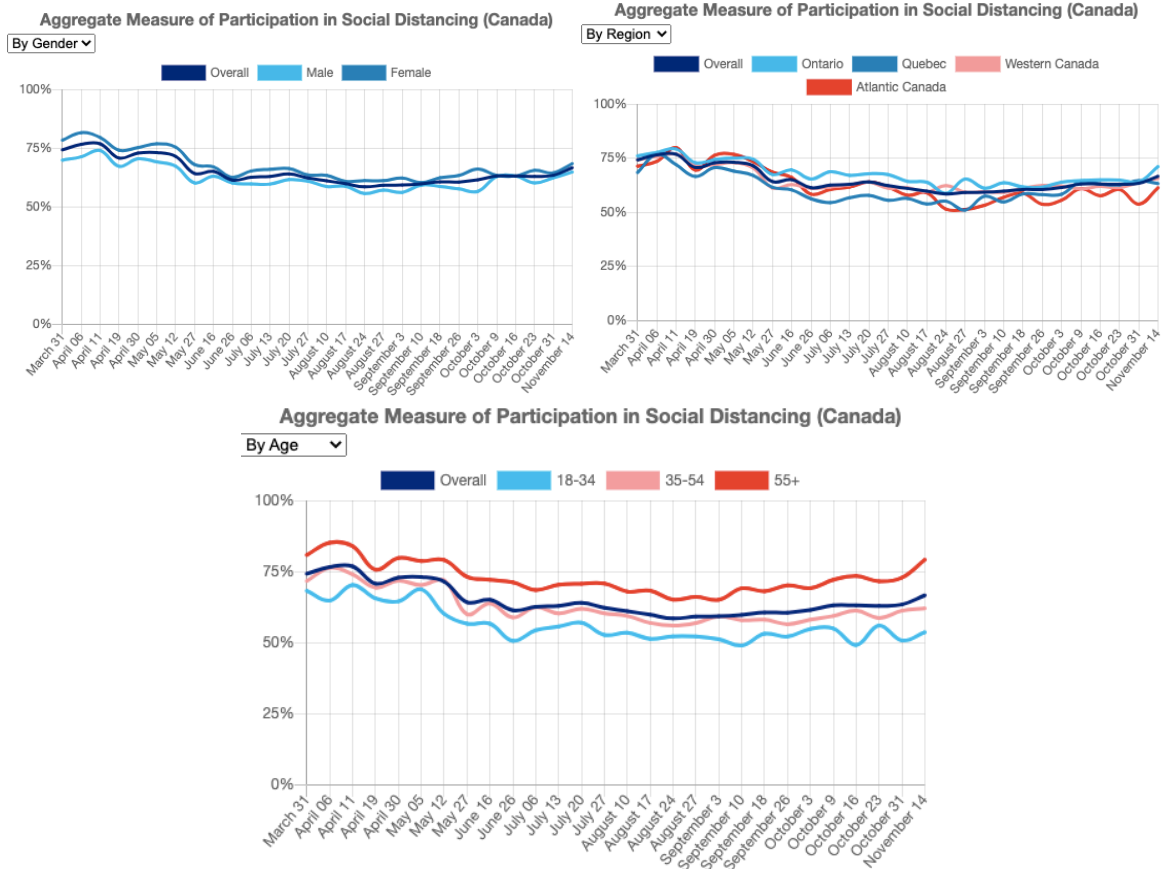


Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada). We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre distance from others; avoided domestic travel; avoided public transit; and avoided the grocery store at peak times. The graph displays the percentage of these measures taken by the average survey participant. The surveys used to collect these data were run in partnership with the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO). Each survey has a sample size of approximately 2,500 people. For each survey, we worked with a leading sample provider to generate a nationally representative, online sample of Canadians. In addition, following data collection, we applied survey weights to each survey so that—within each province—the sample is representative of the population age and gender.

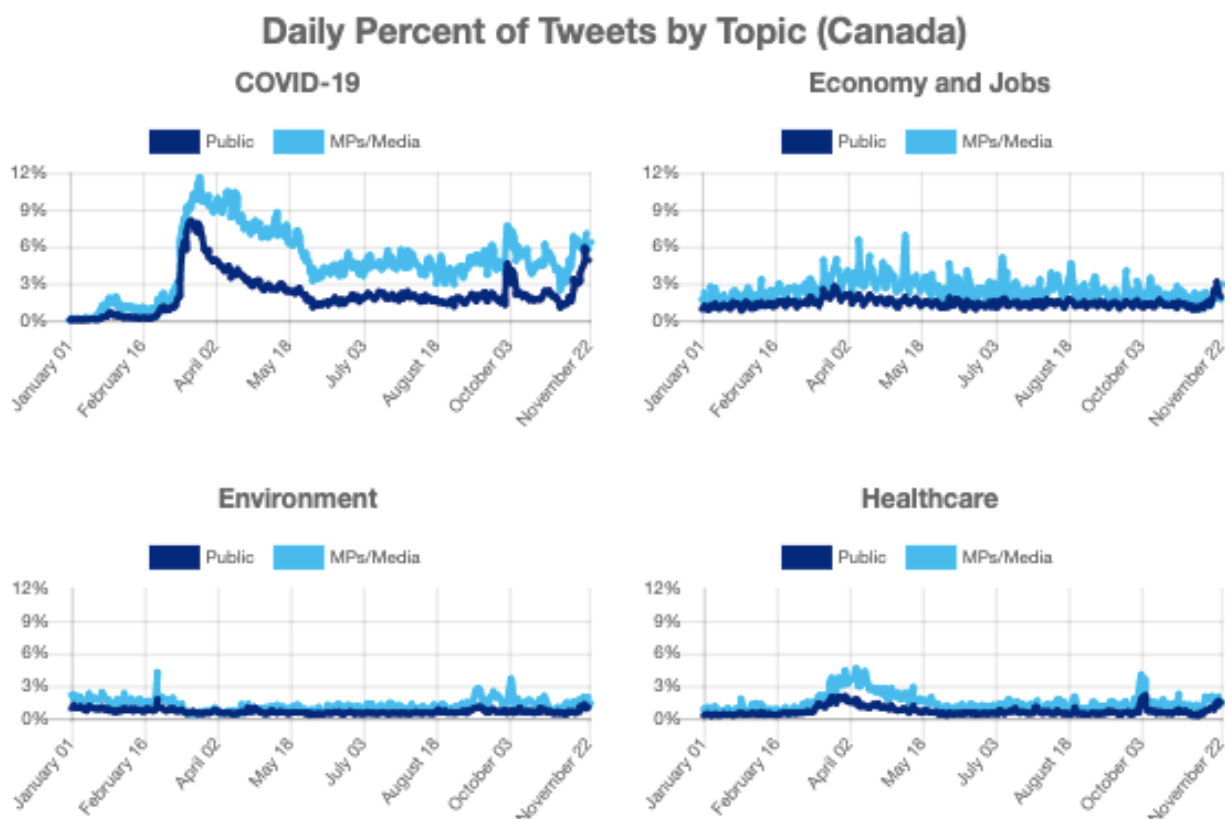


Figure 3 – Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada). The graphs report the percentage of daily tweets containing one or more keywords associated with the particular topic. The results are presented separately for MPs, senators, and journalists, on the one hand, and for the Canadian public, on the other. The Twitter data are provided by the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO). It aims to capture the entire Canadian Twitter conversation. To do so, MEO identified a set of politicians, political journalists, public intellectuals, and Canadian-specific hashtags and collected every Twitter user that touched one of these themes or individuals. MEO then evaluated each individual, looking at their follower or friending behaviour, biographies, self-identified location, and hashtag use and included them in the sample if they were determined to be algorithmically likely to be Canadian. The dataset contains approximately 200,000 tweets a day. The analysis uses a 10% sample of the public’s daily tweets and the full set of daily tweets from MPs, senators, and journalists.

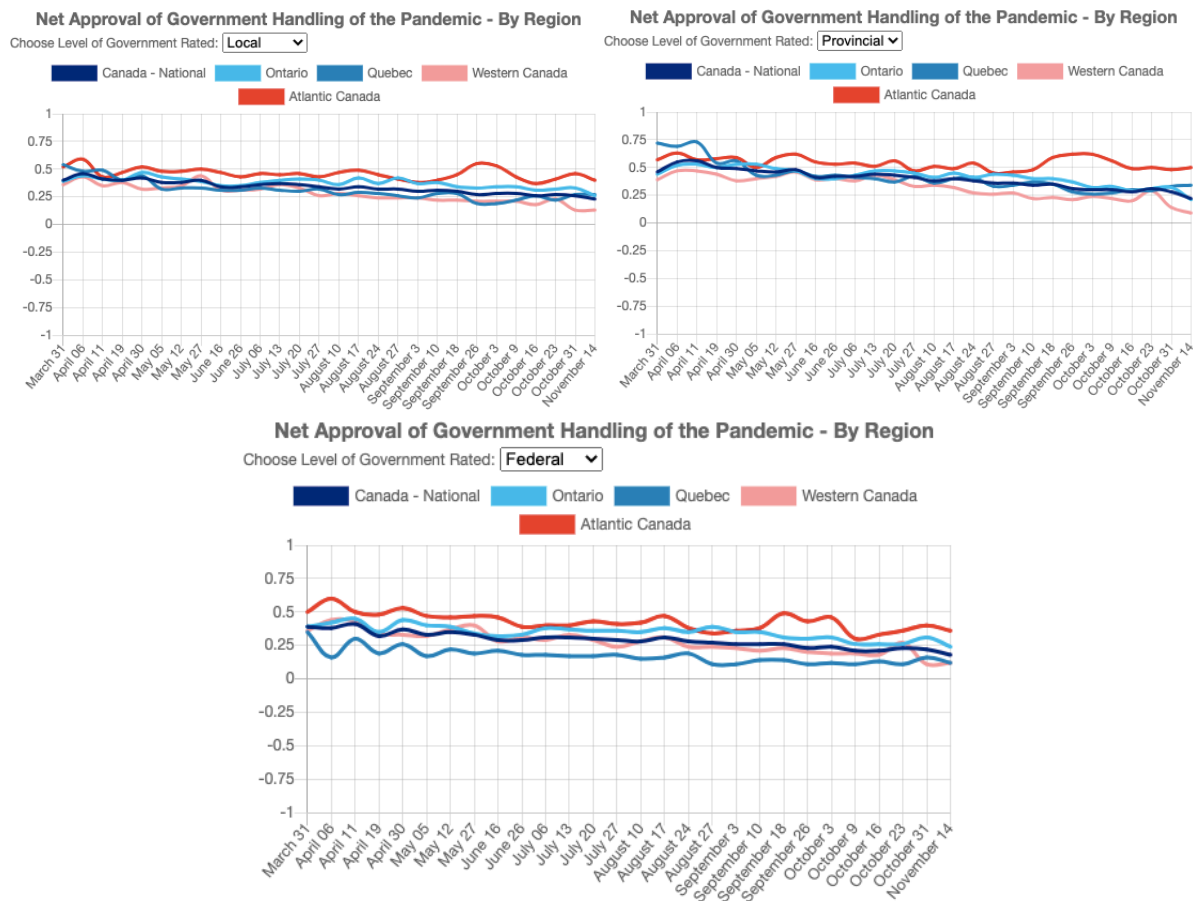


Figure 4 – Net approval of government handling of the pandemic by region. We asked Canadians whether they approved of how each level of government (the federal government, their provincial government, and their local government) was handling the coronavirus pandemic so far. To obtain a net approval score, participants' answers were coded as follows: strongly approve (1); somewhat approve (0.5); neither approve, nor disapprove (0); somewhat disapprove (-0.5); and strongly disapprove (-1). The graph displays the average score. The surveys used to collect these data were run in partnership with the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO). Each survey has a sample size of approximately 2,500 people. For each survey, we worked with a leading sample provider to generate a nationally representative, online sample of Canadians. In addition, following data collection, we applied survey weights to each survey so that—within each province—the sample is representative of the population age and gender.

Individual OECD Country Profiles

THE AMERICAS

Canada

→ *Alberta*

On November 21, Alberta recorded 1,336 new cases of COVID-19 -- breaking its single-day case record for the fourth day this week. The Edmonton zone reported 4,941 active cases.¹ Edmonton may implement additional COVID-19 restrictions if the provincial government does not extend or introduce new measures before the current ones expire on November 27.² Contact tracers are having difficulty finding the source of infections due to the overwhelming number of cases, making it difficult for health officials to determine which further restrictions are needed.³

→ *British Columbia*

The number of new cases is still on the rise in British Columbia, staying mostly above 500 per day last week. A mandatory mask policy has not been implemented, but the government is encouraging the use of masks. On November 19, the previous regional orders were expanded province-wide. Indoor and outdoor social gatherings are prohibited, with the exception of baptisms, funerals and weddings. Group physical activities are banned until at least the end of the year. All businesses and worksites are required to conduct active daily screening of all on-site workers using their COVID-19 safety plans, and employers are encouraged to support work-from-home options. Non-essential travel is strongly discouraged.⁴

→ *Manitoba*

On November 20, Manitoba recorded 438 new cases of COVID-19. The Manitoba government announced enhanced public health restrictions on November 19, which will remain in effect until December 1. Under these new measures, the province further limited social contacts, only allowing those within a household to enter a private residence. Exceptions to this rule can be made for essential reasons such as childcare, homecare services, tutoring, construction, repairs, and emergency response. Existing orders limiting public gatherings outside the home to five people remain in effect to allow for events, such as weddings, funerals, and baptisms to take place.⁵ Businesses that sell essential items such as food, medication, office supplies and major appliances will be required to remove any non-essential goods from the shelves or rope off those areas. Large retailers are required to restrict their capacity to 25% of normal capacity, or to a maximum of 250, whichever is lower.⁶

→ *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported a single-day record of 23 new cases of COVID-19 on November 21, leaving the province with a total of 77 active cases as of November 23.⁷ This surge in cases has prompted the provincial government to move Zones 1 (Moncton) and 2 (Saint John), where the majority of active cases have been reported, back to the “orange” alert level.⁸ This means that the spread of COVID-19 is no longer considered “stable” in these parts of the province and that some minor restrictions and public health guidelines are needed to reduce pressure on the healthcare system -- including the limitation of personal contacts to a single-household bubble, travelling only when essential, and the enforcement of strict hygienic regimes in public places and venues.⁹ These changes come just one week after New Brunswick began allowing people from outside of Canada to enter the province to visit immediate family members.¹⁰

→ *Newfoundland and Labrador*

Newfoundland and Labrador remains at Alert Level 2. The number of cases are increasing, with 18 active cases in the province.¹¹ The chief medical officer of health said there is concern about public complacency with respect to COVID-19 guidelines. The government does not recommend non-essential travel due to the second wave being experienced in other provinces.¹²

→ *Northwest Territories*

No new cases of COVID-19 have been reported in the Northwest Territories over the past week. The travel bubble with Nunavut was suspended on November 17 due to the territory's epidemiological situation. All travellers from Nunavut are required to self-isolate for 14 days, and travellers from affected communities in Nunavut who are already in the NWT are required to self-isolate immediately.¹³ The general guidance for travellers returning from outside the territory has also been revised: travellers arriving after November 18 and their households must self-isolate for 14 days -- unless they have a self-contained suite for the travellers. Non-essential travel outside of the territory is strongly discouraged.¹⁴ Over 4,700 flu shots have been delivered to Yellowknife residents, and additional appointments will be offered from November 23 to 29. The government is prepared to supply twice as many total flu shots as usual.¹⁵

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia reported 11 new cases of COVID-19 on November 22, the province's largest single-day increase since May 4, leaving the province with a total of 44 active cases.¹⁶ This increase in cases has prompted officials to place Halifax and neighbouring Hants County, the province's hardest hit regions, under stricter public health rules that will last until at least December 21.¹⁷ Gatherings without physical distancing will be limited to five people for both regions, and households will only be allowed to host up to five visitors at a time.¹⁸ Larger indoor gatherings, such as sports games, cultural events, religious gatherings, weddings, and funerals, must be limited to 50% of the venue's capacity -- up to a maximum of 100 people.¹⁹ The premier has stated previously that he "will not hesitate, if required, to shut down this economy in sections [...]" if new cases continue to emerge at the current rate.²⁰

→ *Nunavut*

There are 134 active cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut as of November 23, including 98 in Arviat.²¹ All other cases are in Sanikiluaq, Rankin Inlet, and Whale Cove, though officials said there does not appear to be extensive transmission in those communities.²² Due to the outbreak, a territory-wide lockdown will be in place until at least December 2. Restaurants can only offer takeout services. All non-essential workplaces, contact services, leisure facilities, cultural activities, and non-emergency health centres must close. The gathering limit remains 5 people. Residents have been advised to wear a mask in public spaces.²³ The travel bubble with the Northwest Territories has been suspended.²⁴ Individuals who have travelled through Arviat since November 2 must immediately self-isolate for 14 days.²⁵

→ *Ontario*

Ontario's 7-day rolling average has remained stable at around 1,400 cases per day.²⁶ Nearly 80% of cases reported in recent days are from regions in red zones. This past week hospitalizations have increased by 22% and intensive care admissions have risen by 50%.²⁷ On November 20, the premier announced that Toronto and Peel Region are moving into "lockdown" effective at 12:01 am. November 23. The shutdown will last a minimum of 28 days, equal to two incubation periods for COVID-19. The province says it will fine people \$750 for violating public-health rules.²⁸ The new restrictions for Toronto and Peel include: no indoor private gatherings; outdoor gatherings limited to 10 people; restaurants limited to take-out and delivery only; gyms closed; non-essential retail and malls limited to curbside pickup; personal care services, casinos and bingo halls closed; and post-secondary institutions moved mostly to virtual instruction. Schools, pharmacies, medical clinics, and grocery stores remain open.²⁹ Durham and Waterloo regions are moving into the red "control" zones. Huron-Perth, Simcoe-Muskoka, southwestern Ontario and Windsor are moving to the orange "restrict" zone.³⁰

→ *Prince Edward Island*

In Prince Edward Island, there is 1 active case of COVID-19. The risk of transmission is low, with no deaths or hospitalizations.³¹ Effective November 20, non-medical masks will be required in all indoor public

spaces. Members of the opposition are pressing the government to provide more details on its COVID-19 economic recovery plan.³²

→ *Quebec*

On November 21, Quebec reported 1,189 new cases, 5 new deaths, and 22 more hospitalizations in the past day.³³ Overall, Quebec has had 130,888 cases and 6,806 deaths.³⁴ Montreal reports the most cases, with Saguenay and Monteregie following behind.³⁵ Saguenay has the most per capita cases: 402 per 100,000 people.³⁶ The Premier wants to implement a four-day relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions between December 24 and 27 -- allowing gatherings with up to ten people if people self-isolate a week before and a week after gathering.³⁷ The closure of bars and restaurants, which began on October 1, is anticipated to finish on January 11.³⁸

→ *Saskatchewan*

Saskatchewan reported 439 new cases of COVID-19 on November 21, the province's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.³⁹ There are 2,683 active cases in the province, including 99 hospitalizations, as of November 22.⁴⁰ A mandatory mask policy has been implemented for all indoor public spaces across the province, and the private gathering limit has been lowered to 5 people. Visits to hospitals and long-term care facilities have been suspended.⁴¹ The new restrictions come after the government was criticized for exempting rural areas from the mask policy even though they often have higher per-capita infection rates than urban centres.⁴² The leader of the opposition has called for the province to introduce "circuit breaker" lockdown restrictions in response to the rising caseload, but the government has resisted introducing significant restrictions due to the effect on the economy.⁴³

→ *Yukon*

Yukon announced eight new cases of COVID-19 in the territory over the past week. With the travel bubble with British Columbia suspended, all travellers entering Yukon -- except for critical service workers and border-area residents -- are required to complete a declaration and self-isolate for 14 days effective November 20. Non-essential travel outside of the territory is not recommended.⁴⁴ Masks became mandatory on Whitehorse public transit on November 23.⁴⁵ No other changes to restrictions in Yukon have been announced over the past week.

The United States

→ *California*

Over the past ten days, California's daily number of new cases had doubled -- the fastest increase in cases since the beginning of the pandemic.⁴⁶ Authorities blame the increase on private gatherings and parties.⁴⁷ As of November 17, over 40 counties regressed to purple, or phase one, on the state's reopening indicators. Approximately 94% of Californians are now in the purple phase and, at this level, restaurants, gyms and religious centres are closed.⁴⁸ On November 21, California implemented a minimum month-long curfew for counties in purple from 10 pm to 5 am, which requires people to stay home unless leaving for groceries, emergencies, take-out or walking dogs.⁴⁹ LA County authorities have said that they may implement additional measures.⁵⁰ Non-essential activities have been restricted in San Francisco and fitness centers and gyms can only operate with up to 10% capacity.⁵¹ Disneyland has not reopened attractions, but the theme park is now open for dining and retail.⁵² The governor apologized for attending an outdoor birthday party, which did not violate rules, but did contradict state recommendations.⁵³

→ *Illinois*

Although Illinois' seven-day average test positivity rate slightly decreased, to 11.5%, on November 21, the state has had its deadliest week in months. The Illinois Department of Public Health reported on average more than 100 COVID-19 deaths per day this week. With over 6,000 hospitalized, the death rate is expected

to increase.⁵⁴ The state is urging everyone to stay home as much as possible to save lives. New restrictions were introduced on November 21 and will remain in place for at least 14 days, but will likely last longer. These statewide restrictions include the closure of all cultural institutions (including museums, casinos and zoos), banning indoor gatherings, telework where possible, and restricting grocery stores to 50% capacity.⁵⁵ Schools remain open.

→ *Michigan*

Michigan's seven-day moving average has climbed this week to 7,000 new cases per day, a record for the state.⁵⁶ On November 15, the governor announced new restrictions that came into effect on November 18, by using the power vested in Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) director during a public health emergency. The new restrictions include suspending in-person dining at bars and restaurants, moving high school and college-level classes online, and closing movie theaters, bowling alleys and other entertainment venues.⁵⁷ Retail stores are permitted to keep their doors open for the next three weeks, but must operate at 30% capacity and enforce face coverings. Personal services, including hair salons and barbershops, can still welcome customers by appointment with safety precautions. The new restrictions will last for three weeks, ending December 9.⁵⁸

→ *New York*

New York's positivity rate is 4.34% in "focus zone" areas, and 2.49% outside those areas.⁵⁹ The state is now conducting roughly 200,000 tests per day. The governor announced that Rockland County's Yellow Precautionary Zone will be expanded, and parts of Orange and Westchester counties will become Yellow Precautionary Zones due to increased cases, positivity, and hospital admissions from these areas.⁶⁰ On November 17, New York City passed its threshold of 3% positivity rate.⁶¹ As of November 19, the mayor halted in-person learning, sending more than one million children into all-online classes at least through Thanksgiving. The city hasn't yet settled on criteria for reopening classrooms, but the mayor said this would involve increasing virus testing of children at schools and allowing students to return only if their parents consented to that testing.⁶²

→ *Texas*

Texas reported 12,293 new daily COVID-19 cases on November 19, which surpassed the November 17 record of 10,823 new daily cases.⁶³ As of November 20, there were 127 counties in red, or phase one, and 82 counties in orange, or phase two.⁶⁴ El Paso County is experiencing the worst COVID-19 situation in Texas and this past week averaged 1,386 new daily cases, which meant approximately 165.1 new cases per 100,000 people.⁶⁵ Texas now has a new antibody treatment from Eli Lilly & Co.⁶⁶ The governor claims that Texas will not lockdown.⁶⁷

Mexico

On November 19, Mexico passed 100,000 COVID-19 deaths -- making it the fourth country.⁶⁸ On November 20, Mexico reported 6,426 new COVID-19 cases and 719 new deaths.⁶⁹ In November, the average daily number of new cases decreased 14% from 5,853 in October to 5,050 in November.⁷⁰ As of November 23, two states remained in red, or phase one; 14 states were in orange, or phase two; 14 states were in yellow, or phase three.⁷¹ Alcohol sales in Mexico City were restricted to dissuade parties and authorities suggested that there may be a lockdown with the rising number of deaths across Mexico.⁷² The US-Mexico land borders will remain closed to non-essential travel until December 21.⁷³ Some Mexicans are highly concerned by the pandemic while others are not worried and refuse to wear masks.⁷⁴ In addition to the limited availability of testing, some people are attempting to treat family members with COVID-19 at home because they do not trust hospitals.⁷⁵ Mexico City is preparing 26 additional testing sites.⁷⁶

Chile

On November 22, Chile reported 1,573 new daily cases and 48 new deaths.⁷⁷ On November 19, Chile imposed additional restrictions in the south and extended Greater Concepcion's curfew from 8 pm to 5 am.⁷⁸ On November 23, Chile reopened its borders to foreigners at the Arturo Merino Benitez Airport.⁷⁹ Travellers must have received a negative PCR test in the past 72 hours, have health insurance for COVID-19 and have a Health Passport.⁸⁰ From November 23 to December 7, foreigners from high-risk countries must quarantine for two weeks and, while other visitors do not have to quarantine, they must download an app to monitor their location and to track symptoms.⁸¹ Foreigners must follow sanitary measures including masks, curfews and not visiting quarantined communes. Hotels, parks, restaurants, museums and beaches must use biosecurity measures.⁸² A November 18 announcement said that theaters could reopen with up to 50% capacity.⁸³

WESTERN EUROPE

France

France's seven-day moving average of new cases decreased to 23,000 cases per day: a positive sign that the lockdown measures may be working.⁸⁴ This past week, hospital admissions fell 13% and the number of new intensive care patients was down 9%. The weekly number of deaths have decreased by 300 this week.⁸⁵ Having been in an intense nationwide lockdown since October 30, the French are starting to prepare for the end of lockdown measures during the first week of December. Shops are preparing for Black Friday shopping ahead of the Christmas holidays. However, the government has insisted that lockdown measures will remain for now. The president is expected to address the nation on November 24 on the prospects for travel and family gatherings for the fast-approaching Christmas break.⁸⁶ A recent Ipsos study found that only 54% of French citizens would get a COVID-19 vaccine if one were available, the lowest rate of any country surveyed.⁸⁷

Germany

Germany's seven-day R-value has slightly increased to 1.07; however, the country's 7-day moving average of new cases has maintained its plateau at around 18,500 cases.⁸⁸ Private gatherings seem to be the largest driver of transmission.⁸⁹ Official data show that the number of COVID-19 patients in German ICUs has climbed from 267 on September 21 to 3,615 as of November 21 -- a more than 13-fold increase in the space of just two months; 6,107 ICU beds remain vacant.⁹⁰ The chancellor met with the 16 state premiers to discuss stricter lockdowns. However, she did not have support among state leaders for new restrictions, postponing any decision until a meeting next week.⁹¹ Current restrictions include contacts reduced to a maximum of two households and no more than 10 people, restaurants and bars closed apart from take-out, and unnecessary travel discouraged but not banned. Schools and nurseries are open. The chancellor was hoping to decrease the household number to one, and to introduce facemasks at schools of all levels.⁹²

Belgium

In Belgium, infection rates, deaths, and hospitalizations are slowly beginning to decrease across the country.⁹³ Effective November 23, COVID-19 tests will become available for asymptomatic people who have had a high-risk contact or returned from a red-travel zone. The head of an intensive care hospital in Brussels called for the current COVID-19 measures to remain in place until 2021.⁹⁴ Belgium's CoronaAlert app has been downloaded about 2 million times in the country, prompting its developers to announce it has reached its efficiency threshold.⁹⁵

Netherlands

On November 20, the number of people being treated in hospital for COVID-19 fell to just under 2,000.⁹⁶ Some restrictions were relaxed on November 19 -- including the reopening of publicly accessible buildings, such as cinemas, museums, and swimming pools. Zoos and theme parks were also allowed to re-open. Up to 30 people, including children, are now permitted to gather in indoor spaces where seating is required. Adults and children 13 and over are able to gather outdoors in groups of up to four. At home, residents will now be allowed up to three visitors per day, instead of two. Theatre groups, dance groups, and bands are permitted to have up to 30 members (unseated) present at rehearsals and performances, with a maximum of 30 audience members at live performances.⁹⁷ Effective December 1, face masks will be mandatory in all public indoor areas for everyone over the age of 13. People caught without a face mask will face a fine of 95 euros.⁹⁸

Spain

On November 17, the 14-day cumulative incidence nationwide was 470.26 cases per 100,000 people.⁹⁹ Some autonomous regions, including Valencia, Cantabria, Castilla-La Mancha and Navarre, have decided that regional borders will remain closed.¹⁰⁰ Valencian officials would like to extend the closure to December 9.¹⁰¹ Madrid will close its regional borders between December 4 and 13 to limit travel during the December 7 and 8 holidays and its 12 am to 6 am curfew will remain.¹⁰² On November 23, bars and restaurants were permitted to reopen with a capacity limit of 30% in Catalonia.¹⁰³ Spain's autonomous governments will decide on the regulations to be implemented during the Christmas season.¹⁰⁴ As of November 23, people visiting Spain are required to have a negative PCR test done 72 hours before departure -- or may be fined, have the test done in Spain, or be sent home.¹⁰⁵ The government hopes to vaccinate all 47 million Spaniards by mid-2021. It intends to begin vaccinating in January 2021 using 13,000 vaccination sites.¹⁰⁶

The United Kingdom

The UK's seven-day rolling average decreased slightly to 22,000 new cases per day.¹⁰⁷ On November 5, a nationwide lockdown began in England, which closed pubs, restaurants and stores selling items deemed to be non-essential such as books, clothing and sneakers until at least December 2.¹⁰⁸ Unlike the spring lockdown, schools and universities, as well as construction sites and factories, remain open. The government is now considering how to replace the nationwide lockdown. Instead of targeted local lockdowns that were in place from July to October, the government is said to be considering tougher restrictions on broader regions of England from December onwards.¹⁰⁹ Britain could ease stringent COVID-19 rules to allow families to gather for Christmas, as the metrics indicate that cases are starting to flatten as a result of the current lockdown.¹¹⁰ Glasgow and parts of Scotland's west and central regions began a stricter lockdown on November 20 to last until December 11: restrictions include the closure of pubs and restaurants and non-essential shops.¹¹¹

Ireland

On November 20, 330 new cases of COVID-19 were reported -- for a total of 69,802 confirmed cases in Ireland since the start of the pandemic.¹¹² The country has been under a six-week lockdown that began on October 21, with people being asked to stay at home and travel only for essential purposes. Despite pubs being closed and only takeaways permitted, concerns have been expressed about the number of people congregating to drink in various Irish city centres over the weekend. The Irish cabinet is expected to agree on new fines of less than 300 euros for people drinking alcohol outdoors, with licence holders facing a fine of up to 1,500 euros. Under licensing regulations, these drinks cannot be consumed within 100m of the premises that sold them.¹¹³

Luxembourg

On November 19, 519 new COVID-19 cases were reported. The effective reproduction rate is currently 1.00.¹¹⁴ Luxembourg could be receiving its first batch of vaccines within four weeks, but it remains unclear as to which company's vaccine will be distributed first. Roughly 45,000 doses could be shipped, but as more than one dose is usually required per person, it would only suffice for just over 23,000 people. A commission has been set up to advise on which members of society should receive vaccination priority, and a task force will be developing a national strategy.¹¹⁵

Portugal

On November 20, Portugal registered 6,489 new cases of COVID-19.¹¹⁶ A curfew has been imposed on an additional 77 municipalities. With this change, a total of 191 municipalities are now under the country's state of emergency measures -- which remain in effect until November 23. These measures include the prohibition of movement on public roads, mandatory teleworking, the closure of restaurants at 10 pm, and a ban on events and celebrations with more than five people (with exception for those from the same household).¹¹⁷

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria

On November 20, 6,668 cases of COVID-19 were reported in Austria.¹¹⁸ The current lockdown will remain in place until at least December 6. Non-essential shops are closed and people may only leave their homes for essential errands. Eateries, theatres, museums, and contact services have been closed. In pharmacies across the country, antigen tests will now be made available to everyone by appointment.¹¹⁹

Greece

On November 21, 2,311 new COVID-19 cases were reported in Greece.¹²⁰ Due to a gradual increase in infections, authorities implemented a second nationwide lockdown -- which is set to expire at the end of November.¹²¹ The health system remains under immense pressure with 80% of all ICU beds occupied at public hospitals.¹²² The government plans to set up more than 1,000 vaccination centers in early 2021 with priority for medical staff and those 65 and older.¹²³

Italy

The second wave in Italy has killed 9,000 people: a rate of 4 deaths per 100 infections, the third highest rate in the world.¹²⁴ On November 20, the government reported 37,239 new cases of COVID-19.¹²⁵ In October, the government introduced a three-tiered system that separates regions into red, orange, and yellow. In red zones, residents can only leave home for essential purposes, but restrictions vary. ICU doctors are reporting significant strain in hospitals. Doctors are warning that an additional 10,000 deaths could be expected by December without the implementation of additional measures.¹²⁶

Slovenia

On November 20, Slovenia reported 1,552 new cases of COVID-19. Hospitals remain at capacity and nursing homes are becoming a major hotspot. The prime minister said some of the current restrictions could remain in place until Christmas.¹²⁷ The chief epidemiologist expressed mixed feelings about the current

measures, including the mandatory use of masks outdoors and bans on movement between municipalities.¹²⁸

Switzerland

Rates of infection, mortality, and hospitalization remain high in Switzerland. Several cantons, including Geneva, report some of the highest rates of infection in Europe. Some areas of Austria, Luxembourg, and Montenegro have been added to Switzerland's quarantine list.¹²⁹ Across the country, ICU beds are near capacity.¹³⁰

EASTERN EUROPE

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic continued to report a steady decline in new cases of COVID-19, with just 1,509 new cases on November 22 -- the country's lowest single-day tally since September 28.¹³¹ Despite the lower rate of infection, Czech officials have opted to extend the state of emergency until December 20.¹³² Most restrictions -- including a curfew, limited movement outside the home, and broad economic closures -- will remain in effect during this extension.¹³³ However, Czech officials have been prompted to ease some other restrictions: as of November 23, the national curfew will last from 11 pm to 5 am (instead of 9 pm to 5 pm), and public gatherings of up to six people will be allowed.¹³⁴ Attendance at elementary schools, and classes with fewer than 20 participants at post-secondary schools, will also be allowed.¹³⁵

Hungary

Hungary remains in a state of emergency as new cases of COVID-19 continue to rise across the country. A number of new restrictions were introduced on November 11, including an extended curfew between 8 pm and 5 am, a complete ban on all public gatherings, limiting catering and restaurant services to take-out and delivery, the closure of all leisure facilities (including swimming pools, gyms, and spas), and transitioning all secondary and post-secondary students to remote learning.¹³⁶ Hungary's foreign minister announced on November 22 that the country will test 10 initial doses of Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine.¹³⁷ The country has also recently purchased 2.8 million doses of a Chinese antiviral medication, and has reserved over 12 million doses of vaccinations from manufacturers across Europe and the United States -- including British-Swedish pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, Belgium-based Janssen, and the joint US-German vaccine from Pfizer and BioNTech.¹³⁸

Latvia

Latvia reported 642 new cases of COVID-19 on November 21, a single-day record for the country.¹³⁹ A state of emergency was declared in Latvia on November 9, which will remain in effect until at least December 6.¹⁴⁰ Under the renewed state of emergency, all in-person public events are prohibited, while entertainment venues -- such as bars, skating rinks, and playgrounds -- remain closed.¹⁴¹ Public natural paths remain open for individual visits, and museums, exhibitions, libraries and other cultural venues also remain open.¹⁴² Food service venues will only serve food as take-out.¹⁴³ Beauty, piercing and tattoo parlours will be closed but hairdresser services will be allowed by appointment.¹⁴⁴ The Latvian healthcare ministry's chief infection specialist said that the results of the state of emergency will be assessed later this week, and that a decision on whether to increase restrictions will be made following that assessment.¹⁴⁵

Lithuania

Lithuania reported a record 2,307 new cases of COVID-19 on November 22, just two days after setting the previous record of 2,265 new cases.¹⁴⁶ All Lithuanian municipalities will remain in the red “quarantine” zone on the country’s three-tiered risk classification system until at least November 29.¹⁴⁷ This means that all commercial and non-commercial events in open and closed public places remain prohibited in the country, with the exception of high-level professional sports competitions (without spectators) and funerals with a maximum of 10 participants.¹⁴⁸ Catering establishments are still limited to providing takeaway and delivery services.¹⁴⁹ Public gatherings of more than five people remain prohibited, except for family members, and it is mandatory to keep a distance of at least two metres from other people.¹⁵⁰ Pre-school children and primary school pupils will continue in-person learning, while older students will continue remote learning.¹⁵¹

Poland

The spread of COVID-19 in Poland has begun to slow this week: 17,856 new cases were reported on November 22 -- the country’s lowest single-day tally in more than 2 weeks.¹⁵² Still, the rate of infection in Poland remains one of the highest in Europe: there have been over 15,000 new cases of COVID-19 every day in Poland for over a month.¹⁵³ The entirety of Poland remains in the “red” zone, which means that all secondary, post-secondary, and primary school students above grade 3 will continue remote learning, cultural events remain limited to fewer than 25 people, all restaurants and catering establishments remain limited to take-out and delivery services, all swimming pools, theme parks, spas, and fitness facilities remain prohibited from operating, and masks remain mandatory at all times outside of home.¹⁵⁴

Slovakia

Following the reportedly successful testing of over 80% of the country’s population, Slovakia’s government reopened theatres, cinemas and churches at half capacity on November 15 and allowed fitness centres and pools to resume operation with limited capacity.¹⁵⁵ Slovakia’s ice hockey and soccer leagues also resumed without spectators on November 20.¹⁵⁶ As the spread of COVID-19 in Slovakia continues to slow, the country’s prime minister has announced that his government will re-conduct nationwide mass testing in December based on the success of the initial run in “containing the pandemic.”¹⁵⁷

NORTHERN EUROPE

Denmark

Denmark reported 1,257 new cases of COVID-19 on November 20, the country’s fourth consecutive day with more than 1,200 cases.¹⁵⁸ The government announced that it believed that the mutated form of COVID-19 found in minks has been “most likely eradicated” after euthanizing most of the animals in the country.¹⁵⁹ The announcement came two days after the government reached an agreement on a legal framework for the cull, which also banned mink farming until at least 2022.¹⁶⁰ Restrictions were lifted on the North Jutland region two weeks ahead of schedule on November 20, with eateries allowed to reopen, public transit operating normally, and students allowed to return to school. Mass testing of 73,000 people in the region did not find any cases related to the mutation.¹⁶¹ Denmark will shift to a regional model in its travel advisories for all European countries, and will shorten its quarantine period for incoming travellers to 10 days. The quarantine can be shortened further if the individual produces a negative test result after four days.¹⁶² The public gathering limit of 10 people has been extended until December 13.¹⁶³

Estonia

Estonia reported 414 new cases of COVID-19 on November 19 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁶⁴ On November 23, the two-week average of new cases was 278.64 per 100,000 people, with a test positivity rate of 5.3%.¹⁶⁵ A mandatory mask policy has been introduced in all indoor public spaces nationwide, and the public gathering limit will be lowered to 500 people for outdoor events, 400 people for indoor seated events, and 250 people for all other indoor events on November 28. All cultural and sports events will be subject to a 50% capacity limit.¹⁶⁶ The ban on the sale of alcohol between 12 am and 10 am has been extended until January 31, 2021.¹⁶⁷ High schools in the two most populous regions of Estonia will move to distance learning until at least January.¹⁶⁸ The country's top public health official said that if the public does not follow the new restrictions, the government will be forced to introduce another lockdown.¹⁶⁹

Finland

Finland reported 456 new cases of COVID-19 on November 20 -- the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁷⁰ Most cases are concentrated in the Helsinki region. Public health officials announced that the region has moved to the "community transmission phase."¹⁷¹ A number of new restrictions have been introduced in the region, with the gathering limit at public indoor events reduced to 20 people, adult team sports suspended for the next three weeks, and swimming pools limited to 50% capacity. A recommendation to limit private gatherings to 10 people was also issued.¹⁷² The government is expected to introduce further restrictions on "late-night cafes" this week due to concerns over crowding.¹⁷³ Finland extended their travel restrictions for another month, with border checks for all arrivals coming from within the Schengen area. The government is looking to implement a mandatory test-and-quarantine scheme that would replace the border checks, but the law has not been finalized.¹⁷⁴

Iceland

Iceland reported just three new cases of COVID-19 on November 18, one of the lowest daily increases since mid-September. The number of active cases in the country is now 198 and has been steadily dropping since mid-October.¹⁷⁵ Tests performed at the border will be free of charge from December 1, though it will continue to remain optional. Authorities said they were dropping the fee to encourage arrivals to get tested, following numerous reports that those who choose to quarantine instead have been breaking the rules.¹⁷⁶ Travellers who can prove that they have contracted and then recovered from COVID-19 will be exempt from virus prevention measures at the border from December 10. Choosing between testing or a quarantine period will continue to be mandatory for all other travellers until February 1, 2021.¹⁷⁷ Public health officials said that at-risk groups may be able to receive a vaccine within the first few months of 2021 if "all goes according to plan."¹⁷⁸

Norway

On November 23, the two-week average of new cases in Norway was reported to be 149.8 per 100,000 people.¹⁷⁹ Local officials in Oslo have moved grades 8 to 10 to distance learning and banned all leisure activities and sports for teenagers due to rising cases among that age group. Oslo remains in a "social lockdown", with most public and private gatherings prohibited.¹⁸⁰ Public health officials said that high-risk groups will be prioritized over essential workers when a COVID-19 vaccine becomes available in Norway in the spring.¹⁸¹

Sweden

The number of daily new cases in Sweden has declined somewhat over the past week, though the infection rate remains very high throughout the country.¹⁸² All Swedish regions have introduced recommendations to avoid high-risk activities, to stay home as much as possible, and to avoid crowded indoor public places.¹⁸³ Stockholm and Malmo have closed all public swimming pools, art galleries, museums, gyms, and other publicly-run recreation facilities.¹⁸⁴ The government announced that seated events will not be exempt from the new public gathering limit of 8 people when it goes into effect on November 24.¹⁸⁵ Individuals with symptoms lasting for less than 24 hours and those with symptoms that can be explained by another cause will be turned away from testing centres because public health officials are seeking to preserve testing capacity.¹⁸⁶ Both the WHO and the Swedish Academy of Sciences have called on the government to introduce a mask recommendation for the general public, but Swedish authorities remain resistant.¹⁸⁷

ASIA/PACIFIC

Japan

The number of new cases in Japan has risen rapidly, staying above 2,000 since the middle of last week. The Tokyo metropolitan government rose to its highest alert level on November 19 for the first time since September. The governor of Tokyo called on residents to use caution when eating in groups as the end of the year approaches.¹⁸⁸ The Tokyo government has asked hospitals to increase the number of beds for COVID-19 patients in serious condition from 150 to 300. A medical facility dedicated to patients with milder symptoms is also being built.¹⁸⁹ The health ministry has been pushing for mandatory testing at long-term care facilities once any residents or staff become symptomatic, especially in prefectures with higher infection rates.¹⁹⁰ The ministry also plans to request that prefectures implement an event-based surveillance system in order to expedite identification of cluster infections at an early stage.¹⁹¹ The prime minister announced that a campaign to encourage domestic travel would be partially halted after an expert panel advised a government review of the program.¹⁹²

South Korea

The number of daily new cases is on the rise in South Korea, staying above 300 for most of the past week and emerging across the country. The prime minister has asked Koreans to stay home and called for greater cooperation between young people and businesses. The special advisory against overseas travel has been extended until December 17.¹⁹³ Health authorities declared the arrival of a third wave in the Greater Seoul Region on November 20.¹⁹⁴ The Seoul Region raised its social distancing rules to Level 2 from November 23, with preemptive Level 3 measures. Rallies involving 10 or more people are banned. Ten key types of facilities are subject to enhanced social distancing rules, while restaurants may only provide takeout and delivery services after 9 pm and indoor gyms must close at the same time. Nursing facilities may not let residents leave or permit visitors, private academies have stricter capacity limits, and public transport will operate at reduced capacity. Places of worship have been urged to move all services online.¹⁹⁵ Local officials in Seoul have expanded the contact tracing team in the region from 30 to 190 people.¹⁹⁶

New Zealand

Few locally acquired cases were reported in New Zealand over the past week. New testing rules will be introduced for border workers on November 26, which requires weekly testing for high-risk groups; all others will be tested every two weeks.¹⁹⁷ Planning for the government-managed isolation facilities has been criticized after more than 1,000 empty rooms were discovered while some people remain stranded overseas.¹⁹⁸ The government has reached an in-principle agreement with Janssen Pharmaceutica to purchase more than three million doses of its vaccine.¹⁹⁹

Australia

Most Australian states have eliminated, or nearly eliminated, community transmission of COVID-19. Due to fears of an outbreak sparked by the misreporting of a locally acquired case, South Australia went into lockdown between November 19 and November 22. Restrictions later returned to what they were earlier in the week following the lockdown.²⁰⁰ New South Wales announced further reopening this week. Starting on November 23, up to 3,000 people were allowed to gather for outdoor ticketed events and up to 500 for outdoor church services -- subject to social distancing regulations.²⁰¹ The border between New South Wales and Victoria reopened on November 23 after a four-month closure.

Turkey

On November 20, Turkey reported 5,103 new COVID-19 cases.²⁰² Effective November 21, schools will close for the remainder of the semester and a partial weekend curfew will begin nationwide from 8 pm to 10 am. Citizens aged 65 and above will be able to go out only between 10 am and 1 pm, while people aged 20 or younger will be permitted between 1 pm to 4 pm. All businesses will have their operating hours limited to between 10 am to 8 pm. Restaurants and cafes will be able to serve takeaway orders during these hours and will switch to delivery-only after 8 pm. Sports events are to be held without fans. Other measures include the closure of traditional Turkish tea houses until further notice. Cinemas are closed until the end of the year.²⁰³

Israel

While now out of its nationwide lockdown, Israel is still reporting around 800 new cases per day -- raising concerns about future spread. National leaders are once again looking to rapidly reopen the economy. The government approved the reopening of open-air shopping centers starting November 17 in low-infection areas. Grades 5 and 6 will return to in-person learning on November 24, with grades 11 and 12 following on December 1 in communities with low-to-medium infection rates. One indoor shopping mall will partially reopen as part of a pilot program. Localized lockdowns continue at major COVID-19 hotspots throughout the country.²⁰⁴ The national legislature approved the partial reopening of two "special tourist islands," including venues such as zoos, restaurants, large outdoor strip malls and other attractions. However, tourists will need a negative test result from the previous 72 hours to enter the "islands." The capacity limit on in-store customers was raised nationwide.²⁰⁵ Amid worries of a widespread unwillingness to get vaccinated, both the prime minister and the health ministry have denied pursuing a potential law to mandate COVID-19 vaccinations.²⁰⁶

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Partnerships and Contributors

The Media Ecosystem Observatory – a joint effort of Peter Loewen (Toronto), Taylor Owen (McGill), and Derek Ruths (McGill) – is responsible for the social media and behavioural data on our dashboard. The leads on these projects are Eric Merkley (Toronto) and Aengus Bridgman (McGill).

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Links

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