

PEARL

**POLICY, ELECTIONS &
REPRESENTATION LAB**



Weekly COVID Update:

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

November 30, 2020

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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

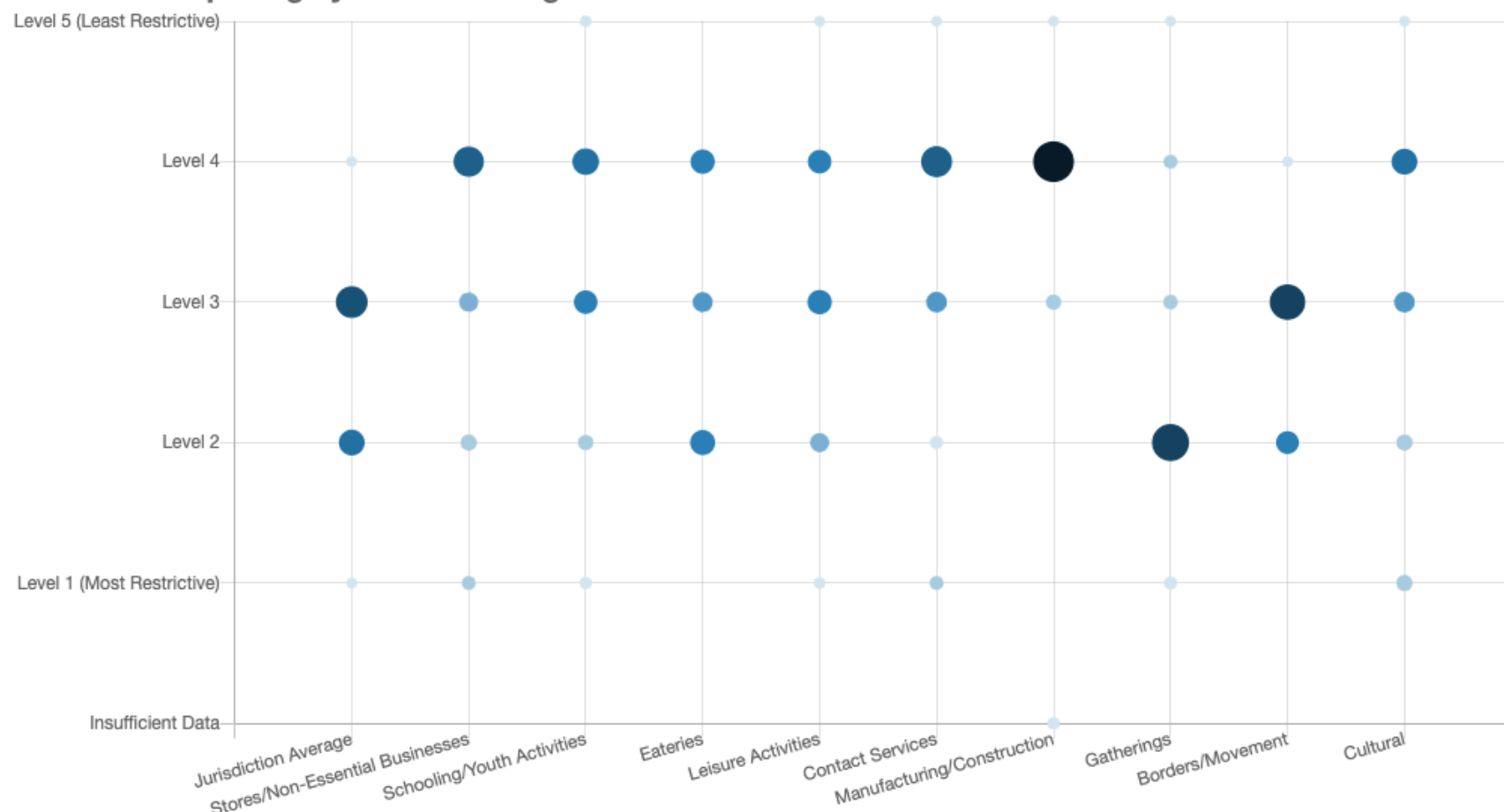


Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of November 30. The reopening policies of 52 jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories. For each jurisdiction, we classify a total of 9 different sectors: Stores/Non-Essential Businesses, 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.

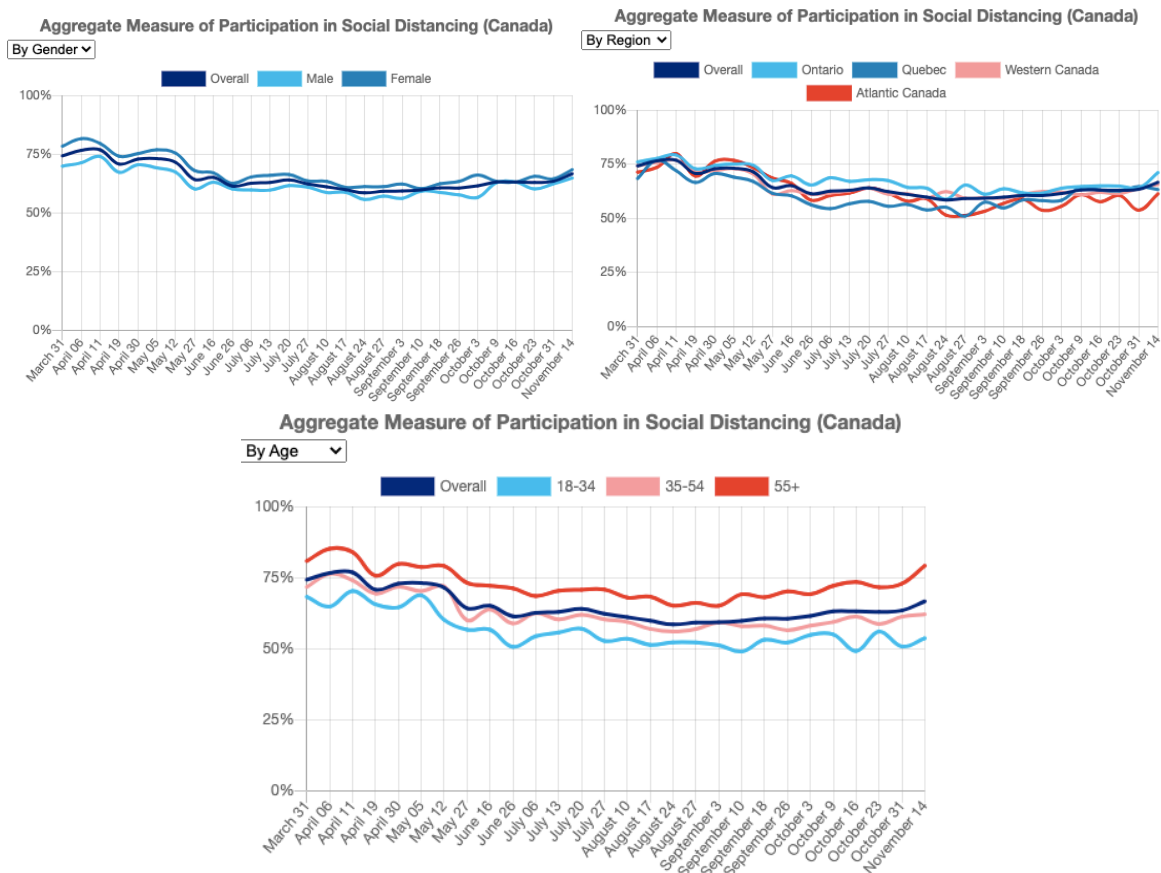


Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada). We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre distance 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.

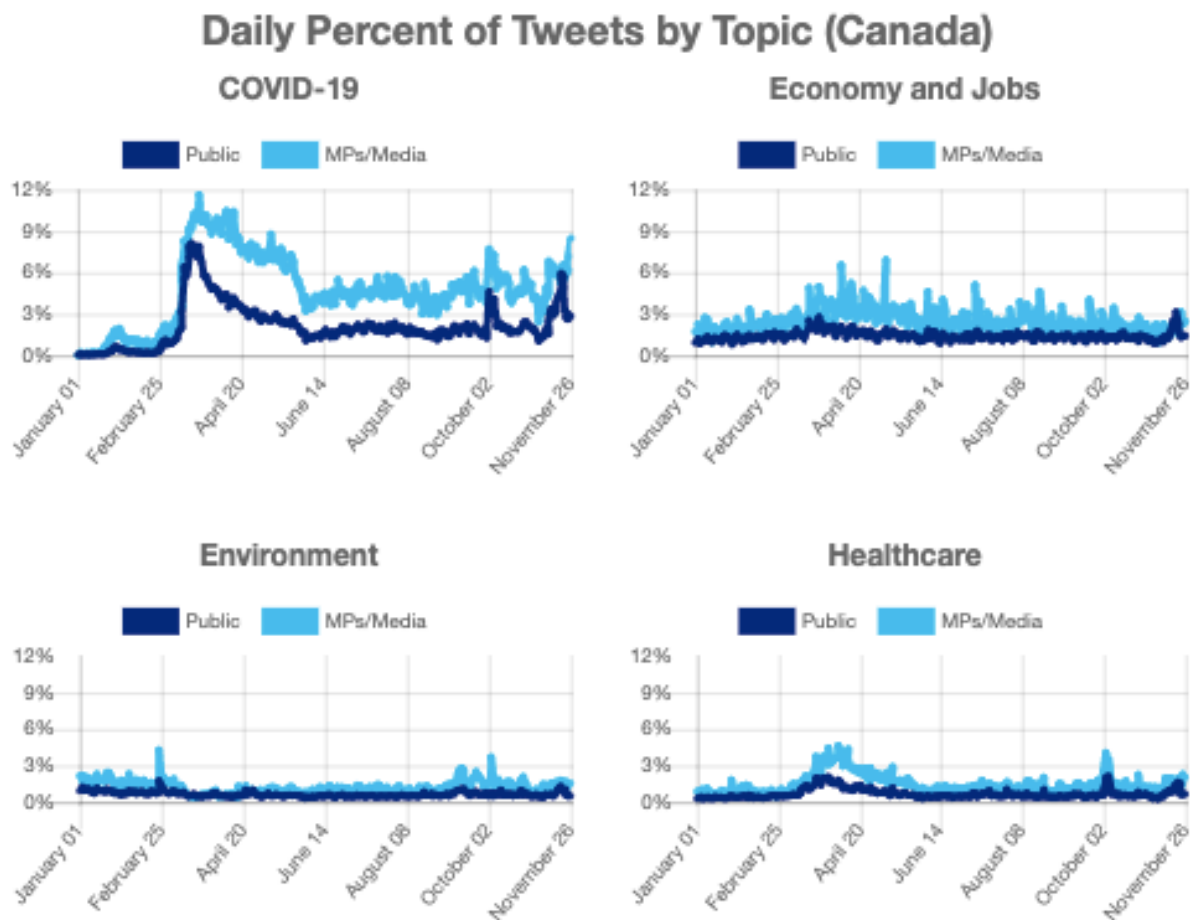


Figure 3 – Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada). The graphs report the percentage of daily tweets containing one or more keywords associated with the particular topic. The results are presented separately for MPs, senators, and journalists, on the one hand, and for the Canadian public, on the other. 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.

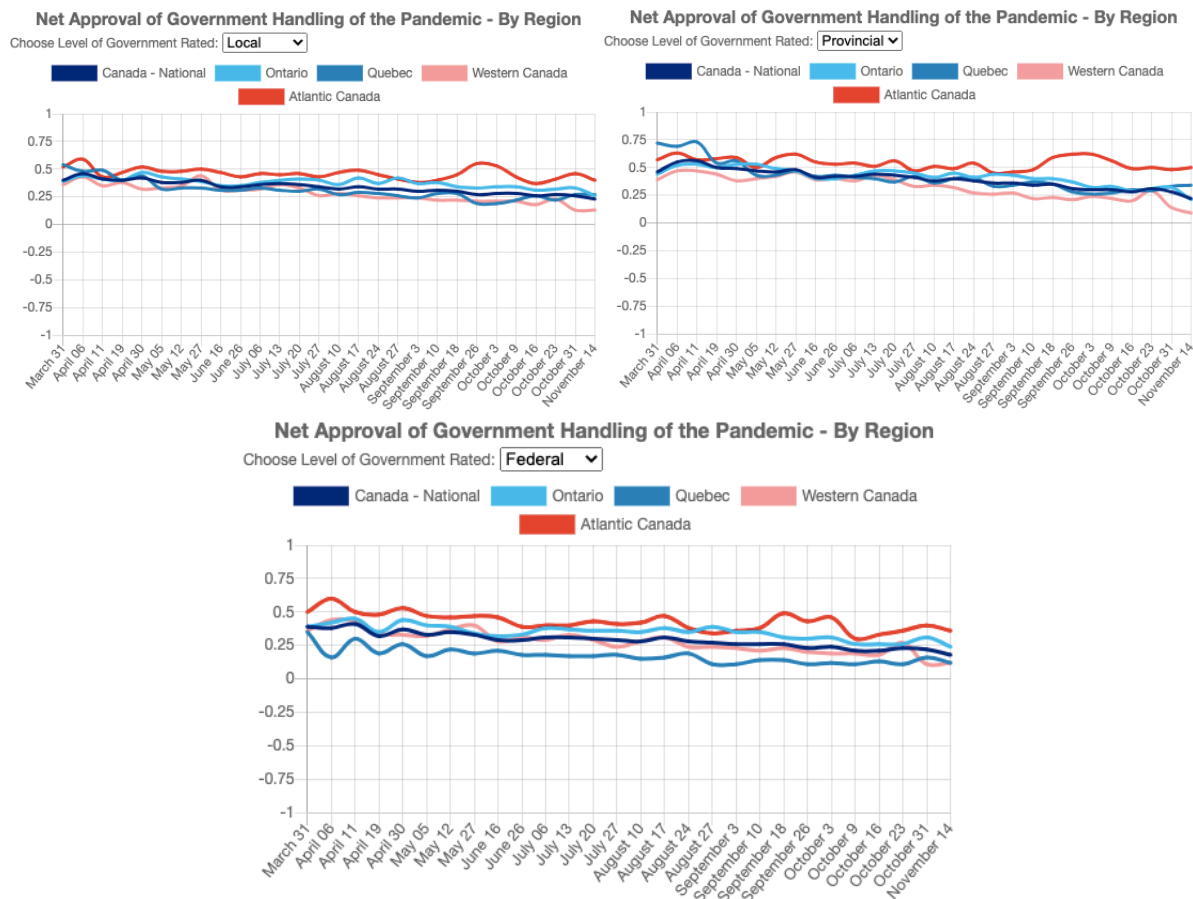


Figure 4 – Net approval of government handling of the pandemic by region. We asked Canadians whether they approved of how each level of government (the federal government, their provincial government, and their local government) was handling the coronavirus pandemic so far. To obtain a net approval score, 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 24, Alberta reported the most active cases in Canada, despite having fewer people than the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia.¹ COVID-19 infection rates, hospitalizations, and deaths remain high.² Following several weeks of pressure from the opposition and doctors across the province, the premier declared a state of public health emergency. Online learning will begin for junior high and high school students -- with an extended winter break for all students. While there is no province-wide mandatory mask requirement, the government has imposed mandatory mask-wearing in indoor workplaces within the Edmonton and Calgary zones. There is a ban on indoor social gatherings and outdoor gatherings, weddings, and funerals are capped at 10 people. Gatherings for worship services cannot exceed one-third of their fire code limits.³ Calgary declared a local state of emergency and is moving to “procure supplies, help vulnerable citizens, and access funds from other levels of government.”⁴ Audio recordings, meeting minutes, and interviews with staff from the COVID-19 response team reveal tension between civil servants and political officials regarding a pandemic strategy.⁵

→ *British Columbia*

British Columbia continued to report a very high level of daily new cases over the past week, occasionally topping 900. The provincial state of emergency has been extended through December 8. Masks are required to be worn by all British Columbians over 11 years old in most indoor public settings.⁶ The strict province-wide restrictions will remain in effect until December 7. COVID-19 antibody tests became available at LifeLabs clinics last week.⁷

→ *Manitoba*

On November 27, Manitoba announced 344 new cases of COVID-19 and 14 more COVID-19 related deaths.⁸ Ahead of Black Friday, the government issued a reminder to Manitobans of the restrictions in place; fines for violating the restrictions range from \$1,296 for individuals to \$5,000 for businesses. The government has also urged Manitobans not to leave the province to shop in places where the restrictions are not as stringent.⁹

→ *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported 18 new cases on November 29, leaving the province with a total of 119 active cases as of November 30 -- up from 77 the week before.¹⁰ The recent surge in infections prompted the province to move Moncton and Saint John back to the “orange” alert level last week, followed by Fredericton on November 26.¹¹ Public Health New Brunswick recommended the increase restrictions due to high numbers of social interactions, multiple exposure settings including schools, pubs, gyms, health facilities and sports clubs, and significant population interaction across regions.¹² Nursing homes in the province’s three orange zones are now starting to restrict visitors, hoping to reduce the risk of an outbreak.¹³ Fredericton’s York Care Centre, for instance, has barred normal visitors from the facility until the region returns to the “yellow” level.¹⁴

→ *Newfoundland and Labrador*

Newfoundland and Labrador remains at Alert Level 2. On November 29, the province reported 36 active cases of COVID-19 with no related hospitalizations.¹⁵ Effective November 25, the province left the Atlantic bubble for at least two weeks and will continue to monitor the situation to determine whether the two-week break requires an extension.¹⁶ Effective November 26, rotational workers returning home from other provinces will have to wait a week -- instead of five days -- to get a COVID-19 test.¹⁷ The town of Deer Lake is closing its town office and arena until December 7 due to rising numbers within the community.

Residents are being asked to limit travel within the community and non-essential businesses have been asked to stop regular operations.¹⁸

→ *Northwest Territories*

No new locally-acquired cases were recorded in the Northwest Territories over the past week. The public health emergency has been extended again through December 8. NWT residents now have full access to the COVID Alert app.¹⁹ No major changes to restrictions were announced over the past week. NWT is still at Phase 2 of its reopening plan and is not expected to seek further reopening until the situation nationwide is under control.

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia reported 11 new cases on November 29, leaving the province with a total of 126 active cases -- up from 44 active cases last week.²⁰ Public officials moved to place Halifax and neighboring Hants County, the province's hardest hit regions, under stricter public health rules last week -- followed by additional province-wide restrictions on November 26.²¹ The premier said on November 24 that the province needs to "flip the switch on COVID-19 right now [...] COVID-19 is moving quickly in Halifax, and we need to stop it from spreading further into Nova Scotia."²² Nova Scotians are being advised to avoid all non-essential travel to the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and to other Atlantic provinces.²³ Public gatherings in HRM are limited to 5 people, and catering establishments are restricted to take-out and delivery services.²⁴ Province-wide measures include the restriction of visiting hours for nursing homes, with the exception of volunteers.²⁵

→ *Nunavut*

There are 108 active cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut as of November 30. The number of active cases has fallen over the past few days as the number of those considered to be recovered rises rapidly.²⁶ No deaths or hospitalizations have been reported. Cases are concentrated in the Kivalliq region.²⁷ While no severe cases have been reported, authorities are concerned that the shrinking ICU capacity in Winnipeg will force them to look elsewhere if a Nunavut resident becomes acutely ill. There is no ICU in any hospital in Nunavut, though there are backup ventilators in Iqaluit and Rankin Inlet.²⁸ If no cases are reported outside of the Kivalliq region, officials said that restrictions in other regions may be eased once the territory-wide lockdown order ends on December 2.²⁹ The federal government has given the territory nearly \$20 million in additional funding in order to deal with the outbreak.³⁰

→ *Ontario*

Ontario's 7-day rolling average has increased slightly to 1,550 cases per day.³¹ On November 23, Toronto and Peel Region moved into "lockdown" for a minimum of 28 days -- with new restrictions including bans on indoor private gatherings, curbside pick-up for restaurants and non-essential retail stores, and closure of personal care services, casinos and bingo halls.³² Windsor-Essex is moving into the red "control" zone, while Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit is moving to the orange "restrict" zone.³³

→ *Prince Edward Island*

In Prince Edward Island, the risk of community transmission is low.³⁴ On November 29, the province reported four active cases of COVID-19. Effective November 30, all high school students will be required to wear a mask at all times while inside schools.³⁵ On November 24, the province exited the Atlantic bubble -- with plans to re-evaluate in two weeks' time. The decision was made in response to rising cases in other parts of the region and in order to avoid an outbreak in the province.³⁶ People arriving in P.E.I. from other Atlantic provinces will now have to self-isolate for 14 days.³⁷

→ *Quebec*

On November 28, Quebec reported 1,480 new cases and 37 new deaths. The province has 678 hospitalizations and 93 people in ICU.³⁸ A total of 7,000 Quebecers have died from COVID-19.³⁹ Saguenay, Quebec City and Montreal have the most COVID-19 cases.⁴⁰ The premier said that increasing hospitalizations, deaths and cases could lead to a ban on gatherings over the holidays.⁴¹ The province is considering allowing up to ten people to gather twice from December 24 to December 27 if they stay home the week prior and following.⁴² Saguenay will receive rapid COVID-19 tests that will be released by mid-December. The release was delayed to investigate how the tests should be used, considering that their results are less reliable.⁴³ The education department is having classroom air quality tested.⁴⁴ Medicago, a Quebec based company, is producing a plant-based COVID-19 vaccine and is in phase two trials, but hopes to enter phase three by the end of 2020.⁴⁵

→ *Saskatchewan*

There are 3,605 active cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan as of November 29. The seven-day moving average of cases has reached 250 -- with a per-capita rate of 20.9 per 100,000 people.⁴⁶ Public health officials have reported that the provincial healthcare system is under significant strain due to a high number of contacts and a surging caseload.⁴⁷ The provincial government announced a number of new restrictions this week: all sports competitions are suspended, masks are mandatory at all schools, and there is a limit of 30 people at all places of worship, leisure activities, and cultural venues. No more than four people may sit together at a restaurant and customer registration at all eateries is mandatory. Food and beverage service at places of worship, leisure activities, and cultural venues is prohibited.⁴⁸ The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses expressed disappointment with the new restrictions -- saying they were “half-measures” that would not contain COVID-19 in the province.⁴⁹

→ *Yukon*

The number of active cases in Yukon has been slowly increasing over the past few weeks. The territory had 16 active cases as of November 29. A drive-thru testing centre opened in Whitehorse on November 22. The centre had been scheduled to remain open for one week, but its operation was extended by another two weeks. Drive-thru testing will continue to be available after that, potentially at a new location.⁵⁰ It is mandatory to wear a non-medical mask in all indoor public spaces effective December 1.⁵¹ Yukon is now in Phase 3 of its reopening plan. The restriction on the number of people allowed at gatherings -- 10 indoors and 50 outdoors -- remains unchanged.

The United States

→ *California*

On November 28, California reported 15,600 new cases.⁵² Over the past 14 days, California’s hospitalizations have doubled. On November 29, California broke a record with 7,415 coronavirus hospitalizations.⁵³ There have been over 19,000 COVID-19 deaths in the state.⁵⁴ LA County’s number of hospitalizations is nearing approximately 80 new patients daily over a seven-day period.⁵⁵ San Francisco is now in phase one of reopening, which imposes a curfew between 10 pm and 5 am for non-essential work, movement, gatherings and outdoor dining.⁵⁶ There are zero counties in yellow or phase four (which is the most open), one county in orange or phase three, six counties in red or phase two, and 41 counties in purple or phase one (which is the most restricted).⁵⁷

→ *Illinois*

Illinois’ seven-day statewide test positivity from November 22 to 28 was 12.1%.⁵⁸ Currently, 5,858 people in Illinois are hospitalized with COVID-19. Of those, 1,185 patients are in the ICU with COVID-19 and 723 patients with COVID-19 are on ventilators. The governor 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 eight more days but will likely last longer. These statewide restrictions include the closure of all cultural institutions (including museums, casinos and zoos), banning indoor gatherings, teleworking if possible, and grocery stores at 50% capacity.⁵⁹ Schools remain open.

→ *Michigan*

Michigan's seven-day moving average is hovering around 7,000 new cases per day.⁶⁰ Hospitalizations have increased steadily for the last five weeks, including upticks in critical care and ventilator use. The Democratic governor is now focused on working with the Republican-controlled legislature to approve a stimulus package for Michiganders as the holidays approach.⁶¹ The state is mid-way through its "3-week pause," after restrictions were announced on November 18. Current restrictions include halting 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.⁶²

→ *New York*

New York's positivity rate is 5.83% in "focus zone" areas, and 3.75% outside those areas.⁶³ The state is now conducting roughly 220,000 tests per day. Based on an increased positivity rate, new Yellow Precautionary Zones will be established in Upper Manhattan and Nassau and Suffolk Counties.⁶⁴ New York City schools will begin phasing out hybrid learning and move toward resuming in-person classes on December 7, after citywide shutdowns on November 19 due to the city's seven-day positivity rate of more than 3%.⁶⁵

→ *Texas*

On November 26, Texas' seven-day average passed 10,000 cases -- triple the numbers from early October.⁶⁶ Testing is at record levels and hospitalizations have doubled since October.⁶⁷ El Paso County in particular is struggling.⁶⁸ On November 28, the state reported 3,954 new cases and 102 new deaths. This week, 10% of COVID-19 tests were positive.⁶⁹ The state reported a daily high of 14,000 new cases on November 25.⁷⁰ El Paso and San Antonio imposed partial curfews for the Thanksgiving weekend.⁷¹

Mexico

On November 27, Mexico reported 12,081 daily new cases and 631 new deaths; however, officials suggest that the real number is likely up to eight times higher than this considering the limited testing. Mexico City accounts for approximately 18% of the registered cases, 16.6% of the deaths, and the most hospitalizations.⁷² Mexico's traffic light indicators for the period November 24 to December 6 identify two states as red or phase one, 14 as orange or phase two, 14 as yellow or phase three, and 2 as green or phase four.⁷³ Chihuahua and Sonora require masks and imposed sanctions for noncompliance.⁷⁴ Mexico City recently opened 26 additional testing stations, for a total of 200. The city aims to conduct 20,000 tests daily.⁷⁵ However, these stations cannot accommodate demand and prioritize the elderly and people with severe symptoms. Many employers in the area are requesting staff be tested to work in the office.⁷⁶ The city imposed a two-week ban on alcohol sales.⁷⁷ Mexico has recovered 60.3% of the number of tourists now compared to last year.⁷⁸

Chile

On November 28, Chile reported 1,718 new cases and 44 new deaths in the past day.⁷⁹ Chile has approximately 9,519 reported active cases.⁸⁰ Chile remains in a state of catastrophe with a nighttime curfew.⁸¹ Chile's National Tourism Sector is providing a Tourist Trust seal to tourist organizations who follow health measures, government recommendations and other prevention advice to reduce the COVID-19 spread.⁸² There are protests in Santiago over access to pension funds for COVID-19 support.⁸³

WESTERN EUROPE

France

France's 7-day moving average of new cases has decreased significantly and is now half of last week's average -- standing currently at 12,000 cases per day.⁸⁴ On November 24, the president announced a three-stage easing of restrictions over the next two months.⁸⁵ The first stage started on November 28, when shops reopened under strict hygiene restrictions and people could start leaving their homes for an extended radius of 20 kilometres for up to three hours. On December 15, if the number of cases remain below 5,000 and ICU occupancy is between 2,500 and 3,000, the lockdown will be lifted with cinemas and museums reopening. Large family gatherings will still be discouraged between December 24 and January 1. If the number of cases continues to decrease by January 20, restaurants, cafes and gyms will resume, but bars and nightclubs will remain closed indefinitely.⁸⁶ With high vaccine skepticism in France and rising conspiracy theories and suspicion about government policies, the president sought to reassure people about the measures the government would take to ensure the vaccine would be safe -- including involving a scientific committee and a citizens' collective.⁸⁷

Germany

Germany's 7-day R-value has decreased to 0.95. The country's 7-day moving average of new cases has decreased slightly to 17,500 cases.⁸⁸ Private gatherings remain the largest driver of transmission.⁸⁹ Officials say the lockdown-lite measures have thus far succeeded in halting the surge.⁹⁰ The chancellor and 16 state premiers came to a decision last week to extend the shutdown until at least December 20 to try to bring the numbers down to below 50 per 100,000 inhabitants each week; there are currently 138 cases per 100,000.⁹¹ Additional restrictions were also announced last week. From December 1, private gatherings will be limited to five people, but this number will rise to ten, not counting children, between December 24 and January 1.⁹² Masks will become mandatory for students in the seventh grade (12-13 years) and up while at school. Germany is seeking a coordinated EU approach to keep ski resorts shut in Alpine countries to limit the spread.⁹³

Belgium

Infections, hospitalizations, and deaths are declining again in Belgium; however, the decline in infections is slower than it was in early November.⁹⁴ The majority of infections are being reported in people between the ages of 30 and 60.⁹⁵ On November 26, Belgium's reported death count surpassed 16,000.⁹⁶ On November 27, the prime minister announced new measures will come into effect between December 1 and January 15, 2021. Non-essential shops can reopen but people must shop alone and can only stay in a shop for a maximum of 30 minutes. Swimming pools and museums are permitted to reopen. Other measures will not be eased until mid-January -- with an exception allowing people living alone to receive two close contacts in their homes on either December 24 or 25.⁹⁷

Netherlands

The public health institute, RIVM, reported 5,700 positive cases on November 27. Ministers have already said that considering the stagnating fall in the number of new cases, it seems impossible to relax the social distancing rules for the Christmas break. The government has now also agreed to look into extending the school holidays by a week to try to curb the spread of the virus among teenagers. Further decisions on the relaxation of current measures will take place on December 8.⁹⁸

Spain

On November 26, Spain reported 12,289 new cases -- which is over 2,000 more cases than the previous day, but fewer than the 21,000 cases reported earlier in November. There have been 153,000 cases and 15,316 hospitalizations over the past 14 days.⁹⁹ Madrid, Murcia and Catalonia want to increase gathering limits from six to ten.¹⁰⁰ Madrid officials also promised a traditional Three Kings Parade and wanted to extend the curfew from midnight to 1:30 am for Spain's holiday season, which goes until January 6.¹⁰¹ Spain released their vaccine distribution plan. The aim is to begin in January with nursing home residents and staff, followed by other health care workers and disabled people requiring intense levels of support.¹⁰² Spain created 18 groups based on risk of serious illness, exposure, socio-economic impact and transmission.¹⁰³ The country's current strategy considers vaccines from six companies.¹⁰⁴ Spain expects enough doses for 80 million people, although their population is only 47 million. Excess doses will be sent to countries not in the EU.¹⁰⁵ Spain's vaccine distribution will use 13,000 sites and is voluntary -- despite the President of Galicia's claim that people would be fined for refusing.¹⁰⁶ Spain intends to register and follow-up with people who have been vaccinated, since multiple vaccines require two doses.¹⁰⁷

The United Kingdom

The UK's 7-day rolling average has decreased to 15,000 new cases per day.¹⁰⁸ On November 5, a nationwide lockdown began in England, which closed pubs, restaurants and stores selling non-essential items such as books, clothing and sneakers until December 2.¹⁰⁹ A tougher three-tiered system of local restrictions will come into force in England when the lockdown ends on December 2 -- if the prime minister gets approval from Parliament on December 1.¹¹⁰ A major study has shown that the COVID-19 rate in England has fallen by about a third due to lockdown measures.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, a leading scientist says that the UK would be making a "terrible mistake" to relax COVID-19 measures just months before vaccines are expected to become available.¹¹² He also indicated that, even though infection rates are declining, numbers in hospital and deaths were too high. Elsewhere in the UK, Scotland is using a five-level system of restrictions and Northern Ireland has begun a two-week circuit-breaker lockdown. In Wales, the hospitality industry is due to be placed under stricter rules -- not yet finalized -- effective December 4.¹¹³ Britain could launch COVID-19 vaccination program as early as December 7.¹¹⁴

Ireland

On November 27, 206 new COVID-19 cases were confirmed by the Department of Health.¹¹⁵ Ireland has agreed to ease restrictions from level 5 to level 3. This includes reopening all retail outlets, gyms, hairdressers, museums, cinemas, galleries, and libraries effective December 1. People will also be able to attend religious services and play golf and tennis again. However, they will not be allowed to leave the county -- except for essential purposes such as work, education, or a medical appointment. The 5 km travel limit will also be lifted, allowing people to travel freely within the county. Unlike typical level 3 restrictions, restaurants and cafes will not reopen until December 4. From December 18 until January 6, people will be allowed to travel to visit family and friends, but only three households can gather.¹¹⁶

Luxembourg

On November 27, the ministry of health recorded 535 new cases of COVID-19.¹¹⁷ On November 26, the country entered a partial lockdown until December 15, which includes a curfew between 11 pm to 6 am. Bars and restaurants are closed for dine-in, only take-out and delivery will be available. Hotels remain open and may offer room service. Cinemas, amusement parks, casinos, fairs, theatres, and concert halls have closed down; museums, art centres, libraries, and places of worship remain open. Fitness rooms and swimming pools are also closed to the public, but outdoor sports facilities remain accessible. Group sports with more than four people are prohibited; however, this rule does not apply to school activities, elite

athletes, and senior national teams. Indoor gatherings of only two people are permitted. For outdoor gatherings of four to ten people, masks must be worn and distance must be maintained. In the event of non-compliance with the rules, several penalties are being charged.¹¹⁸

Portugal

On November 27, Portugal recorded 5,444 new cases of COVID-19.¹¹⁹ The government implemented a new state of emergency across the entire country on November 24, with several measures in place until December 8. All 278 municipalities have been categorized into four groups based on the risk of transmission: "extremely high", "very high", "high" and "moderate" risk levels. In the 127 municipalities classified as "extremely high", "very high", and "high" risk, a curfew has been implemented between 11 pm and 5 am. The use of masks has also been made compulsory at all workplaces. Movement between municipalities classified as high-risk areas has also been banned on public roads between 11 pm and 5 am. However, exceptions include travel for work, health, and assistance to the elderly, among others.¹²⁰

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria

Austria is currently in lockdown, with plans to gradually relax measures on December 6 -- provided infection rates continue to fall.¹²¹ From December 5 to 8, the Austrian government will carry out its voluntary mass testing plan for all teachers, kindergarten supervisors, and police officers.¹²² The country will receive 24 million vaccine doses from the EU. Vaccinations are expected to start in early January. People in higher risk groups will have priority, followed by health care workers.¹²³ In France, Italy, and Germany, leaders are calling on the EU to close all ski resorts over the holidays to curb the spread of the virus.¹²⁴ In Austria, revenue from winter sports accounts for about 5% of GDP and approximately 230,000 jobs depend on the industry.¹²⁵ While the government has not decided when or to what extent it will lift restrictions on ski resorts, the chancellor said that "it is not a matter in which the EU should interfere."¹²⁶

Greece

In Greece, the current lockdown has been extended from November 30 to December 7 due to rising infection rates, especially in the north.¹²⁷ In Thessaloniki, Greece's second largest city, only 4% of hospital beds are vacant.¹²⁸ The government has set up a field hospital and has authorized two private clinics to treat COVID-19 patients due to the rapid increase in admissions and limited capacity of medical staff.¹²⁹ On November 26, several civil servant unions held a 24-hour strike, disrupting transport services and news broadcasts in Athens and Thessaloniki. Union demands include: "increasing workplace and school protective measures, mass hiring in the public transport and health sectors, and salary increases for civil servants."¹³⁰

Italy

In Italy, daily death tolls remain high but hospital admissions and ICU occupancy rates are slowing.¹³¹ Effective November 29, rules in five regions were relaxed: Calabria, Lombardy, and Piedmont moved from the red to orange zone, and Liguria and Sicily moved to the yellow zone.¹³² In mid-January, Italy should be receiving 3.4 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine, with priority for the elderly and those most at risk of exposure.¹³³ In the southern region of Campania, public hospitals in Naples can no longer accept all patients.¹³⁴

Slovenia

In Slovenia, COVID-19 hospitalization, infection, and death rates continue to rise. The government has extended all main lockdown measures for an additional week. As a result, there is a continued ban on gatherings, movement between municipalities, and in-class schooling. Non-essential shops, cultural institutions, and eateries remain closed. The curfew will remain in place and public transport will remain suspended.¹³⁵ The Slovenian Business Club is calling for widespread testing and preparation of testing protocols to contain the spread and allow for the economy to reopen.¹³⁶

Switzerland

Over the past week, the COVID-19 situation in Switzerland has improved but hospitalizations and death rates remain high. The seven-day average of new positive cases is 3,902 -- 20% less than the previous week.¹³⁷ The government announced that ski resorts can open as long as they comply with strict protection measures. COVID-19 vaccinations could begin in the first quarter of 2021 and will be free but not mandatory for all citizens.¹³⁸

EASTERN EUROPE

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has continued to report a steady decline in new cases of COVID-19, reporting just 1,074 cases on November 29 -- the country's lowest single-day tally since September 20.¹³⁹ Despite the smaller number of new infections, Czech officials have opted to extend the country's state of emergency until December 20, following the end of the previous order on November 20.¹⁴⁰ However, officials have started to gradually ease restrictions. On November 30, a decision was made to move the country down from level 5 to level 4 on its COVID-19 alert scale,¹⁴¹ allowing all restaurants and pubs to reopen with limited indoor seating.¹⁴² Non-essential shops and fitness centers have also been allowed to reopen, provided that they are able to maintain the 15 square metres density requirement.¹⁴³ Religious services have also been allowed to resume and the nighttime curfew has been lifted.¹⁴⁴ The number of people allowed to congregate outdoors was increased from 6 to 50.¹⁴⁵

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 from 8 pm to 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 the transition of all secondary and post-secondary students to remote learning.¹⁴⁶ Hungary's National Chief Medical Officer has stated that if the rules are followed "we can be confident that we can spend the holidays with our families, closer together." The government will decide in early December on the regulations that will remain in place for the holidays.¹⁴⁷ A record single-day increase of 6,918 new cases was reported in Hungary on November 29.¹⁴⁸

Latvia

Latvia reported 898 new cases of COVID-19 on November 26, a new single-day record for the country.¹⁴⁹ A state of emergency was declared in Latvia on November 9, prohibiting all in-person public events, as well as the operation of entertainment venues such as bars, skating rinks, and playgrounds.¹⁵⁰ Food service venues have also been limited to take-out and delivery services under the new state of emergency and

beauty, piercing and tattoo parlours were ordered to close.¹⁵¹ The state of emergency was originally set to remain in effect until December 6, but on November 30 it was extended to at least January 11, 2021.¹⁵² Additional restrictions were also announced on November 30, including a limit of two people per group in public gatherings, and a mandatory mask policy for all students, teachers, and staff of primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.¹⁵³

Lithuania

Lithuania reported 2,338 new cases of COVID-19 on November 27: a new single-day record for the country.¹⁵⁴ On November 25, the Lithuanian government decided to extend the country-wide restrictions - originally set to expire on November 29 -- until December 17, leaving all Lithuanian municipalities in the red “quarantine” zone.¹⁵⁵ This means that all commercial and non-commercial events remain prohibited in the country -- with the exception of high-level professional sports competitions (without spectators) and funerals with a maximum of 10 participants.¹⁵⁶ Catering establishments are still limited to providing takeaway or delivery services.¹⁵⁷ 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 or groups of people.¹⁵⁸ Pre-school children and primary school pupils will continue attending educational establishments, but senior students will continue remote learning.¹⁵⁹ Lithuanians will be allowed to visit libraries and museums under strictly defined conditions from December 10.¹⁶⁰

Poland

The spread of COVID-19 has continued to slow in Poland this week -- with 11,482 new cases of the virus reported on November 29, the country’s lowest single-day tally since October 26.¹⁶¹ Still, 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.¹⁶² Effective November 28, libraries are permitted to reopen provided that for every one person inside the facility there is at least 15 square metres of space available.¹⁶³ The limit on private gatherings organized within the home has also been increased to 5 people.¹⁶⁴

Slovakia

As the spread of COVID-19 in Slovakia continues to slow, the country’s government is gradually easing restrictions in key areas. From November 27, 2020, public gatherings can take place in groups of up to 6 people -- provided that all participants have a negative RT-PCR or antigen test result within 12 hours.¹⁶⁵ The second round of nationwide testing that was set to take place during the first weekend of December has been cancelled due to the fact that the country does not have enough antigen tests.¹⁶⁶ The economy minister was assigned to purchase 16 million antigen tests; the first batch of four million tests is expected to be delivered by December 2.¹⁶⁷

NORTHERN EUROPE

Denmark

The number of new cases reported in Denmark has remained relatively stable over the past week, though officials expect another surge in cases as the holiday season approaches.¹⁶⁸ The government is asking all residents of West Jutland to get tested after a number of cases were linked to mink farm workers. None of the infected persons were found to have the mutated strain of COVID-19, but officials are advising

enhanced testing protocols as a precaution.¹⁶⁹ Local officials in the Copenhagen region are expected to announce new restrictions covering the retail sector this week.¹⁷⁰ The ministry of health is developing a ‘vaccine passport’ for Danish residents that may be used to permit access to large events throughout the country.¹⁷¹ Denmark has announced its vaccination plan. The first Danish residents are scheduled to receive the vaccine as early as December. The elderly, at-risk groups, and healthcare workers will be given priority access before it is made available to the general public.¹⁷²

Estonia

On November 30, Estonia reported a two-week average of 335.75 new cases per 100,000 people. The positivity rate of testing was 6.5% on the same day, with most cases concentrated in Harju and Ida-Viru counties.¹⁷³ Local officials in Tartu have limited the number of people who can participate in sports or hobby-related gatherings to 10.¹⁷⁴ Travelers from Iceland will be permitted to enter Estonia without self-isolating upon their arrival -- effective November 30. Exemptions to the quarantine requirement continue to apply to some travelers from Finland, Latvia, and Lithuania.¹⁷⁵ The minister of social affairs said that the government will implement more restrictions in the coming weeks if the infection rate does not improve.¹⁷⁶ A prominent legal expert said that the government does not have the grounds to issue fines for not wearing a mask in indoor public places -- leaving the policy’s enforcement uncertain.¹⁷⁷ Minor protests have occurred throughout the country due to the mandatory mask policy.¹⁷⁸

Finland

Finland reported 618 new cases of COVID-19 on November 28 in the country’s largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁷⁹ The prime minister said that there are no plans to implement a nationwide mandatory mask policy or institute a national state of emergency. However, the government issued a recommendation to avoid close-contact leisure activities and said further regional restrictions would be implemented.¹⁸⁰ All state-owned slot machines and gambling facilities will be closed in any region deemed to be in the ‘community transmission’ phase of the pandemic.¹⁸¹ Local officials in Helsinki and the Tampere region announced that all youth centres, cultural venues, and indoor sports facilities must close.¹⁸² All leisure activities for adults in both regions have been suspended. Upper secondary schools in Helsinki have switched to online learning. The public gathering limit in both regions has been lowered to 10 people; private gatherings are not recommended.¹⁸³

Iceland

The number of new domestic cases is rising in Iceland and public health officials are concerned again about potential “exponential growth” of the virus.¹⁸⁴ The new cases have been linked to private gatherings. The chief epidemiologist rescinded his recommendation to the health minister that restrictions could be eased next week.¹⁸⁵ Public health officials have urged residents to form “Christmas bubbles” in advance of the holiday season, while limiting social gatherings and meeting online if possible.¹⁸⁶ Healthcare workers and at-risk groups will be the first to be vaccinated for COVID-19 once it is available in Iceland. The vaccine will be free of charge and available to all residents.¹⁸⁷

Norway

The number of new cases in Norway has remained relatively stable over the past week and appears to be on a downward trend for the first time since September.¹⁸⁸ Local officials in Oslo have extended their ‘social lockdown’ restrictions until at least December 18. All indoor events in the city remain prohibited, all cultural and leisure activities are closed, upper secondary schools are online, and the sale of alcohol at all eateries is banned.¹⁸⁹ All national restrictions were also extended by three weeks, including recommendations to avoid social contact and stay home as much as possible. Guidelines for the upcoming

holiday season are forthcoming.¹⁹⁰ The Norwegian government will not make the COVID-19 vaccine mandatory but did not rule out restrictions for those who choose not to get it.¹⁹¹

Sweden

The number of new cases in Sweden has remained relatively stable over the past week.¹⁹² New modelling suggests that the current wave of COVID-19 may peak in mid-December, though relatively high infection rates are expected to remain until at least February. The first vaccines are expected to be distributed to at-risk groups in January.¹⁹³ Local recommendations to avoid high-risk activities, avoid close contact with others, and stay at home as much as possible will remain in place until at least mid-December in 20 of 21 regions.¹⁹⁴ Public health officials said that a complete ban on non-essential travel during the upcoming holiday season is unlikely, but they urged residents to avoid public transit if they can.¹⁹⁵

ASIA/PACIFIC

Japan

Japan recorded 2,684 new cases on November 28, its largest daily increase. There are more than 460 patients in intensive care. Due to the overwhelming resurgence, the national government removed two cities -- now considered COVID-19 hotspots -- from its domestic tourism campaign.¹⁹⁶ The government is planning to subsidize public transport operators to introduce new anti-virus measures and cashless payment systems.¹⁹⁷ Starting November 28, and lasting for 20 days, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government is asking restaurants, bars and karaoke parlors that serve alcohol to reduce their operating hours. Businesses complying with the recommendation will receive subsidies from the government.¹⁹⁸ Several other prefectural governments have made similar requests.¹⁹⁹ Japan and China resumed both short- and long-term business travel between the two countries on November 30.²⁰⁰

South Korea

The number of daily new cases continues to increase in South Korea, topping 500 in the middle of last week. As hospitals in Seoul struggle with a shortage of beds, the National Medical Center is proposing home care for mild-symptom COVID-19 patients.²⁰¹ With the national college entrance examination nearing, the education minister is asking citizens to temporarily suspend their usual gatherings so that the exam will not be affected. The minister also urged young people and their family members to take additional precautions.²⁰² The Greater Seoul Region and several other COVID-19 hotspots will stay at Level 2 of the social distancing scheme, with some restrictions enhanced. The rest of the country moves to Level 1.5 on December 1. The stricter restrictions include closing saunas and steam-bath rooms and banning high-risk indoor exercise.²⁰³ The nationwide discount coupon program aimed at promoting arts and leisure spending was suspended on November 24. The ruling party has raised its COVID-19 vaccine supply target from 30 to 44 million people, about 85% of the country's population.²⁰⁴

New Zealand

No new domestic community cases have been reported in New Zealand over the past week. Additional restrictions have been imposed on staff at government-managed isolation facilities in Auckland as a safety precaution, though a labour shortage at the facilities is becoming a concern.²⁰⁵ The whole country remains at Alert Level 1, with no restrictions on movement, gathering, businesses, or activities.

Australia

Few locally acquired cases have been reported in Australia over the past week. With more than two weeks without new local transmissions, New South Wales has eased more of its restrictions. Starting December 1, private gatherings can have up to 50 people outdoors, and restaurants, bars and cafes with up to 200m² of floor space will be subject to looser density requirements. The current work-from-home order will be lifted on December 14.²⁰⁶ The Victoria government is revamping its hotel quarantine system with international flights resuming next month. Under the revamped system, all staff will be exclusively recruited by the agency and residents in quarantine will no longer be allowed to leave their rooms.²⁰⁷ Victoria and South Australia are introducing entry logging apps using QR codes.^{208,209} Due to increased transmission at quarantine facilities, South Australia is appealing to the national government to require returning travellers to undergo testing prior to boarding. International flights into South Australia have been suspended due to the local outbreak.²¹⁰ The first cohort of international students to enter Australia since March arrived in Darwin, Northern Territory on November 30. The Queensland border has reopened to Victoria and the Greater Sydney area.²¹¹

Turkey

On November 27, Turkey registered 29,845 more COVID-19 infections, including 6,592 symptomatic cases, within 24 hours.²¹² Until November 25, Turkey's asymptomatic cases were not included in the number of daily reported cases. This accounting change, which followed pressure from local and international bodies, means that Turkey has become the country with the third highest number of daily new COVID-19 cases. After imposing a series of measures, including mandatory mask-wearing and the enforcement of social distancing, Turkey now largely relies on people's compliance. Illegal gatherings, such as house parties and street weddings where crowds often disregard masks and distancing, worry authorities. However, a full lockdown is not being considered under any circumstances.²¹³

Israel

The number of daily new cases seems to be on the rise in Israel, nearing 1,000 at the end of last week. Israeli hospital administrators were reportedly in unanimous agreement that a third wave is approaching.²¹⁴ The new "coronavirus czar" has announced a massive antibody testing program to grant a "green passport" to those carrying antibodies.²¹⁵ Following a lengthy debate on November 24, the 'coronavirus cabinet' approved the education minister's plan to reopen most schools in areas with low-to-medium infection rates, with high schoolers going back to the classroom earlier than planned. Some high school students began returning to school on November 29, subject to reduced days of in-person education and other social distancing rules. Students in grades 1 and 2 returned to full-size classes to free up educational resources.²¹⁶ Fifteen malls were permitted to reopen on November 27 under a pilot plan to evaluate the safety of further reopening. The reopening scheme is to be reassessed after a significant number of Israelis went to those malls.²¹⁷

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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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