

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

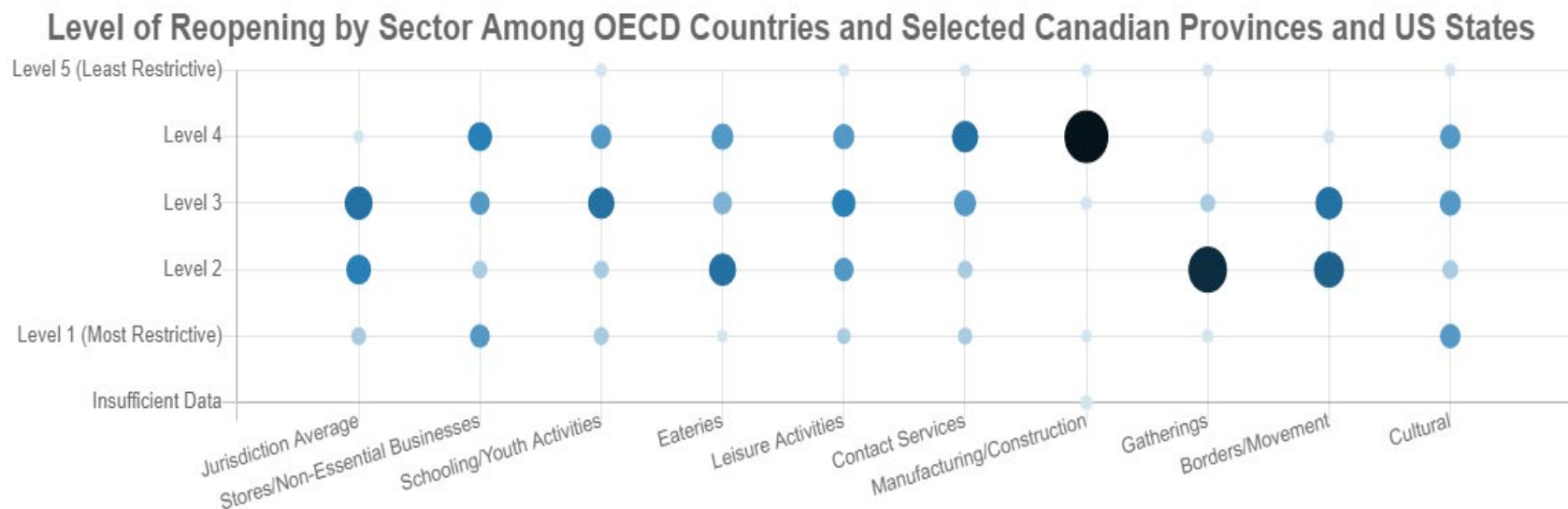


Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of February 08. The reopening policies of 52 jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories. For each jurisdiction, we classify a total of 9 different sectors: Stores/Non-Essential Businesses, 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

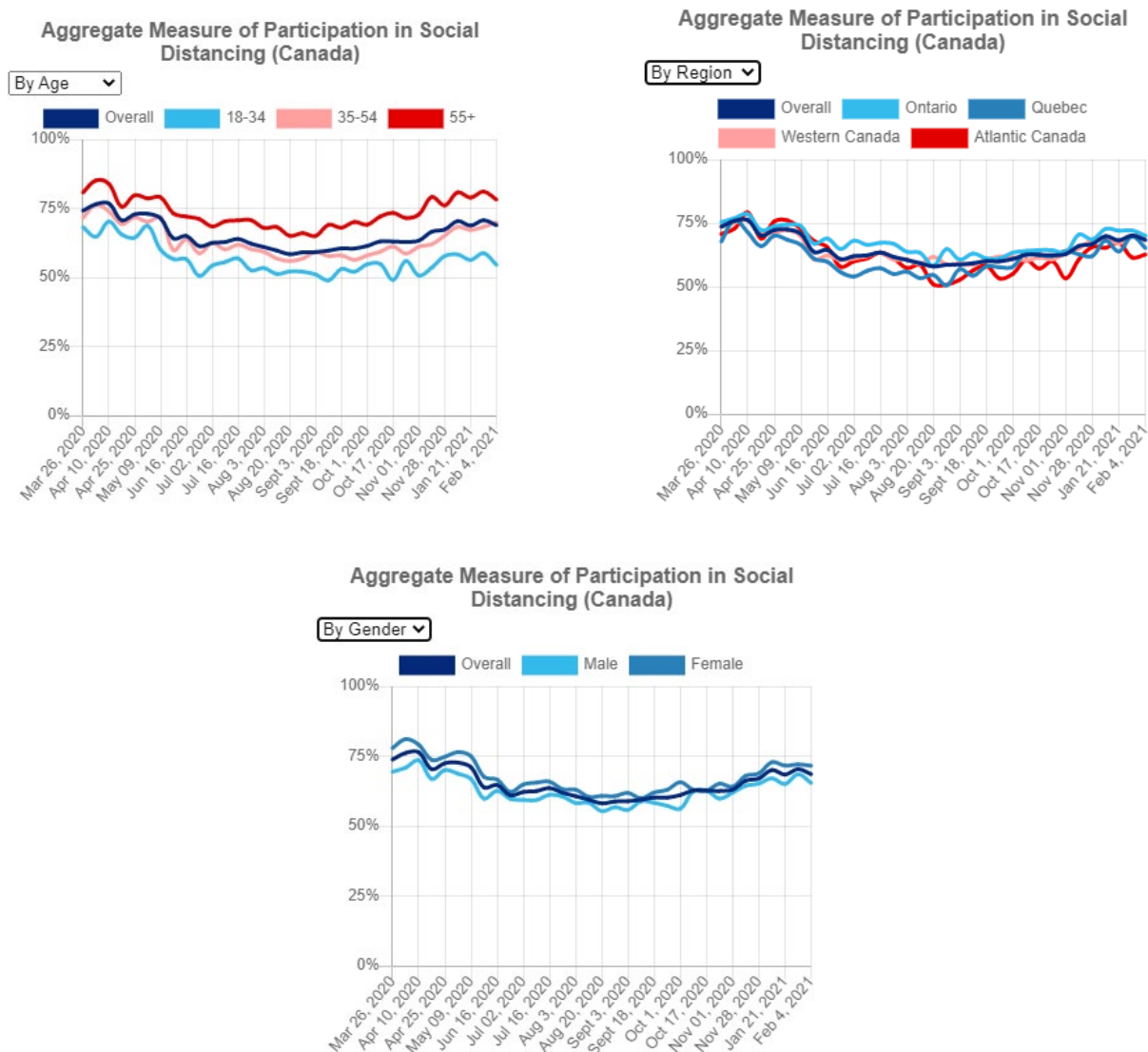


Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada). We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre distance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

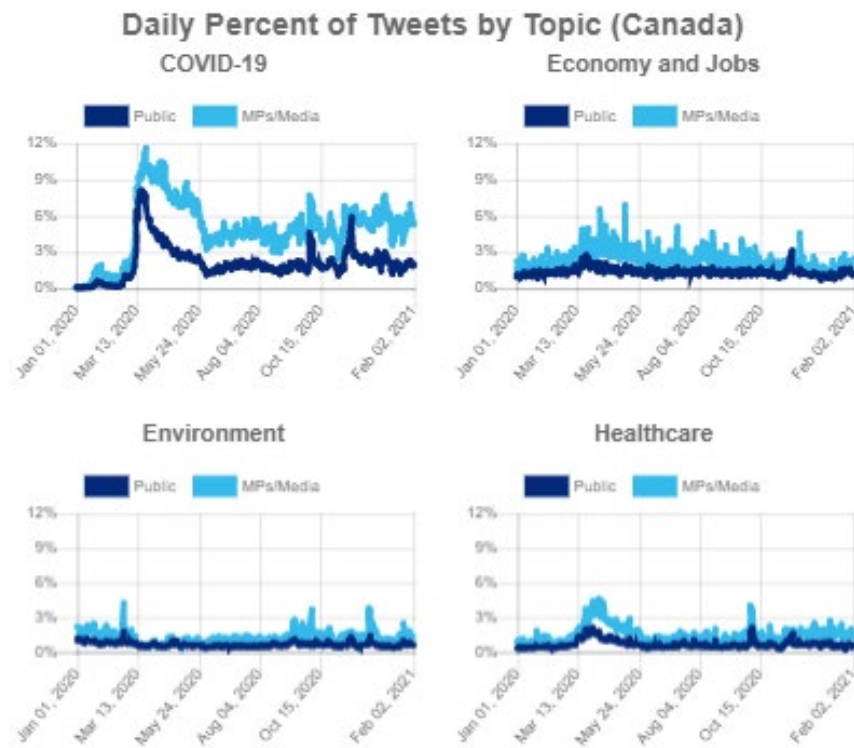


Figure 3 – Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada). The graphs report the percentage of daily tweets containing one or more keywords associated with the particular topic. The results are presented separately for MPs, senators, and journalists, on the one hand, and for the Canadian public, on the other.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

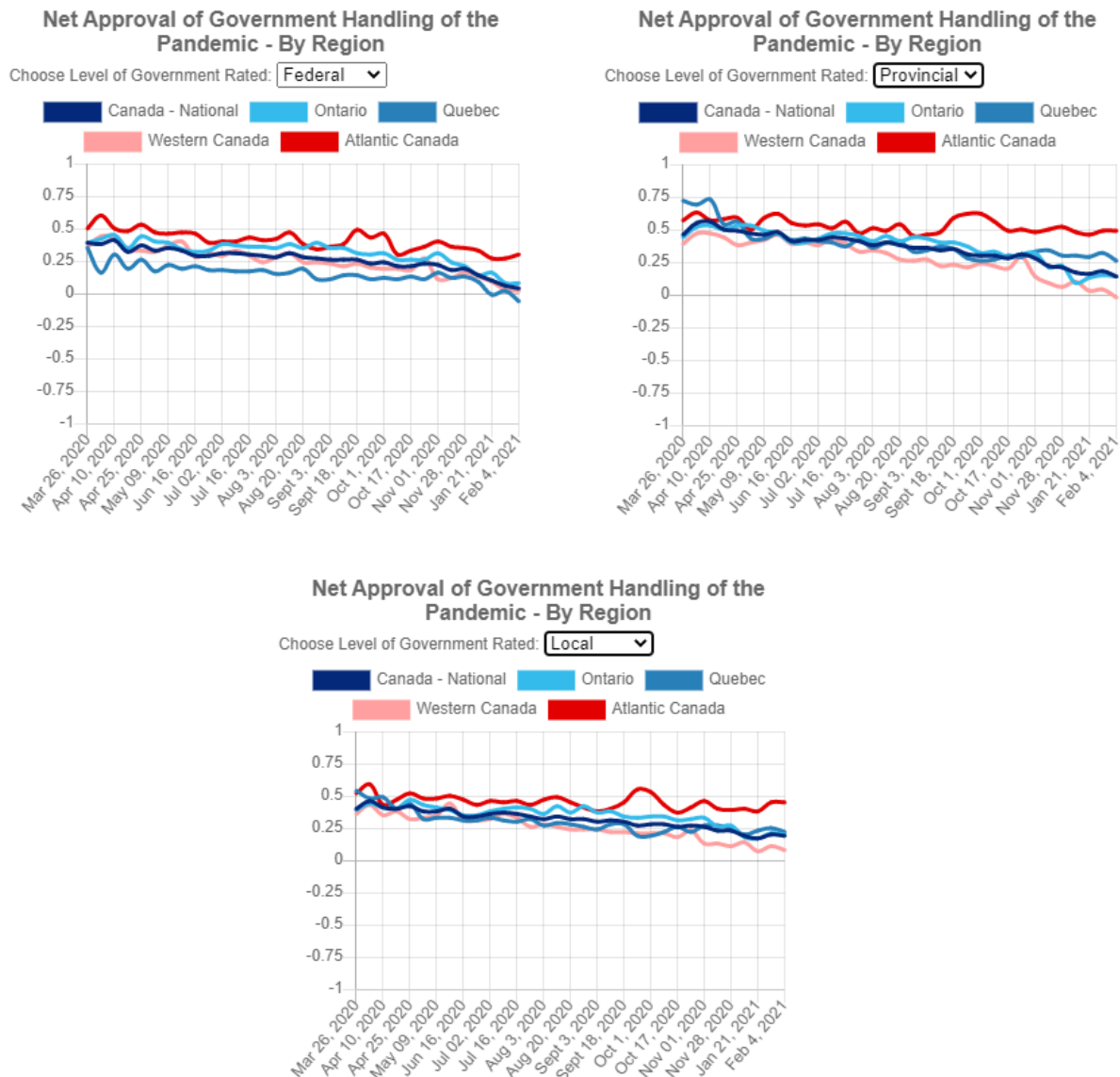


Figure 4 – Net approval of government handling of the pandemic by region. We asked Canadians whether they approved of how each level of government (the federal government, their provincial government, and their local government) was handling the coronavirus pandemic so far. To obtain a net approval score, 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 February 4, there were 582 daily cases of COVID-19 and 517 hospitalizations in Alberta.¹ Restrictions will begin to be eased based on hospitalization benchmarks. Step 1 will take effect on February 8, allowing eateries, youth activities, and individual indoor fitness to resume. At restaurants, 6 people from the same household can be seated per table, tables must be 2 metres apart, contact information must be collected, entertainment is not permitted, liquor service must end at 10 pm, and in-person dining must close by 11 pm. One on one training is permitted for indoor fitness activities, but group sports are prohibited.² Alberta changed the isolation rules for people infected with COVID-19 variants; in some cases, individuals may now need to quarantine for up to 24 days.³

→ *British Columbia*

British Columbia reported an average of about 50 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people between January 30 and February 4. The provincial state of emergency has been extended through February 16, in addition to province-wide restrictions, which have been extended without a definite expiry date.⁴ To enhance safety in the education system, middle and secondary school students, and K-12 staff are required to wear non-medical masks while indoors, and when they are with their learning groups, with minor exceptions. For elementary students, wearing masks indoors remains a personal choice.⁵

→ *Manitoba*

On February 4, 110 new COVID-19 cases were recorded in Manitoba.⁶ The province is set to loosen the current restrictions, which would expire on February 13. This may involve allowing restaurants, tattoo parlors, gyms, nail salons, places of worship, and libraries to reopen with limited capacity. Additionally, measures may include increasing the number of people permitted to gather for weddings and enabling the film industry and photographers to resume work. Organized outdoor sports are allowed to resume for games or practices, but no multi-team tournaments will be permitted. Gyms are allowed to offer one-on-one training sessions, but no group classes.⁷

→ *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported 7 new cases of COVID-19 on February 7, leaving the province with a total of 203 active cases -- down from 286 one week ago.⁸ Zones 2 (Saint John), 3 (Fredericton), 5 (Campbellton), 6 (Bathurst), and 7 (Miramichi) remain at the less restrictive “orange” public health alert level, while Zone 1 (Moncton) remains at the “red” alert level with 41 active cases.⁹ Households in orange-level regions are permitted to have up to 10 “steady” contacts from outside the home, and formal outdoor gatherings of up to 50 people are permitted with hygienic measures in place.¹⁰ Students of all ages can return to in-person classes, and most non-essential business, cultural institutions, and entertainment venues are also permitted to open under orange-level restrictions.¹¹ Zone 4 (Edmunston) remains in the province’s most restrictive “lockdown” phase with 135 active cases.¹² Lockdown measures include the restriction of non-essential business, compulsory remote-learning, and the prohibition of non-essential inter-regional and inter-provincial travel.¹³

→ *Newfoundland and Labrador*

On February 4, Newfoundland and Labrador reported one new case of COVID-19.¹⁴ The province remains at Alert Level 2 and has eased restrictions to permit eateries, leisure, and cultural facilities to reopen and operate with reduced capacity.¹⁵ The province has been affected by delays and reductions in the shipment of vaccines resulting in the postponement of the immunization program in parts of Labrador.¹⁶

→ *Northwest Territories*

Three new cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the Northwest Territories last week. The territory-wide public health emergency has been extended through February 16. The territory remains in Phase 2 of its reopening plan. Even with a reduced shipment of vaccines expected, NWT has succeeded in offering the first doses to 1 in 3 eligible adults.¹⁷

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia has reported 5 new cases of COVID-19 in the past 7 days.¹⁸ There are currently 8 active cases in the province, down from 10 one week ago.¹⁹ As of February 8, fitness establishments, such as gyms and yoga studios, are permitted to reopen at 75% capacity with hygienic measures in place; and businesses and organizations can now host in-person events and activities, including arts, cultural, and sporting events, festivals, weddings, funerals, and other social events, with up to 100 participants indoors, and 150 outdoors.²⁰ The province remains in a state of emergency.²¹

→ *Nunavut*

As of February 4, there are 14 active cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut, all of which are in Arviat. The community's second round of vaccinations is scheduled to begin on February 10, with priority given to those receiving their second dose.²² Public health officials have officially declared the COVID-19 outbreak in Whale Cove over and eased some restrictions in the community. Up to 15 people may gather indoors and up to 100 people may gather outdoors. Indoor public places can have up to 50 people or 50% capacity. Elementary schools in the community have returned to in-person learning, but middle and high school students will continue to use a mix of in-person and remote learning.²³ On February 3, middle and high schools in the Kitikmeot and Qikiqtani regions returned to full-time in-person learning.²⁴ The health minister reassured residents of Iqaluit that all residents of the community who wish to be vaccinated will receive one in the next few months after it was revealed that the next stage of vaccinations would be limited to high-risk groups.²⁵

→ *Ontario*

Ontario reported a seven-day moving average of 1,428 new cases of COVID-19 per day on February 7.²⁶ There are currently 14,799 active cases in the province, down from 19,017 one week ago.²⁷ Toronto Public Health has identified Canada's first case of the Brazilian P.1 variant, as well as its second case of the South African variant known as B.1.351.²⁸ There are 174 known cases of the United Kingdom's B.1.1.7 variant in Ontario as of February 8.²⁹ The province's state of emergency will be allowed to expire as scheduled on February 9, but the current stay-at-home order will remain in place until individual regions transition back to the province's colour-coded public health framework.³⁰ According to the province's reopening plan, an "emergency brake" will be left in place allowing the government to quickly move a region back into lockdown if it "experiences a rapid acceleration in COVID-19 transmission or if the healthcare system becomes overwhelmed."³¹ Health units in Hastings Prince Edward, Kingston, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington, Renfrew County, and Timiskaming are expected to move into the green zone on February 10, allowing restaurants, non-essential businesses, and schools to reopen.³² On the week of February 15, all remaining regions are set to move to the framework based on their local case rates, except for the Toronto, Peel, and York Regions, which will be the last to make that transition in the week of February 22.³³ Schools in 13 districts across Ontario will resume in-person learning on February 8.³⁴

→ *Prince Edward Island*

In Prince Edward Island, no new cases were reported on February 4.³⁵ Retail businesses, markets, gyms, fitness facilities, museums, and libraries can now operate at full capacity as long as physical distancing is maintained. Restaurants and bars are permitted to stay open for in-person dining.³⁶ International travellers will be required to quarantine for 14 days in the province, even after completing the 3-day hotel quarantine

mandated by the federal government.³⁷ Effective February 6, legislative changes will permit pharmacists to provide COVID-19 vaccinations; however, implementation will likely not occur until the second phase of the vaccine rollout.³⁸ As of February 4, people 80+ became eligible for vaccine appointments.

→ *Quebec*

Quebec has reported more than 10,000 cumulative COVID-19 deaths.³⁹ The province reported 1,204 new cases, 58 fewer hospitalisations and nine fewer ICU patients on February 7.⁴⁰ As of February 8, CEGEP, college, and university students in red zones may return to school more than once per month. The class capacity for theory lessons is 50%, but there is no limit for practical classes like labs.⁴¹ Students must maintain 1.5 m distance and wear masks.⁴² Some additional COVID-19 measures will be lifted on February 8, allowing some non-essential businesses like hair salons and museums to reopen. However, the curfew will remain for red zones and visiting private homes remains prohibited.⁴³ Non-essential surgeries have resumed but are heavily backlogged.⁴⁴ Approximately 248,000 vaccinations have been administered since December 14.⁴⁵

→ *Saskatchewan*

As of February 7, the seven-day average of daily new cases in Saskatchewan was 17.9 per 100,000 people, with a total of 2,363 active cases in the province.⁴⁶ Public health officials have found multiple cases of the B117 variant in Regina and said they will continue to monitor the situation.⁴⁷ The province has administered 95% of its vaccine stock, and is scheduled to receive several thousand more doses in the coming weeks.⁴⁸ The provincial government has faced criticism over how it has been reporting hospitalization figures throughout the pandemic, with the provincial NDP alleging that patients are excluded from the count when they are no longer infectious -- even if they still require hospital-based care. Public health officials revised their hospitalization figures up by 21 following these complaints.⁴⁹

→ *Yukon*

No active cases of COVID-19 remain in Yukon. The territory remains in Phase 3 of its reopening plan. The territory began administering second vaccine doses to all staff and residents of long-term care homes as of February 1. A plan to open a Whitehorse vaccination clinic to the general public on February 10 was delayed due to a reduction in vaccine shipments.⁵⁰

The United States

→ *California*

California reported a seven-day average of 14,708 daily new cases on February 5, the lowest it has been since December 1. The state had previously peaked with an average of 44,629 new cases on January 10.⁵¹ Hospitalisations have declined to their lowest number since December 11.⁵² California is also reporting its fewest number of ICU patients since December 16.⁵³ Around 1,100 soldiers will be deployed to five vaccination sites in California; the two sites opening on February 16 will be predominantly federally run.⁵⁴ Following a Supreme Court decision, California must lift its ban on worshipping indoors and modify its indoor church service restrictions. This could include a 25% capacity limit and restrictions on singing and chanting.⁵⁵ California's vaccination program will now prioritize age instead of some high-risk groups, including the homeless, the incarcerated and some essential workers.⁵⁶ California has vaccinated over four million people.⁵⁷

→ *Illinois*

Illinois reported about 158 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people last week. As of February 8, all 11 regions of Illinois are in Phase 4 of the state's reopening plan.⁵⁸ The mayor of Chicago and the Chicago Teachers Union have reached a tentative agreement to reopen city schools for families seeking in-person instruction, narrowly averting a strike. Under the tentative framework, the first group of students

and staff, pre-K and special education cluster programs, would return on February 11.⁵⁹ Illinois is slowly catching up with its mass vaccination program; the state's rolling average of doses administered per day is approaching 50,000.⁶⁰ State legislators have now been added to the list of those eligible for Phase 1b vaccination.⁶¹

→ *Michigan*

Michigan reported about 106 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people last week and the lowest level of positivity rates of testing since mid-October. Starting February 8, contact sports are allowed to resume in Michigan, provided that masks are worn during practices and competition. If masks cannot be worn, participants must be regularly tested consistent with public health guidelines. Participants also need to maintain six feet of distance when not actively engaged in play.⁶² To enable the return of in-person learning in all Michigan school districts by March 1, the government launched a rapid antigen testing program as of February 2. The program targets educators from both public and private schools and provides testing supplies to schools for free.⁶³

→ *New York*

New York reported a statewide positivity rate of 4% on February 7, the lowest rate since November 27. There are 7,649 hospitalizations, with 1,459 in intensive care.⁶⁴ The governor's decision to reopen indoor dining in New York City is facing criticism because the per-capita rate for cases, hospitalizations, and test positivity are all higher than when he announced the ban. Officials defended the plan by saying that all three metrics have been declining for several weeks, warranting the easing of the restriction. The governor faced criticism about the statistics he presented on the epidemiological situation in New York.⁶⁵ Very few positive cases have been analyzed for the presence of virus variants in New York City, but local public health officials expect to have a more robust surveillance system in place by the end of the month.⁶⁶ Middle schools in New York City are set to reopen on February 25, though the vast majority of students have opted out of in-person learning.⁶⁷

→ *Texas*

Hospitalisations and new cases in Texas are falling after peaking during the holidays; cases have dropped to an average of 16,500 per day and hospitalizations fell to 10,523 on February 4. Texas still has more than 40% more new daily cases on average than during the last summer's peak.⁶⁸ Approximately 401,000 vaccinations are arriving during the week of February 8 and will be sent to 358 providers in 135 counties.⁶⁹ Vaccination priority will be for people over 75.⁷⁰ Local public health officials in Houston will also prioritize people with the highest risk of severe illness.⁷¹

Mexico

Mexico reported 13,575 new cases,⁷² and 1,682 deaths on February 4.⁷³ Mexico recorded 165,786 cumulative COVID-19 deaths, the third highest globally.⁷⁴ In Mexico City, some restaurant workers are protesting to reopen, but as hospitals in the city have over 80% full, restaurants are only permitted to offer take-out and delivery.⁷⁵ While the Sputnik vaccine was approved, Mexico does not have a contract or a scheduled delivery date for the vaccines.⁷⁶ Mexico has received approximately 766,000 Pfizer vaccine doses and is saving some of its vaccine stock for second doses. The country is expecting another Pfizer shipment in mid-February.⁷⁷ The government is using a website to organize vaccinations, but the site was inoperable over the past week.⁷⁸ The president revealed that he had a negative antigen test after he tested positive for COVID-19 12 days earlier.⁷⁹ Less than 1% of the population has been vaccinated. Employers have the right to fire people for refusing to be vaccinated.⁸⁰

Chile

Chile reported 3,786 new cases and 77 deaths on February 5. COVID-19 cases have fallen in 14 regions over the past two weeks.⁸¹ 454,155 people had been vaccinated nationwide as of February 5.⁸² Chile began its mass vaccination campaign by administering doses to people over the age of 90 at approximately 1,400 vaccination centres across the country.⁸³

WESTERN EUROPE

France

On February 6, France reported 20,586 new cases, hospitalisations fell by 245 and ICU patients decreased by 20.⁸⁴ France will not impose a national lockdown.⁸⁵ Ski lifts are expected to stay closed until at least March. Borders will be closed to people from countries outside of the EU. Travellers must have a negative virus test.⁸⁶ As of February 8, children cannot wear homemade facemasks to school; only surgical masks and Category 1 fabric masks are permitted.⁸⁷ Not wearing a mask can lead to a 135 euro fine. France has received 273,600 AstraZeneca vaccines.⁸⁸ Approximately 1.86 million people in France have received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine; 247,260 people have been fully vaccinated.⁸⁹

Germany

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Germany increased by 14,211 to 2,252,001 according to data released by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) on Thursday.⁹⁰ The health minister announced on February 5 that the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions could be lifted before the spring. After loosening restrictions during the summer months, Germany went into a partial lockdown in November -- closing bars, restaurants, and cultural and sporting facilities. Schools and non-essential shops were added to the list in mid-December. In January, the government brought in tighter rules on mask-wearing and working from home amid concerns over new virus variants. Federal and state leaders will meet on February 10 to review Germany's current lockdown, which is set to expire on February 7. However, a group of frontline medical professionals has called on the government to keep the measures in place until the end of February.⁹¹

Belgium

In Belgium, 2,452 new daily cases of COVID-19 were reported on February 5.⁹² The current measures have been extended until April 1, with some restrictions being eased this week. Effective February 8, campsites and holiday parks can reopen; hairdressers and zoos can reopen on February 13.⁹³ Currently, non-essential stores, museums, and swimming pools are open, with safety measures in place. Non-medical contact services, such as beauticians and tattoo shops, have been permitted to reopen on March 1.⁹⁴

Netherlands

On February 2, the Netherlands registered 3,570 new positive cases of COVID-19.⁹⁵ Government health experts have been asked to take a look at all the measures in place, including the curfew, to deal with the spread of the UK variant. This could mean that the curfew could extend past the deadline of February 10 but "it really depends on what the figures show." Primary schools and childcare facilities will reopen on February 8 under strict conditions. The wider lockdown will remain in force until March 2, with a review on February 23.⁹⁶

Spain

Over 60,000 people in Spain have died from COVID-19.⁹⁷ The number of new cases in Spain appears to be declining. The 28,565 new cases reported on February 5 were far lower than the 40,000 daily new cases reported during the country's peak.⁹⁸ However, various mutations of the virus are being discovered in the country,⁹⁹ including the Brazilian variant which was found in Madrid.¹⁰⁰ In response to these COVID-19 variants, Spain is increasing travel limits to Brazil and South Africa, similar to the limits on travel to the United Kingdom.¹⁰¹ Inter-territorial travel is restricted in several parts of Spain.¹⁰² Restrictions were eased in Catalonia on February 8, with gyms permitted to reopen and bars and restaurants allowed to remain open until 4:30 pm.¹⁰³ Spain will not yet administer the AstraZeneca vaccine to people older than 55, but the vaccines are anticipated to arrive soon.¹⁰⁴ The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are being used on long-term care residents and staff.¹⁰⁵

The United Kingdom

On February 5, 19,114 new cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the UK.¹⁰⁶ Starting February 15, in a bid to stop the new virus variants, travellers arriving from countries identified as COVID-19 hotspots will be required to quarantine for 10 days in approved hotels near airports and seaports patrolled by security guards. They will be billed for their stay. Authorities are facing criticism for delays in implementing the policy, which was first announced in late January. The government announced that it plans to work with German biopharmaceutical firm, CureVac, to develop vaccines targeting emerging variants of COVID-19. Public health officials around the world are concerned about new virus strains that may be more contagious or resistant to existing vaccines. The government also aims to give a shot to 15 million people by February 15, including everyone over 70 and those with underlying health conditions.¹⁰⁷

Ireland

On February 5, 506 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Ireland.¹⁰⁸ Those entering the country from Northern Ireland "without a reasonable excuse," will be fined 100 euros. This fixed payment notice (FPN) comes into effect at 7 am on February 8, with every adult in the car liable to be fined -- not just the driver.¹⁰⁹ A legal requirement to quarantine takes effect February 4 for all travellers with exception for travellers beginning their journey in Northern Ireland. Travellers may only leave their place of residence during the quarantine period for essential purposes or to take a RT-PCR test no less than 5 days after arrival. If the traveller receives written confirmation that the result of this test is negative, the period of quarantine can end. If a traveller's journey began in South Africa or Brazil, the traveller must complete the full 14 days of quarantine -- regardless of whether the traveler had a negative test result.¹¹⁰

Luxembourg

On February 5, the ministry of health recorded 181 new cases of COVID-19 in the country.¹¹¹ Effective February 8, primary schools will close, switching to distance learning for a week until the February half term begins. Creches are permitted to stay open; however, all other facilities such as music schools or maisons relais will close as well. This decision followed the detection of a series of infection chains and clusters over the last week -- including a primary school in Schiffange, which has sent the whole of cycle 2 into quarantine.¹¹² Aside from a few exceptions, cross-border workers will not be able to get vaccinated in Luxembourg because of the minimal number of doses available in the country.¹¹³

Portugal

On February 4, Portugal reported 7,914 new cases of COVID-19.¹¹⁴ A ban on driving between counties came into force from 8 pm on February 6 to 5 am on February 8, despite some exceptions provided within

the state of emergency. The restriction of circulation between the 278 counties on the mainland is a way to minimise the risks of the new COVID-19 variants. Several other measures are in place to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, including a mandatory lockdown, the prohibition of sales or deliveries in any establishment of the non-food sector, the prohibition of sale or delivery of any drink, and the ban on staying in public leisure spaces. Establishments open to the public must close by 8 pm on weekdays and 1 pm on weekends and holidays, except supermarkets, which are allowed to operate on weekends until 5 pm.¹¹⁵

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria

On February 5, Austria reported 1,518 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection.¹¹⁶ New measures came into effect on February 8, allowing “non-essential shops, museums, libraries, and zoos to reopen with an FFP2 mask requirement for all customers and visitors.”¹¹⁷ Contact services, such as hairdressers, may reopen but proof of a negative test will be required for all customers. A stay-at-home order continues to be in effect from 8 pm to 6 am.¹¹⁸ People arriving in Austria must show a negative test and commit to self-quarantining -- with exceptions for those coming from Australia, Finland, Greece, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, South Korea, and the Vatican.¹¹⁹ In Vienna, protestors attended an unauthorized far-right demonstration against COVID-19 restrictions.¹²⁰

Greece

On February 5, Greece reported 1,069 daily new cases of COVID-19.¹²¹ In the Attica region, which includes Athens, cases rose by about 40%, with the increase likely due to the presence of the UK and South African variants.¹²² The government has reintroduced the color-coded risk assessment map, giving areas a yellow or red risk rating.¹²³ In red risk regions, stricter measures apply that primarily impact the retail sector, with clothing stores requiring an appointment and all other retail stores operating on curbside pickup.¹²⁴ In red risk zones, a 6 pm to 5 am weekend curfew is in effect, including in the largest cities of Athens and Thessaloniki. On weekends, only supermarkets, pharmacies, and gas stations can operate in these zones.¹²⁵

Italy

In Italy, 13,656 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection were reported on February 5.¹²⁶ A colour-coded system of restrictions remains in place, with the majority of the country in the yellow zone.¹²⁷ In yellow zones, eateries can stay open until 6 pm and takeout services at restaurants are permitted until 10 pm. Museums can reopen during the week and hairdressers can resume their services. Primary and secondary schools have reopened with reduced class sizes for high-school students. Across Italy, a nighttime curfew remains in effect from 10 pm to 5 am. Gyms, cinemas, theme parks, pools, and theatres remain closed. The ban on non-essential movement between regions will remain in effect until February 15.¹²⁸ “Mario Draghi, the former European Central Bank chief, has accepted a mandate from the president to try to form a new government following the collapse of the most recent coalition government.”¹²⁹

Slovenia

On February 5, 1,239 daily new cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded in Slovenia.¹³⁰ Ski resorts and some stores will reopen, along with easing of current restrictions. On February 6, daily migrant workers and academics arriving from EU countries with lower 14-day incidence rates will not be required to provide negative test results or quarantine. Effective February 12, shops no larger than 400 square metres will be permitted to reopen but are required to test their employees on a weekly basis.¹³¹ Restrictions on businesses have been further eased in 7 regions to permit the reopening of produce stalls and specialized shops selling

children's products. Six of 12 regions have reopened schools for students in kindergarten to grade 3 but otherwise remote learning is largely in effect.¹³²

Switzerland

On February 5, Switzerland reported 1,765 new daily cases of COVID-19.¹³³ The closure of non-essential stores, sports facilities, museums, libraries, and eateries has been extended until the end of February.¹³⁴ The Swiss Teachers Association is demanding tests be extended to schools in the country but the Federal Council has rejected the idea due to each canton's jurisdiction over education.¹³⁵ The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has not been approved for use in Switzerland due to insufficient data on safety, efficacy, and quality. However, the BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna vaccines are a part of the government's vaccination program.¹³⁶ On February 6, "hundreds of protesters marched against coronavirus restrictions after the health minister said the current restrictions will stay in place through the end of February."¹³⁷

EASTERN EUROPE

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic reported 2,415 new cases of COVID-19 on February 8, below its 7-day moving average of 7,171 cases per day.¹³⁸ The country received its first shipment of the AstraZeneca vaccine on February 6. The distribution of 19,200 doses to vaccination centers across the country is expected to begin on February 8.¹³⁹ The Czech Republic ordered three million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine and should receive a total of 130,000 doses this month.¹⁴⁰ Czech hospitals are at the limits of their capacity according to the country's deputy health minister.¹⁴¹ As of February 6, there were 5,756 COVID-19 patients in Czech hospitals, including 1,018 in intensive care units.¹⁴² Hospital capacities are lowest in Prague and the Karlovy Vary (west Bohemia) and Hradec Králové (east Bohemia) regions.¹⁴³ The government indicated that many people have gone to the mountains in recent weeks, even though ski lifts are not in operation.¹⁴⁴ Government officials will meet on February 8 to discuss the extension of the state of emergency, which expires on February 1, and to discuss the limiting of movement and restriction of travel between regions.¹⁴⁵

Hungary

Hungary reported 1,370 new cases of COVID-19 on February 7, below the country's 7-day moving average of 1,415 new cases per day.¹⁴⁶ The government is extending ongoing coronavirus-related restrictions until March 1, according to the Prime Minister's Office.¹⁴⁷ The Hungarian government has also decided to green-light the use of any coronavirus vaccine that has already been administered to over one million people worldwide.¹⁴⁸ RB Leipzig will play Liverpool Football Club in a round-of-16 Champions League match at the Puskas Arena in Budapest on February 16 instead of at the Red Bull Arena in Leipzig because Germany blocked almost all entry from Britain.¹⁴⁹

Latvia

Latvia reported 480 new cases of COVID-19 on February 8, below the country's 7-day moving average of 937 new cases per day.¹⁵⁰ On February 3, the Latvian cabinet of ministers extended the country's state of emergency and a number of ongoing safety measures until April 6. This means that all public events, as well as the operation of all entertainment venues, bars, skating rinks, cultural sites, museums, and food service venues, remain prohibited.¹⁵¹ In-person shopping remains limited to establishments providing essential services, and the national curfew remains in effect for the hours between 10 pm and 5 am on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.¹⁵² From February 10 to 24, travellers from the European Union, the European Economic Area, Switzerland and the UK will be allowed to enter Latvia for essential purposes.¹⁵³

Lithuania

Lithuania reported 270 new cases of COVID-19 and 18 deaths due to the virus on February 8.¹⁵⁴ A nationwide lockdown, which has been in effect since November 7, will remain in effect until at least February 28.¹⁵⁵ This means that a number of ongoing restrictions will remain in effect, and Lithuanians remain forbidden from leaving the boundaries of their home municipality unless they are attending a funeral, going to work, accessing healthcare services, or taking care of a family member.¹⁵⁶ Non-essential movement within municipalities is also forbidden, with the same exceptions.¹⁵⁷

Poland

Poland reported 4,725 new cases of COVID-19 on February 7, below its 7-day moving average of 4,909 cases per day.¹⁵⁸ Poland remains in the “red zone,” but economic restrictions have been gradually relaxed in recent weeks. Some cultural institutions including libraries, art galleries, and museums, were permitted to reopen under strict sanitary regimes on February 1.¹⁵⁹ Cinemas, theaters, sporting venues, and ski resorts will be allowed to reopen at 50% capacity from February 12.¹⁶⁰

Slovakia

Slovakia reported 552 cases of COVID-19 on February 7, below its 7-day moving average of 1,916 cases per day.¹⁶¹ From February 8, Slovakia will begin using a colour-coded regional alert system in order to establish localized public health guidelines. This is in addition to a similar national alert system already in use.¹⁶² Slovakia’s state of emergency was extended on February 8, with the country remaining at the most restrictive “black” phase of its national alert system.¹⁶³ Forty-one of Slovakia’s 72 administrative regions will begin the week at level 3 out of 4 on the country’s regional alert scale, which permits the reopening of kindergartens and primary schools for in-person learning, as well as the resumption of many non-essential activities for residents who had a negative COVID-19 test in the past 7 days.¹⁶⁴

NORTHERN EUROPE

Denmark

The epidemiological situation in Denmark has been rapidly improving over the past few weeks. Danish public health officials reported 44 hospitalizations on February 4, its lowest figure since December 15. On the same date, Denmark reported 553 new cases and a positivity rate of just 0.38%.¹⁶⁵ The government announced that students up to grade four will return to in-person learning on February 8, with no timetable for the return of older students.¹⁶⁶ The mandatory entry quarantine and proof of negative test requirement was officially introduced on February 7.¹⁶⁷ The flight ban on the United Arab Emirates was rescinded on the same date, but all travellers from the country must produce a negative test from the past day upon their arrival, get tested again, and quarantine for 10 days.¹⁶⁸ The Danish government announced that they will create a ‘vaccine passport’ within the next few months, allowing residents to easily prove that they have been vaccinated.¹⁶⁹ A large protest took place in Copenhagen on February 6 against the country’s lockdown restrictions and the decision to create the vaccine certificate.¹⁷⁰

Estonia

Estonia reported a two-week average infection rate of 549.22 new cases per 100,000 people on February 8, indicating relative stability over the past week -- though the positivity rate remains high at 11.2%.¹⁷¹ The scientific council has advised the government that it should not ease any restrictions for the foreseeable future.¹⁷² The harmonized nationwide restrictions announced last week came into force on February 3,

setting 50% capacity requirements in restaurants, non-essential stores, public events, houses of worship, and swimming pools.¹⁷³ The entry quarantine requirement was lifted on February 2 for those who can prove that they have received the COVID-19 vaccine or have recovered from COVID-19 in the past six months.¹⁷⁴ The education minister said that teachers and other education workers will become eligible to receive the vaccine in mid-February.¹⁷⁵ Estonian public health officials set the upper age limit to receive the AstraZeneca vaccine at 70 years old, in line with several other European countries.¹⁷⁶

Finland

The number of new cases in Finland has risen slightly over the past few weeks, with a two-week incidence rate of 91.7 per 100,000 people on February 8.¹⁷⁷ The government has submitted a proposal to parliament that all current restrictions on restaurants and bars be extended through the end of June. Regions are able to adjust their own operating hours and customer capacity as long as they are following national guidelines.¹⁷⁸ The justice minister has rejected a proposal to postpone the municipal elections scheduled for April 18, saying the COVID-19 situation does not warrant the move. The elections will only be postponed if the country moves to its highest level of COVID-19 restrictions.¹⁷⁹ Finland is planning to introduce a 'vaccine passport' that is similar to those announced in Denmark and Sweden.¹⁸⁰ Public health officials announced that the AstraZeneca vaccine will only be given to those under the age of 70, and said that the interval between vaccine doses can be extended to up to 12 weeks.¹⁸¹

Iceland

As of February 8, Iceland has the lowest infection rate in Europe, with an overall two-week average infection rate of 9.3 new cases per 100,000 people -- including cases found at the border.¹⁸² Several restrictions were eased on February 8. Private gatherings will continue to be limited to 20 people, but seated events at cultural institutions and houses of worship may have up to 150 people. Capacity limits at non-essential stores will continue to vary by the size of the store, but no store may admit more than 150 people. Gyms may open their change rooms and return to 50% capacity for individual workouts. Bars and nightclubs may reopen -- but must close by 10 pm. Social distancing and mandatory mask policies remain in effect.¹⁸³ The AstraZeneca vaccine will only be given to those under the age of 65.¹⁸⁴ Icelandic public health officials have signed a deal with CureVac to purchase 180,000 doses of their vaccine, with approval expected to take place in the second quarter of this year. As of February 2, approximately 3.28% of the population had been fully vaccinated.¹⁸⁵

Norway

The nationwide epidemiological situation in Norway has improved slightly over the past week, with cases and hospitalizations continuing to fall.¹⁸⁶ However, a number of cities in western Norway, including Bergen, introduced lockdown restrictions on February 7 due to an outbreak of the B117 variant. All leisure activities and public events have been cancelled, restaurants can only offer takeout, and non-essential businesses must close. The measures will be in place until at least February 14.¹⁸⁷ Local officials in Oslo eased the city's restrictions on February 3, allowing bars, restaurants, youth leisure activities, libraries, and non-essential stores to reopen. The sale of alcohol in bars and restaurants in the city continues to be prohibited.¹⁸⁸ The education minister announced that all year-end exams for high school students have been cancelled due to the pandemic.¹⁸⁹ Norway will recommend the AstraZeneca vaccine only for those under the age of 65 and not in a high-risk group.¹⁹⁰

Sweden

On February 4, Sweden reported a two-week infection rate of 404 new cases per 100,000 people, representing a slight decline from the previous week. However, public health officials have warned that the

country is susceptible to another wave of COVID-19 if the public does not continue to follow social distancing regulations.¹⁹¹ As a result, the government has extended its ban on the sale of alcohol after 8 pm, and said it would bring in legal restrictions on domestic travel and non-essential stores if necessary.¹⁹² New travel restrictions came into effect on February 6: all incoming foreign travellers are required to present a negative test from the past two days upon their arrival. Citizens and residents of Sweden are exempt from the new rule but are recommended to get tested and quarantine upon their arrival. The travel restrictions will remain in place until March 31.¹⁹³ The government announced that it expects to have a 'vaccine passport' developed by June.¹⁹⁴ Public health officials have recommended that the AstraZeneca vaccine only be given to those under the age of 65.¹⁹⁵

ASIA/PACIFIC

Japan

Japan reported about 13 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people last week. The state of emergency in 11 prefectures has been extended through March 7, except for the Tochigi Prefecture. The Japanese government has revised its guidelines for the ten prefectures to urge people to refrain from non-essential outings throughout the day and to work from home wherever possible. Bars and restaurants will continue to be asked to close by 8 pm. Hospitals are encouraged to accept recovering COVID-19 patients in regular wards to free up beds for the new patients.¹⁹⁶ The national government is also asking the ten prefectures to launch an intensive testing campaign at elderly care facilities.¹⁹⁷ The revised antivirus laws have been formally enacted by national lawmakers to enable imposing penalties on COVID-19 rule breakers. Further glitches have been identified in Japan's contact-tracing app.¹⁹⁸ Japan has asked the European Union for cooperation in its efforts to secure a stable supply of vaccines from the bloc.¹⁹⁹

South Korea

South Korea reported about 5.2 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people in the last week. The discovery of the first community cases of more contagious variants has put authorities on high alert. Although the general social distancing scheme remains, the government has allowed some businesses outside the Seoul Metropolitan Region, such as restaurants and fitness clubs, to extend their operating hours by one hour to 10 pm. Apart from the relaxation, the government also strengthened the punishment for the violation of antivirus rules by business owners.²⁰⁰ The prime minister called for continued caution and asked Koreans not to travel over the Lunar New Year holiday.²⁰¹ South Korean health authorities are now planning to speed up the approval process for COVID-19 vaccines and homegrown treatments.²⁰²

New Zealand

New Zealand has reported about 0.33 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people in the last week, with very limited risk of transmission in the community. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been granted provisional approval and a batch of 450,000 doses are expected by the end of March. The prime minister has said that border workers and the people living with them would be prioritized once the rollout begins.²⁰³ Starting February 9, a new Short-Term Absence Payment has come into effect to pay workers awaiting COVID-19 test results as well as parents waiting for their children's results if they cannot work from home. The government is also planning to increase the minimum sick leave entitlement to 10 days a year.²⁰⁴

Australia

Australia reported about 0.16 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people in the last week. The sporadic discovery of new local cases linked to quarantine facilities has prompted states to push for stricter protocols

regulating their facilities. Victoria tightened its restrictions effective February 4, mandating masks indoors and limiting private gatherings to 15 people rather than 30.²⁰⁵ The Perth, Peel and South West regions in West Australia emerged from snap lockdowns on February 5. Some post-lockdown restrictions continue to apply in the Perth and Peel regions until February 14: only essential travel in and out of the regions will be permitted; a 20-person limit will apply to private gatherings, while hospitality, entertainment, retail and fitness venues and weddings will have their capacity capped at 150; bars have to run a seated service; nightclubs and the casino have to remain closed; mask wearing remains mandatory outside people's home except for primary school students and when "strenuously exercising outdoors".²⁰⁶ The federal government has confirmed that Australians will be able to access proof through their mobile phones that they have received vaccination.²⁰⁷ To bolster the mass vaccination, free vaccination will also be offered to foreign nationals who are in Australia on a visa.²⁰⁸ The weekly cap on international passenger arrivals has been increased from 4,127 to at least 6,362.²⁰⁹

Turkey

On February 5, Turkey recorded 7,909 new COVID-19 cases.²¹⁰ The government is planning to ease restrictions imposed on businesses if the number of cases decreases to a certain point, the prime minister announced on February 1. The government imposed weeknight curfews and full lockdowns on weekends in December 2020 due to a surge in the number of daily cases, restricting the operation of restaurants and cafes to takeaways and delivery services. While business owners are expecting to reopen as soon as possible, it has not been made clear when businesses can start operating again.²¹¹ Turkey launched its mass-vaccination program with the goal of inoculating 1 million health workers. The program is relying entirely on the country's purchase of 50 million doses of a vaccine developed by the Chinese pharmaceutical company Sinovac.²¹²

Israel

Israel reported about 517 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people last week. People can now travel beyond 1,000 meters from their home. Nature reserves, national parks, heritage sites, and Israel Antiquities Authority sites will reopen to the public. Businesses that do not cater to the public can reopen. Restaurant takeaway services and businesses with individual interactions, like hairdressers, cosmeticians and barbers will be allowed to operate. Vacation rentals can serve single families. The country's major international airport will remain closed until at least February 20.²¹³ As of February 7, no decision has been made by the government on the reopening of the education system. With the pace of the mass vaccination campaign slowing down, Israel opened vaccination to anyone over the age of 16.²¹⁴

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Links

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