

PEARL

**POLICY, ELECTIONS &
REPRESENTATION LAB**



Weekly COVID Update:

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

December 14, 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

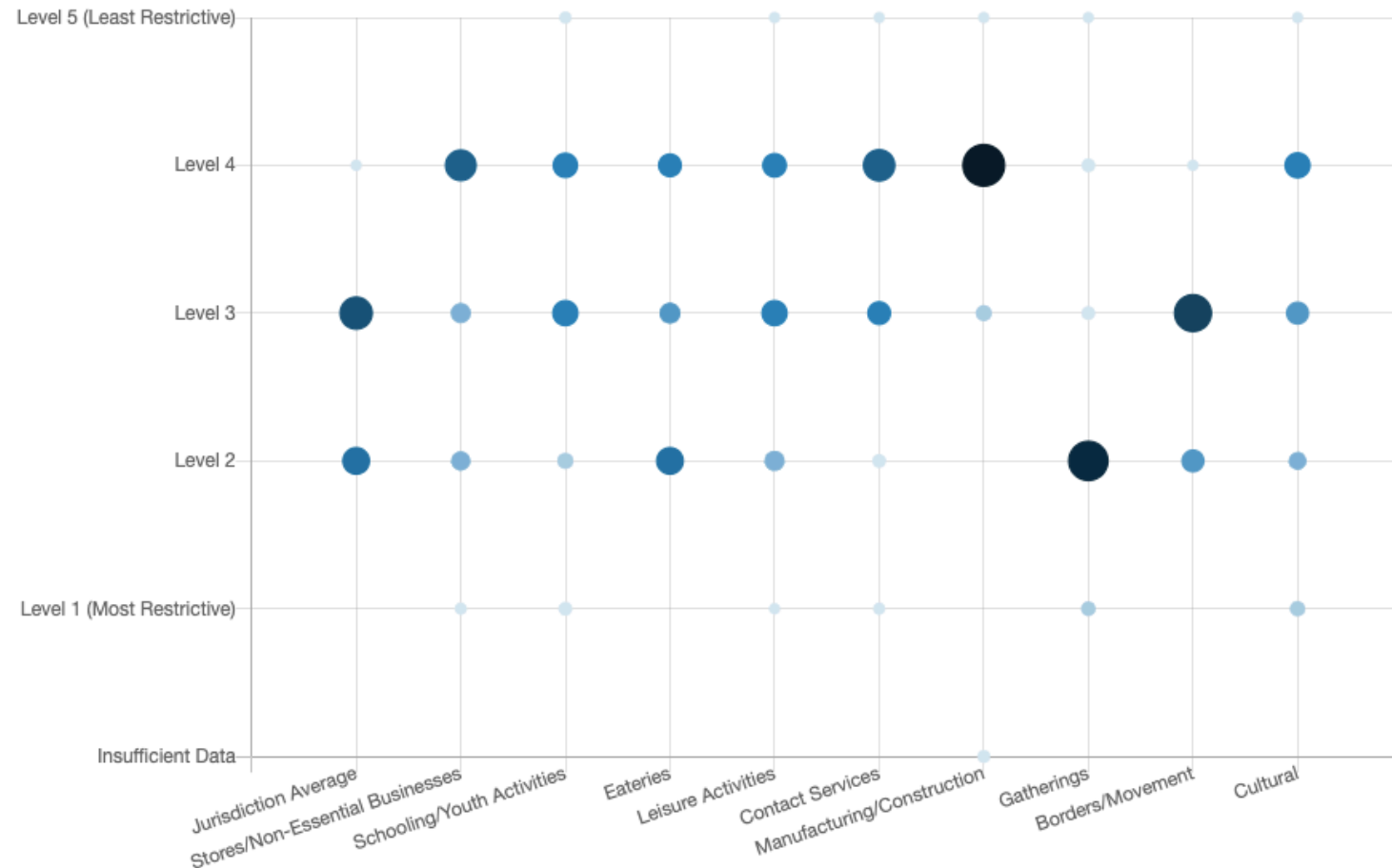


Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of December 14. The reopening policies of 52 jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories. For each jurisdiction, we classify a total of 9 different sectors: Stores/Non-Essential Businesses, 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.

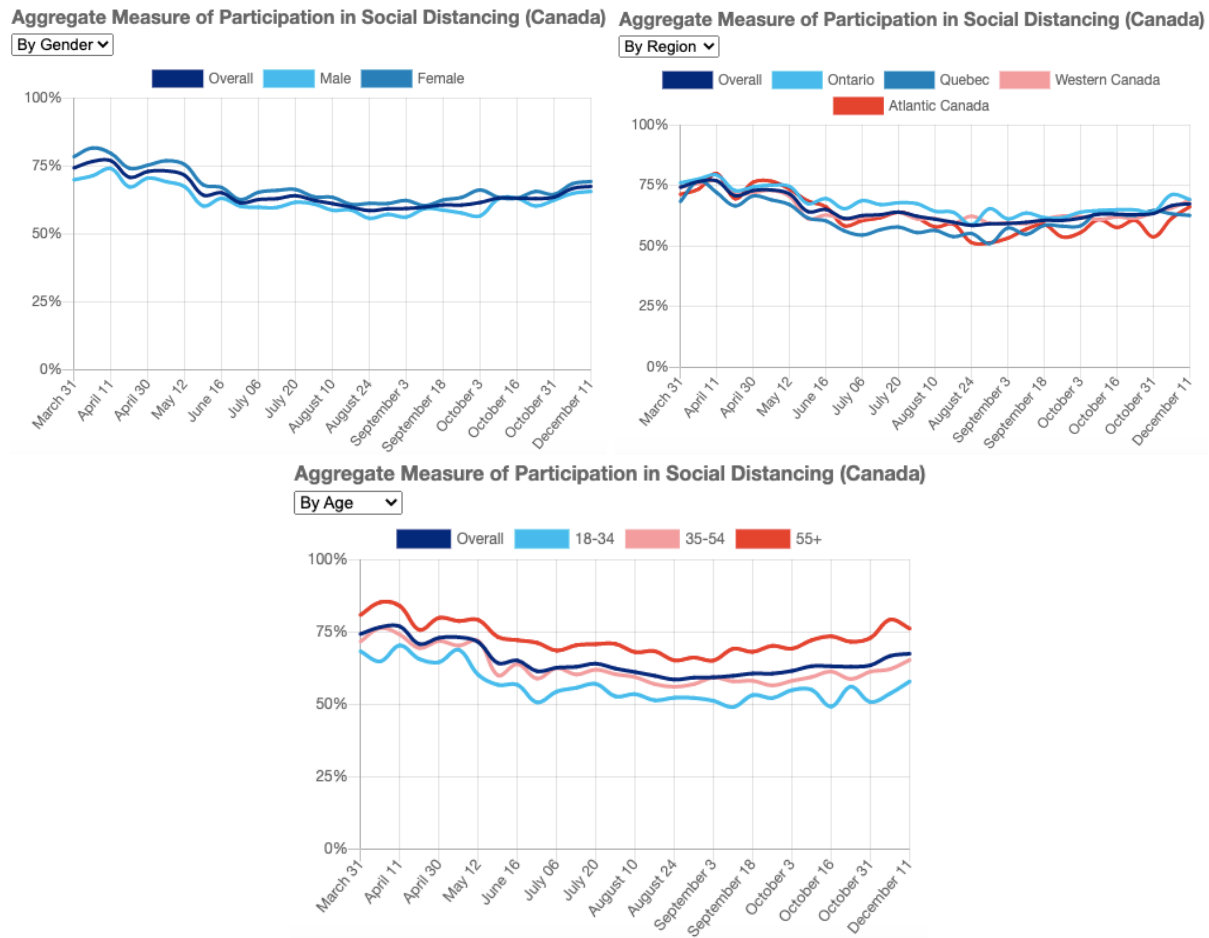


Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada).

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.

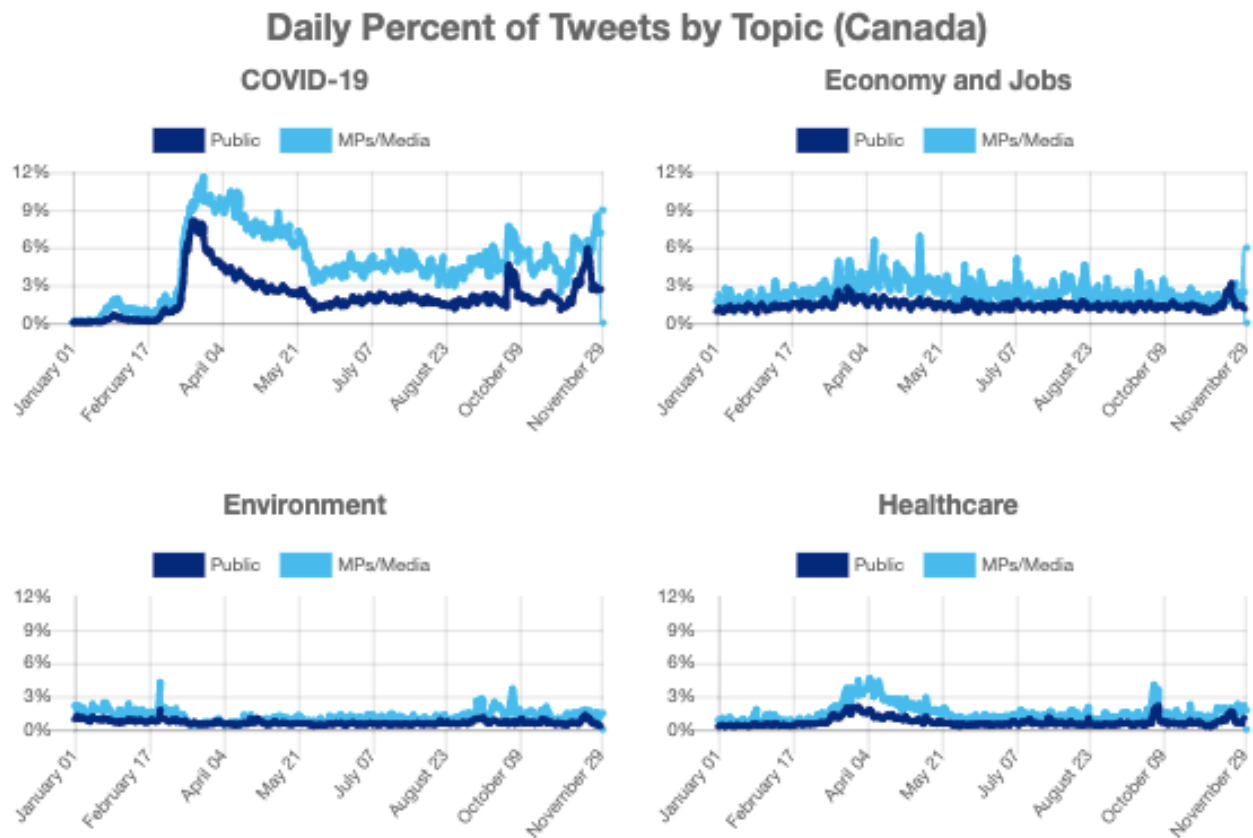


Figure 3 – Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada). The graphs report the percentage of daily tweets containing one or more keywords associated with the particular topic. The results are presented separately for MPs, senators, and journalists, on the one hand, and for the Canadian public, on the other.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

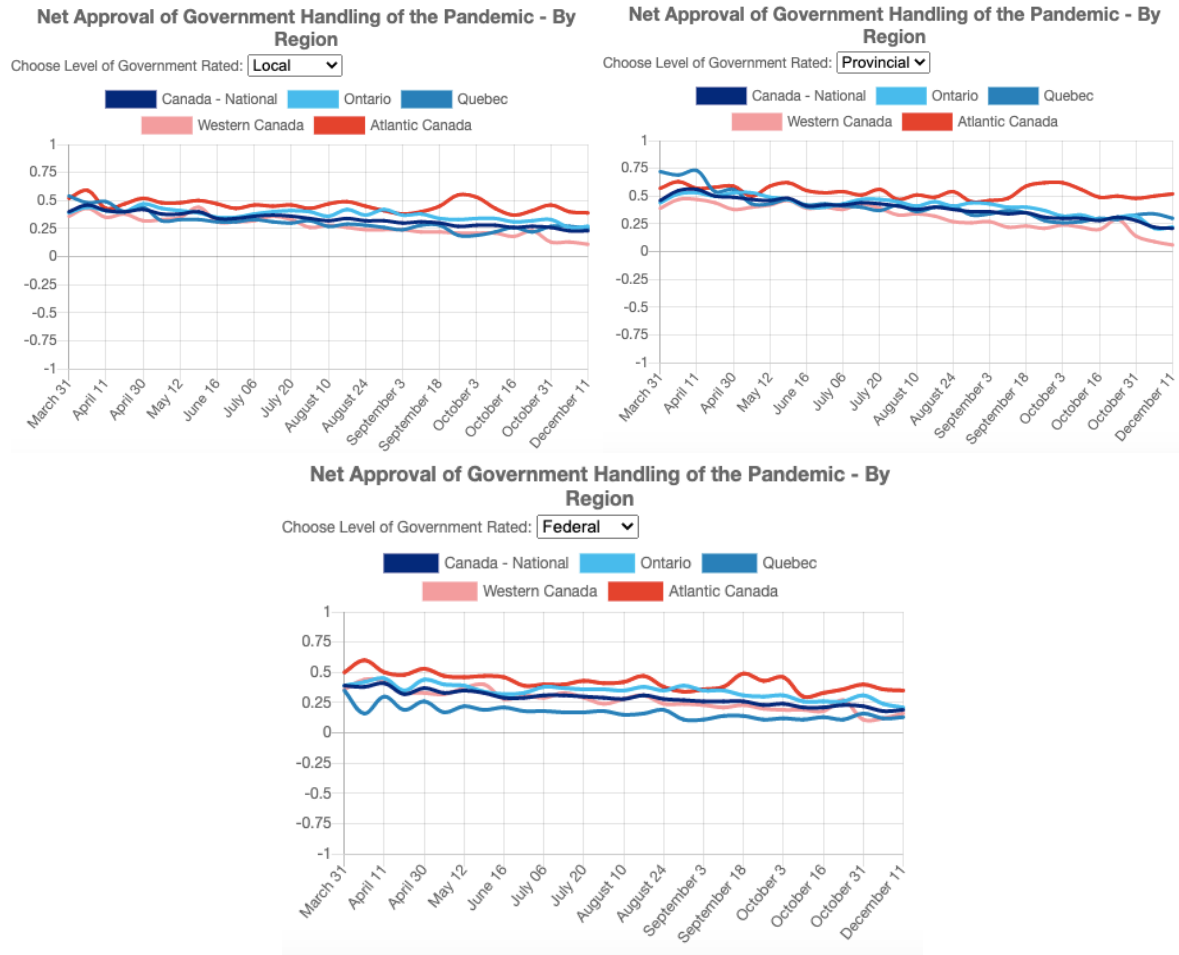


Figure 4 – Net approval of government handling of the pandemic by region. We asked Canadians whether they approved of how each level of government (the federal government, their provincial government, and their local government) was handling the coronavirus pandemic so far. To obtain a net approval score, 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*

“Alberta has almost a quarter of Canada’s active cases, hospitals are operating over capacity, and the number of people in intensive care has grown dramatically.”¹ Currently, at-home social gatherings are the main transmission source. On December 8, new restrictions were introduced in Alberta. Work from home measures came into effect and masks have been made mandatory across the province. Businesses including casinos, gyms, pools, spas, libraries, museums, and amusement parks have been closed. Dine-in services at restaurants and bars will not be permitted. All outdoor and indoor social gatherings have been banned and funerals and weddings are limited to 10 people. These measures will remain in place for at least four weeks and came into effect after weeks of pressure from the Opposition, health care experts, and mayors.²

→ *British Columbia*

Although experiencing a slight decline, the number of new cases in British Columbia is still hovering around 700 a day. The provincial state of emergency has been extended through December 22. All province-wide restrictions have been extended until January 8, 2021. All events and social gatherings have been suspended except for some drive-in and drop-off events as well as funerals, weddings and baptisms.³ The COVID-19 vaccine program is kicking off in B.C. this week. The first vaccines will be delivered at two Lower Mainland sites initially before expanding to 9 sites by January 2021. The first limited round of approximately 4,000 immunizations will be administered to healthcare workers who work in long-term care homes and front-line healthcare workers essential to the COVID-19 response. A registration system is also in development, including a process to register for vaccine access and receive a formal record of immunization.⁴

→ *Manitoba*

On December 10, Manitoba reported 293 new cases of COVID-19.⁵ Effective December 12, retail businesses can remain open later on Sundays and holidays. This new measure is aimed at providing businesses more flexibility to allow for curbside pickup and delivery options, as well as more time for in-person shopping in order to minimize crowds.⁶ Under code red, the government says outdoor activities such as skating, sledding, and skiing will be permitted over the holidays. However, groups must be small and COVID-19 safety measures should be followed -- including mask wearing and social distancing.⁷

→ *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported a total of 65 active cases of COVID-19 on December 14,⁸ down from 81 a week ago.⁹ Zone 2 (St. John) was moved back to the less restrictive “yellow” alert level on December 10 -- despite having the highest number of active cases in the province (33).¹⁰ At the yellow level, residents are permitted to hold private indoor gatherings of up to 20 people.¹¹ Meanwhile, Zone 4 (Edmundston) has been moved to the “orange” level after an outbreak at a local hospital.¹² The region had 15 active cases as of December 13, seven of which were healthcare workers at the Edmundston Regional Hospital.¹³ At the orange level, residents are restricted to a single-household bubble, and masks are required in most public places.¹⁴ The province has confirmed that 1,950 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccine arrived in New Brunswick on December 14. A second shipment is expected before the end of 2020.¹⁵

→ *Newfoundland and Labrador*

Newfoundland and Labrador remain at Alert Level 2, with 22 active COVID-19 cases as of December 13. The chief medical officer of health reduced the size of informal gatherings to 20, down from 50 this week. The new measure is related to high daily cases of COVID-19 in Alberta. Many people from Newfoundland and Labrador travel to Alberta for work and will be returning home over the holidays.¹⁶ The province will continue to stay out of the Atlantic bubble for an additional month and all visitors to the province must continue to self-isolate for 14 days. Newfoundland and Labrador is preparing to receive 1,950 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine next week.¹⁷

→ *Northwest Territories*

Five new cases of COVID-19 were diagnosed in the Northwest Territories on December 10 after traces of the virus were identified in Yellowknife's wastewater. The public health emergency has been extended through December 22. Starting December 7, new rapid testing devices have been put into service in a number of communities. They will deliver presumptive test results in as little as 15 minutes.¹⁸ More communities in the territory have been instituting mandatory mask policies as cases continue to climb across Canada.¹⁹ According to the government's preliminary plans, the COVID-19 vaccine will roll out as early as January 2021. Once authorized for distribution by Health Canada, the territory will receive enough vaccines to immunize 75% of its residents 18 years of age or older. The government encourages all adult residents to get vaccinated.²⁰

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia reported a total of 59 active cases of COVID-19 on December 13, down from 88 active cases one week ago.²¹ As of December 14, there are zero hospitalizations in the province due to the virus.²² On December 12, the premier announced that the province would extend its winter break for public school students in order to minimize the spread of COVID-19.²³ Schools will now close on December 18, rather than December 22, and reopen to students on January 11 instead of January 4.²⁴ The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and neighboring Hants County remain under stricter public health rules than the rest of the province.²⁵ Nova Scotians are advised to avoid all non-essential travel to the HRM and to other Atlantic provinces.²⁶ Public gatherings in the HRM are limited to 5 people, and catering establishments are restricted to take-out and delivery services.²⁷

→ *Nunavut*

There are 49 active cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut as of December 14, all of which are in Arviat.²⁸ All cases in Rankin Inlet, Whale Cove, and Sanikiluaq have recovered, though monitoring continues. Some residents of those communities remain in isolation.²⁹ The territorial government announced that they expect to be able to vaccinate up to 75% of Nunavut's population by the end of March.³⁰ The Red Cross will offer rapid testing to residents of isolation hubs in Winnipeg before they return to the territory. Public health officials have urged Nunavut community members to take advantage of the testing before returning because the initial outbreak has been linked to the facilities.³¹

→ *Ontario*

Ontario's 7-day rolling average has remained steady at 1,830 cases per day.³² Critical Care Services Ontario reported that, as of December 11, there were 251 COVID-19 patients in Ontario intensive care units and 152 people on ventilators. Doctors say they are seeing an average of 21 new COVID-19 ICU cases every day.³³ As of December 14, York Region and Windsor-Essex joined Toronto and Peel Region in the lockdown-grey zone.³⁴ The lockdown will last a minimum of 28 days, where bars and restaurants, personal care services, and non-essential retail stores close.³⁵ The government also announced that Middlesex-London, Simcoe Muskoka and Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph moved into the red-control level; Eastern Ontario moved into the orange-restrict level; and Leeds, Greenville and Lanark moved into the yellow-protect level. Ontario's first vaccination will be administered on December 15, prioritizing the first 3,000 doses for healthcare workers providing care in long-term care

homes and other high-risk settings. The government expects to receive 2.4 million vaccines in the first quarter of 2021 from Pfizer and Moderna.³⁶

→ *Prince Edward Island*

As of December 14, there are 17 active COVID-19 cases in the province.³⁷ Prince Edward Island has implemented a two-week lockdown that will remain in effect until December 21. The province will remain outside of the Atlantic bubble during this time. No personal gatherings are permitted, and organized gatherings cannot exceed 10 people. Recreational facilities including gyms, fitness facilities, casinos, museums, and libraries are closed, and no organized sports are permitted. Retail stores and shops must operate at 50% capacity; restaurants and bars are not permitted to offer indoor dining services. Contact services must operate by appointment and masks are mandatory.³⁸ The federal government will be paying for the full cost of 1,000 COVID-19 vaccines, which are set to arrive in the province as early as next week.³⁹

→ *Quebec*

On December 12, Quebec reported 1,898 new COVID-19 cases and 14 additional deaths over the past day.⁴⁰ There were 860 hospitalizations, which is fewer than on December 11, and there were 129 people in the ICU, which is higher than on December 11.⁴¹ Parts of the Laurentians -- including Mont-Tremblant and St-Sauveur -- were designated red, or phase one, of the province's reopening indicators. This means that bars, indoor dining, theatres and some other venues must close and private gatherings are prohibited.⁴² Ski hills in red zones may open, which the Camp Fortune hill has done.⁴³ Some of the restrictions that Camp Fortune has had to implement include patrons only taking the chair lift with family, requiring masks, patrons bringing their own ski equipment, allowing people to use the chalet for 20 minute intervals, and no food or beverages in the chalet.⁴⁴ With the increasing number of cases in Montreal, West Island regional health authorities have begun cancelling healthcare workers' vacation requests.⁴⁵

→ *Saskatchewan*

There are 4,188 active cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan as of December 14.⁴⁶ The province recorded a record-high 11 deaths on December 12.⁴⁷ Local officials in Regina announced that all public and Catholic schools will move to distance learning until at least January 11. Staff will continue to work in schools.⁴⁸ Provincial courts across Saskatchewan are suspending most of their operations until mid-January; all trials and hearings are postponed.⁴⁹ The chief medical health officer said that no new restrictions will be put in place until at least next week. No reopening will take place until the average number of daily cases is below 120.⁵⁰ The premier said that the first vaccinations in the province may be conducted as soon as next week, with long-term care residents and healthcare workers first in line.⁵¹

→ *Yukon*

There are three active cases remaining in Yukon. The territorial state of emergency has been extended again by 90 days. The government has released its COVID-19 vaccine strategy, which aims to provide free vaccinations for all eligible adult Yukoners. The vaccinations are expected to begin in early 2021. Yukon will be receiving enough vaccines to immunize 75% of the eligible adult population in the first quarter of 2021. High-risk populations outlined in national guidance may receive vaccines first. These priority groups include long-term care residents and staff, healthcare providers, and remote communities.⁵²

The United States

→ *California*

On December 8, California reported 35,400 COVID-19 cases and 219 deaths -- a record number of cases and deaths in 24 hours.⁵³ California's weekly average of deaths was 135 per day for the past week, compared to the 44 deaths per day average in November.⁵⁴ The governor implemented a new regional stay-at-home order on December 3 for regions that report ICU availability below 15%.⁵⁵ All of Central and Southern California, and parts of Northern California, the Bay Area and Sacramento, are in the stay-at-home level of reopening -- which means that bars, wineries and personal care services are closed and private gatherings are prohibited.⁵⁶ Schools with a waiver may remain open, as can critical infrastructure and restaurants offering take-out or delivery.⁵⁷ Hotels are only permitted to accept guests travelling for essential reasons and with limited occupancy.⁵⁸ The governor has left enforcing the rules to local governments, but threatened to pull funding from counties who do not enforce compliance.⁵⁹ The rest of California is in Purple on the state's reopening indicator list, which means that there is a curfew between 10 pm and 5 am until December 2 -- along with limited non-essential activities.⁶⁰ 325,000 Pfizer vaccines will be distributed to health workers and long term care residents.⁶¹

→ *Illinois*

Illinois' seven-day statewide test positivity from December 6 to December 12 has decreased from last week, and is now at 10.6%.⁶² The 196 fatalities reported on December 10 bring the statewide death toll to 13,861.⁶³ Statewide restrictions -- including closure of all cultural institutions (including museums, casinos and zoos), banning indoor gatherings, encouraging teleworking if possible, and grocery stores at 50% capacity -- remain in place.⁶⁴ Several Illinois healthcare regions that had seen progress in their coronavirus metrics in recent days have taken steps back, but a few are still advancing toward a potential rollback of Tier 3 coronavirus mitigation rules.⁶⁵ The governor has indicated that the state may not allow regions to roll back mitigations due to concerns of holiday-related spikes in COVID-19 numbers. Region 6 in east-central Illinois has met all three criteria to move forward, leaving the state to make a decision on whether to pull back on restrictions.⁶⁶

→ *Michigan*

Michigan's seven-day moving average decreased to 5,100 new cases per day -- the lowest in nearly a month.⁶⁷ However, the 7-day average of COVID deaths was 125 -- the highest since April. The number of hospitalizations continues to increase.⁶⁸ 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. These restrictions, part of a "COVID-19 three week pause," were set to expire on December 9. However, the governor, through the Department of Health and Human Services, extended COVID-19 restrictions for another 12 days.⁶⁹ Michigan will start vaccinating this week, with a strategy that will first immunize the people who keep the state's crucial healthcare infrastructure running. This includes workers in hospitals, critical care units, and emergency medical services.⁷⁰

→ *New York*

New York's statewide positivity rate increased to 4.98% as of December 13.⁷¹ For the first time since May, the number of hospitalizations surpassed 5,000: it now stands at 5,321 patients statewide -- with 1,007 patients in the ICU and 546 of them on a ventilator.⁷² On December 12, 106 New Yorkers died due to COVID-19.⁷³ On December 11, the governor announced new rules to trigger the various COVID-19 restrictions and colour zones in New York State. A "Red zone" will go into effect if a region is 21 days from 90% hospital capacity, an "Orange zone" will go into effect if a region is over 4% positivity over the past 10 days, and a "Yellow zone" will go into effect when there is 3% positivity over the past 10 days.⁷⁴ As of December 14, indoor dining was shut down in New York City. Other restrictions are being studied. Data show that gyms are responsible for .06% of the spread, hair and personal care are responsible for .14%, and restaurants are responsible for 1.43%. Indoor gatherings in private homes, by contrast, were found to account for 74% of COVID-19 spread.⁷⁵

→ *Texas*

On December 13, Texas reported over 8,000 confirmed and potential new cases and 111 more deaths.⁷⁶ The COVID-19 hospitalization rate for Deep East Texas was higher than 15% for three consecutive days from December 9 to December 11, which exceeds the reopening threshold set by the governor that allowed some businesses to reopen at 75% capacity and permitted elective surgeries.⁷⁷ The Pfizer vaccine will be sent to hospitals beginning December 14 and will go to healthcare workers, people working in medical facilities, and nursing home residents and staff first.⁷⁸

Mexico

On December 13, Mexico reported 8,608 COVID-19 cases and 249 deaths in the past day. Mexico has the fourth highest number of cases in Latin America and the fourth highest number of COVID-19 fatalities globally.⁷⁹ On December 12, to curb the spread, Mexico City shops were told that they would have to close by 5 pm.⁸⁰ The mayor announced that Mexico City is in a state of emergency and is encouraging people to stay home and socialize less.⁸¹ Currently, three states are in red on the reopening traffic light indicator, 24 states are in orange, three states in yellow and three states are in green.⁸² On December 11, Mexico approved the Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine for emergency use.⁸³ On December 10, British Airways resumed flights between London and Cancun after a 9-month pause.⁸⁴

Chile

On December 9, Chile's average positivity rate increased to 5.62%, which is the highest that it has been since October.⁸⁵ On December 12, Chile reported 1,807 COVID-19 cases in the past day, 64 additional deaths, 651 people in the ICU, 472 people on ventilators and 61 people in critical condition.⁸⁶ The COVID-19 situation in the Santiago Metropolitan area is one of the worst in the country and, due to a rise in cases, general travel outside of Santiago is no longer permitted.⁸⁷ Santiago and the Metropolitan area have a weekend and holiday curfew in place to curb the spread.⁸⁸ The Arturo Benitez International Airport in Santiago will remain open to tourism.⁸⁹

WESTERN EUROPE

France

France's 7-day moving average of new cases has slightly increased since last week and is now at 12,000 cases per day.⁹⁰ France's second stage of reopening is set to begin on December 15, with lockdown measures set to be lifted and replaced with a curfew. However, France did not reach its required thresholds of 5,000 average new daily COVID-19 cases and 2,500-3,000 patients in the ICU to end the lockdown.⁹¹ Accordingly, the lockdown will be replaced with an 8 pm to 6 am curfew, but museums, cinemas and theatres will remain closed. After 6 pm, no one is allowed to leave their homes unless they have an emergency, are going to work, or are travelling.⁹² Restaurants and cafés will remain closed until at least January 20. Bars and nightclubs are closed indefinitely. Ski lifts and other facilities are closed until January 7. Curfew measures will be lifted on December 24, but not on December 31.⁹³ Vaccine skepticism is growing: recent polls show that 61% of French people would not get the COVID vaccine when it becomes available.⁹⁴

Germany

Germany's 7-day R-value has increased slightly since last week and is now at 1.12. The country's 7-day moving average of new cases increased to 22,000 daily cases.⁹⁵ Germany's intensive care unit

capacity is also at a critical level: only 5% to 10% of intensive care beds are available in some parts of the country.⁹⁶ The chancellor and Germany's 16 state premiers have come to an agreement to increase restrictions across the country. On December 16, nonessential shops and services, schools and daycare centers will close until January 10.⁹⁷ Religious events may take place only if participants register, adhere to strict hygiene rules, and not sing. States are planning to ease stricter contact restrictions for December 24 to 26 so that close family members can spend Christmas together -- with up to 4 adults from different households mixing if they are immediate family.⁹⁸ Production issues at the Pfizer-BioNTech facilities in Germany have delayed the distribution of the first 3 million vaccines until the end of January.⁹⁹

Belgium

Over the past week, the daily average of new COVID-19 cases in Belgium was 2,165.¹⁰⁰ Children and teenagers represent 14% of COVID-19 infections in the country. Overall, infection, death, and hospitalization rates continue to slowly decrease in Belgium as a whole -- but are rising in the province of West Flanders.¹⁰¹ In response to the current restrictions, hairdressers set up their equipment in the streets to pressure authorities to allow them to reopen.¹⁰²

Netherlands

On December 11, 8,894 COVID-19 cases were reported by the public health institute, RIVM. As a result of increased testing, almost 48,000 people have tested positive for the virus over the past seven days -- compared with 35,000 in the preceding week. The government has stated that if the number of cases does not decline, new measures could be introduced.¹⁰³ Schiphol Airport will soon be one of the world's most important distribution points for the COVID-19 vaccines. The Air France-KLM group is preparing to store and transport vaccines.¹⁰⁴

Spain

On December 9, Spain reported 9,773 new COVID-19 cases and 373 new deaths over the previous 48 hours. This suggests that the number of cases has fallen in Spain and is now at approximately 4,500 daily new cases.¹⁰⁵ On December 10, health officials said that approximately one out of every thousand people in Spain have died from COVID-19.¹⁰⁶ On December 9, restaurants were permitted to reopen in Murcia.¹⁰⁷ On December 11, bars, restaurants, malls and gyms could reopen in Castile and Leon. Clubs were required to close in Valencia.¹⁰⁸ PCR tests are no longer necessary for trips to the Canary Islands and people can use a negative antigen test instead, which tends to be cheaper and faster.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, children under six years old no longer need PCR tests and can instead do a Transcription, Mediated, Amplification (TMA) test. Spain is awaiting the European Medicines Agency's permission to begin the distribution and vaccination process.¹¹⁰ Spanish health authorities intervened in a nursing home in Tenerife that reported 164 residents with COVID-19.¹¹¹

The United Kingdom

The UK's 7-day rolling average increased to 18,000 new cases per day.^{111A} On December 2, the nationwide lockdown in England was lifted and replaced with a tougher three-tiered system of local restrictions.^{111B} Most of England is in Tier 3 (Very High Alert), where non-essential shops in all areas can reopen, as can gyms, hairdressers and other personal care businesses, but restaurants, pubs, bars and other hospitality establishments must remain closed.^{111C} London is in Tier 2. PHE data shows 21 of London's 32 boroughs have infection rates higher than the overall rate for England of 150 cases per 100,000 people and higher than the current rate in Leicestershire, Tees Valley or Bristol -- all of which are in Tier 3.^{111D} After December 23, lockdown restriction will be eased to allow up to three households

to meet up for five days over Christmas. People can mix in homes, places of worship and outdoor spaces. Travel restrictions will also be eased.^{111E} On December 8, a 90-year-old woman in central England became the first person in the world to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccine outside of the vaccine trials.^{111F}

Ireland

An additional 15 COVID-19 related deaths have been reported in Ireland, bringing the country's total death toll to 2,117. On December 11, 310 new cases were recorded.¹¹² Also on December 11, Scotland's travel restrictions to and from most of Ireland were eased. The changes follow a reduction in the number of COVID-19 cases across most of the country -- excluding Donegal.¹¹³

Luxembourg

On December 11, over 500 new cases and eight more deaths were recorded in Luxembourg. The reproduction rate rose to 1.03.¹¹⁴ The government announced an extension to the country-wide restrictions for another month. Due to end on December 8, Luxembourg's current restrictions permit a maximum of two people from another household to visit. The restrictions also include a curfew between 11 pm and 6 am and the closing of restaurants, cafes and bars. Next week, following a vote, the restrictions could be extended until January 15.¹¹⁵

Portugal

Portugal recorded 95 deaths and 5,080 new cases of COVID-19 on December 11.¹¹⁶ The government announced new lockdown measures and highlighted reduced restrictions for the Christmas period if the situation remains stable. The state of emergency will be in place from December 9 to 23. On December 18, holiday measures will be evaluated to ensure the epidemiological situation is improving.¹¹⁷ The coordinator of the national vaccination plan said that “the first COVID-19 vaccines will be given to the populations at risk in early January, shortly after arriving in Portugal.”¹¹⁸

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria

In the last seven days, Austria has reported 20,947 new cases of COVID-19.¹¹⁹ On December 7, the country ended its strict lockdown but maintained measures designed to limit travel into the country during the holidays. Comments made by the chancellor and interior minister blaming foreigners and minorities for importing the virus into Austria have sparked outrage among coalition partners, international agencies, and citizens.¹²⁰

Greece

On December 11, Greece reported 1,675 new daily cases of COVID-19. Despite weeks of lockdown measures, rates of daily deaths, ICU admissions, and infections remain high.¹²¹ “Intensive care units are at 83% of their capacity nationwide.”¹²² Due to pressures on the national health system, the government has extended Greece’s lockdown until January 7. Effective December 14, bookshops and hairdressers can reopen but all other retail stores and entertainment venues must remain closed.¹²³ Schools, restaurants, and bars remain closed and the nighttime curfew remains in effect. Stay-at-home

orders will continue with movement outside the home only permitted for essential purposes. Non-essential travel between Greek's administrative regions is banned.¹²⁴

Italy

On December 10, Italy reported 16,998 new daily cases of COVID-19. The number of daily cases and deaths are decreasing. The majority of COVID-19 cases are in the Veneto region.¹²⁵ On December 13, Italy surpassed the United Kingdom as the country with the highest COVID-19 death toll in Europe.¹²⁶ Effective December 10, cross-border train services between Italy and Switzerland will be suspended indefinitely due to the inability of train personnel to conduct government ordered COVID-19 safety checks.¹²⁷ New restrictions will come into effect from December 21 to January 6 in an effort to avoid a rise in infections over the holidays. In response, Pope Francis will begin Christmas Eve Mass earlier, at 7:30 pm, to allow the limited number of people who can attend to return home in time for Italy's 10 pm curfew.¹²⁸

Slovenia

On December 10, Slovenia reported 1,813 new daily cases of infection and 1,268 new hospitalizations. The seven-day rolling average of daily new cases in the country is 1,526.¹²⁹ Some restrictions in Slovenia will be temporarily eased from December 15 to December 23. Public transportation will resume at 50% capacity, while hair salons, flower shops, and dryer cleaners can reopen. In four regions where the COVID-19 situation is less severe, retail shops and car dealerships may reopen. Despite the inter-municipal ban on movement, people living in these four regions may move between municipalities using the national exposure notification app, OstaniZdrav.¹³⁰

Switzerland

On December 11, 5,136 new daily cases of COVID-19 were reported in Switzerland. The rise in infections is much worse in the German-speaking cantons.¹³¹ New national measures will come into effect from December 12 to January 22 due to high levels of new infections. In most of the country, bars, restaurants, museums, libraries, leisure facilities, and shops must close by 7 pm. In French cantons, where infection rates are lower, cantons may extend the closing time to 11 pm -- if the reproduction rate is below 1 and the infection rate is below the national average for the week. Sports and cultural activities are permitted in groups of up to 5 people. Many cantons were resistant to the new measures introduced by the Federal Council.¹³²

EASTERN EUROPE

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic reported 3,657 new cases of COVID-19 on December 13, below its 7-day moving average of 6,486 cases.¹³³ The country returned to the more restrictive "red" alert level on December 14 as it struggles to contain the spread of the virus -- just one week after transitioning from red to the less restrictive "orange" level.¹³⁴ Measures in the red level limit restaurants to take-away and delivery services, while many non-essential services and business are required to close.¹³⁵ The sale of all take-away beverages was banned on December 10 until further notice.¹³⁶ The Czech Republic will remain in a state of emergency until at least December 20.¹³⁷

Hungary

Hungary reported 4,153 new cases of COVID-19 on December 13, below its 7-day moving average of 5,815 cases.¹³⁸ On November 10, Hungary extended its state of emergency for at least 90 days. Ongoing restrictions include the obligation to wear a mask in all public spaces, indoor and outdoor, in localities with more than 10,000 residents. All students in grades 8 and up, including post-secondary, are restricted to remote learning. A national curfew remains in force between 8 pm and 5 am. Restaurants are limited to pick-up and delivery services. Hotels are limited to hosting guests arriving for business, economic or educational purposes. Sporting events must be held behind closed doors and all leisure facilities, such as gyms, indoor swimming pools, museums, libraries, cinemas, zoos and skating rinks, must suspend their services.¹³⁹

Latvia

Latvia reported 621 new cases of COVID-19 on December 13.¹⁴⁰ On December 2, Latvian officials extended the country's state of emergency, first declared on November 9, until January 11 -- prohibiting all in-person public events as well as the operation of all entertainment venues, bars, skating rinks, cultural sites, museums, and food service venues until 2021.¹⁴¹ Additional restrictions include a limit of 2 people per group in public gatherings, and a mandatory mask policy for all students, teachers, and staff of primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.¹⁴² On December 10, the Latvian Operational Medical Commission announced a state of emergency in the country's healthcare system due to the overload caused by COVID-19.¹⁴³ This technical legal status enables hospital managers to organize their work more freely in case of a sudden influx of COVID-19 patients.¹⁴⁴

Lithuania

Lithuania reported 2,849 new cases of COVID-19 on December 13, below its single-day record of 4,551 new cases set on December 3.¹⁴⁵ On December 14, Lithuanian officials held a press conference to announce the country's move towards a nationwide lockdown.¹⁴⁶ From December 16, Lithuanians are forbidden from leaving the jurisdictional boundaries of their home municipality unless they are attending a funeral, going to work, accessing healthcare services, or taking care of a family member.¹⁴⁷ Non-essential movement within municipalities is also forbidden, with the same exceptions as above. There are no new restrictions on international travel or border closures. People can travel across the country to reach an airport, seaport, or a border crossing. All contact services that require physical contact for more than 10 minutes -- including barbers and other beauty services -- are prohibited. All non-essential shops must limit business to online sales. Students at all levels will learn remotely until the holiday period begins.¹⁴⁸

Poland

The spread of COVID-19 has continued to stabilize in Poland this week, with 8,976 new cases reported on December 13.¹⁴⁹ Despite calls from various sectors to reopen the economy, the prime minister announced on December 11 that the government will follow the advice of epidemiologists and extend the lockdown in the gastronomy, culture and fitness sectors, with restaurants, cinemas, theaters, and gyms required to remain closed until at least December 27. However, shopping malls are allowed to reopen for Christmas shopping under strict sanitary regulations and customer limits. Schools across Poland are being asked to close; online learning will be provided until at least December 23.¹⁵⁰

Slovakia

Despite the reported success of Slovakia's mass-testing and quarantine operation -- in which millions of Slovaks were tested for COVID-19 twice over a 3-week period -- the country is experiencing a major resurgence of COVID-19 this week. It reported a record 3,707 new cases on December 12.¹⁵¹ This spike in cases comes as a surprise after nearly a month of declining single-day counts.¹⁵² In light of the country's deteriorating epidemiological situation, Slovakia's pandemic commission has proposed that lockdown restrictions be implemented once again. The proposed rules would be similar to those imposed after the first round of mass testing. This means that it would be possible to leave the house in order to shop for essentials and walk to school or work. The commission suggested that the lockdown be put in place until January 10, 2021. The proposal first needs to be approved by the cabinet. The health minister has stressed that it is necessary to impose the lockdown as soon as possible.¹⁵³

NORTHERN EUROPE

Denmark

Denmark reported 3,552 new cases of COVID-19 on December 10 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁵⁴ Thirty-one more municipalities have been placed under the partial lockdown order announced last week. The restrictions now cover 79% of the Danish population. Only 29 municipalities are unaffected by the restrictions, which close most cultural venues and leisure activities and send students in grade 5 and up to distance learning. The restrictions will remain in place until at least January 3.¹⁵⁵ Authorities are strongly encouraging Danish residents to limit their social contacts during the holiday season but have said they will not introduce domestic travel restrictions between communities under lockdown and those that are not.¹⁵⁶ Residents of Aarhus and Copenhagen need to wait as long as 12 days to get tested for COVID-19 if they are asymptomatic or report only mild symptoms.¹⁵⁷

Estonia

Estonia reported 760 new cases of COVID-19 on December 12 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic. The positivity rate is now 9.87%.¹⁵⁸ The two-week average of new cases is 457.72 per 100,000 people as of December 14.¹⁵⁹ The government announced that all schools nationwide, except kindergartens, will go on Christmas break early: from December 14 until January 11. Distance learning will be permitted only in "special cases" for lessons that cannot be postponed.¹⁶⁰ The Mayor of Tallinn criticized this plan and said that students in the city will continue with distance learning until the regularly-scheduled Christmas break.¹⁶¹ Authorities also announced that all cultural venues and leisure activities in Ida-Viru County will close for the next three weeks, with restaurants only permitted to open for takeout and delivery service.¹⁶² Only individual indoor leisure activities will be permitted nationwide, with groups of up to 10 allowed for outdoor activities. Professional athletes may continue to train and play behind closed doors.¹⁶³

Finland

Finland reported 840 new cases of COVID-19 on December 11 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁶⁴ Restaurants in Lapland must stop selling alcohol by 10 pm effective December 11, and national restaurant restrictions have been extended until the end of February.¹⁶⁵ Hospitals in Helsinki have had to reduce their non-urgent care capacity due to the rising number of COVID-19 hospitalizations.¹⁶⁶ Public health officials have recommended that all those who wish to visit their elderly relatives during the holidays should complete a 10-day quarantine period before doing so.¹⁶⁷ There have been a number of reports of healthcare staff being forced to go back to

work despite not having completed their quarantine period after being exposed to an infected person. A patient whose case was connected to the staff has since died.¹⁶⁸

Iceland

Iceland reported a two-week average of 35.5 new domestic cases per 100,000 people on December 14.¹⁶⁹ The Icelandic government eased some of its restrictions on December 10. Swimming pools may reopen with a 50% capacity limit and non-contact recreational sports can resume. Professional athletes may resume training in contact or non-contact sports. All stores may admit up to five customers per 10m², to a maximum of 100 people. Restaurants can stay open until 10 pm as long as no new guests are admitted after 9 pm. Cultural events may resume with up to 30 people on stage and 50 people in the audience; masks are mandatory for all attendees. Up to 50 people may attend a funeral. The restrictions will remain in place until January 11.¹⁷⁰ The first vaccinations in Iceland are scheduled to begin in early January.¹⁷¹

Norway

The infection rate in Norway has remained relatively stable over the past week after three consecutive weeks of declining case numbers.¹⁷² Local officials in Oslo announced that most current restrictions will remain in place until at least January 7. A few will be eased during the holiday season: religious services with fixed seating may have up to 20 people and youth clubs may host up to 20 people.¹⁷³ Norway will digitally register everyone who enters the country from January 1, with all travellers required to provide their name, contact information, where they are quarantining, and their Norwegian employer (if applicable).¹⁷⁴ Travellers entering the country will also have the option to avoid staying in a state-run quarantine hotel if they have other suitable accommodation. Travellers must be able to avoid all close contact with others, have their own bathroom, and have private access to food in order to qualify.¹⁷⁵ Public health officials said that Norwegians should limit themselves to hosting or attending two social gatherings during the holidays.¹⁷⁶

Sweden

Sweden reported 8,402 new cases of COVID-19 on December 11 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁷⁷ The top public health official in Stockholm urged residents to follow the government's recommendations as the city's ICUs have reached 99% capacity. Severe COVID-19 patients may need to be sent to other Nordic nations due to the strain on the healthcare system.¹⁷⁸ Local officials in Stockholm said that all lower secondary schools in the region would move to distance learning on December 14. All primary schools in Malmö will go on Christmas break a few days early following a recommendation by the Skåne region.¹⁷⁹ The government wants to create a new temporary pandemic law that would allow them to more effectively enforce gathering limits at a variety of venues.¹⁸⁰ Swedish officials have pledged to vaccinate all adults in the country by the end of July. The first wave of vaccinations is scheduled to begin on January 7, with those in long-term care facilities and the elderly going first.¹⁸¹

ASIA/PACIFIC

Japan

The number of daily new cases in Japan was 3,000 late last week. Five prefectures are now facing a severe shortage of hospital beds and have occupancy rates around or higher than 50%.¹⁸² The medical staff in Hokkaido prefecture have been too busy treating patients to upload complete information about

confirmed COVID-19 cases since last month.¹⁸³ Medical teams from the Self-Defense Forces have started assisting frontline workers at two facilities in the country's north that have been hit with clusters of infections.¹⁸⁴ The government is planning to launch a framework for inter-prefectural cooperation to allow medical staff to help with the worst-affected areas in the country. Officials are also urging local authorities to quickly secure more hospital beds.¹⁸⁵ Despite the rampant spread of COVID-19, the Japanese government has not suspended its domestic tourism campaign. Public health officials in Tokyo are urging residents to only go to restaurants in small groups.¹⁸⁶

South Korea

The number of daily new cases is still on the rise in South Korea, exceeding 1,000 on December 13 for the first time since the start of the pandemic. Around 20% of the new cases are now untraceable. As the number of available hospital beds for critical COVID-19 patients has dropped to less than 10 in Seoul, the city government is planning to install about 150 shipping container medical rooms at municipal hospitals.¹⁸⁷ 18 additional residential treatment centers will open this week to house 1,577 beds for patients with mild symptoms.¹⁸⁸ Free COVID-19 testing will be offered from December 14 to January 3 at 150 new testing sites in Seoul and the surrounding area.¹⁸⁹ The opening hours of public test centers will also be extended. The city will reinstall drive-thru test centers.¹⁹⁰ Hundreds of military, police and civil servants will be dispatched to the Seoul metropolitan area to support contact tracing.¹⁹¹ Effective December 10, short-term visa holders staying in South Korea for fewer than 90 days are obliged to report their accommodations to immigration authorities to help manage the movement of foreigners.¹⁹²

New Zealand

There are no active domestic cases of COVID-19 remaining in New Zealand. The official contact tracing app received a Bluetooth upgrade on December 10 to also enable proximity-based contact detection, a common feature of contact tracing apps around the world.¹⁹³ The New Zealand government remains cautious over the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines. The entire country remains at Alert Level 1, with no restrictions on movement, gathering, businesses, or activities.

Australia

Australia has continued to record very few locally acquired cases of COVID-19 over the past week. Both Australia and New Zealand have been cautious over the rollout of vaccines despite their approval in the UK, US and Canada. South Australia eased a series of restrictions on December 14 after reaching zero active domestic cases. The maximum number of people at home gatherings was raised from 10 to 50 people, while 200 people may attend weddings or funerals -- up from 150. Patrons will be able to stand up while drinking at hospitality venues, cinemas can operate at increased capacity, and gyms are subject to less stringent density requirements. People are no longer urged to work from home, and masks will be voluntary except for high-risk groups or settings.¹⁹⁴ Starting this week, the Northern Territory government will be removing patrols at its minor land border entry points.¹⁹⁵

Turkey

Turkey recorded 32,106 new COVID-19 cases on December 11.¹⁹⁶ The Turkish health minister shared a basic framework of the COVID-19 vaccination program on December 10, saying that healthcare professionals would be the first group to be vaccinated -- followed by COVID-19 patients who are above 65 years of age. The Turkish health ministry is laying out a plan to use hospitals, family health centres, community health centres, pharmacies, and other health institutions for the vaccination process. The vaccine will be given to people free of charge within the scope of an upcoming vaccination campaign. Vaccination is not mandatory.¹⁹⁷

Israel

The number of daily new cases has stayed above 1,700 in Israel since the middle of last week. The country will reportedly roll out the COVID-19 vaccine as early as December 20, one week ahead of its previous target.¹⁹⁸ The health ministry is planning to issue “green passports” to vaccinated residents, which will grant them benefits including a quarantine exemption, access to cultural events and restaurants, and advantages in international travel.¹⁹⁹ Due to intra-Cabinet dissent and legal challenges, the government’s plan to stop Israelis from visiting the homes of others and to impose a nationwide curfew during Hanukkah has been dropped. The government decided instead to impose new restrictions if the daily caseload exceeds 2,500.²⁰⁰ Shopping centers, museums and outdoor markets were allowed to open on December 9, subject to social distancing restrictions.²⁰¹ Israel has further reduced its mandatory quarantine period from 12 to 10 days -- but travellers must receive two negative tests before leaving isolation.²⁰²

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Partnerships and Contributors

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Links

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