

**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.

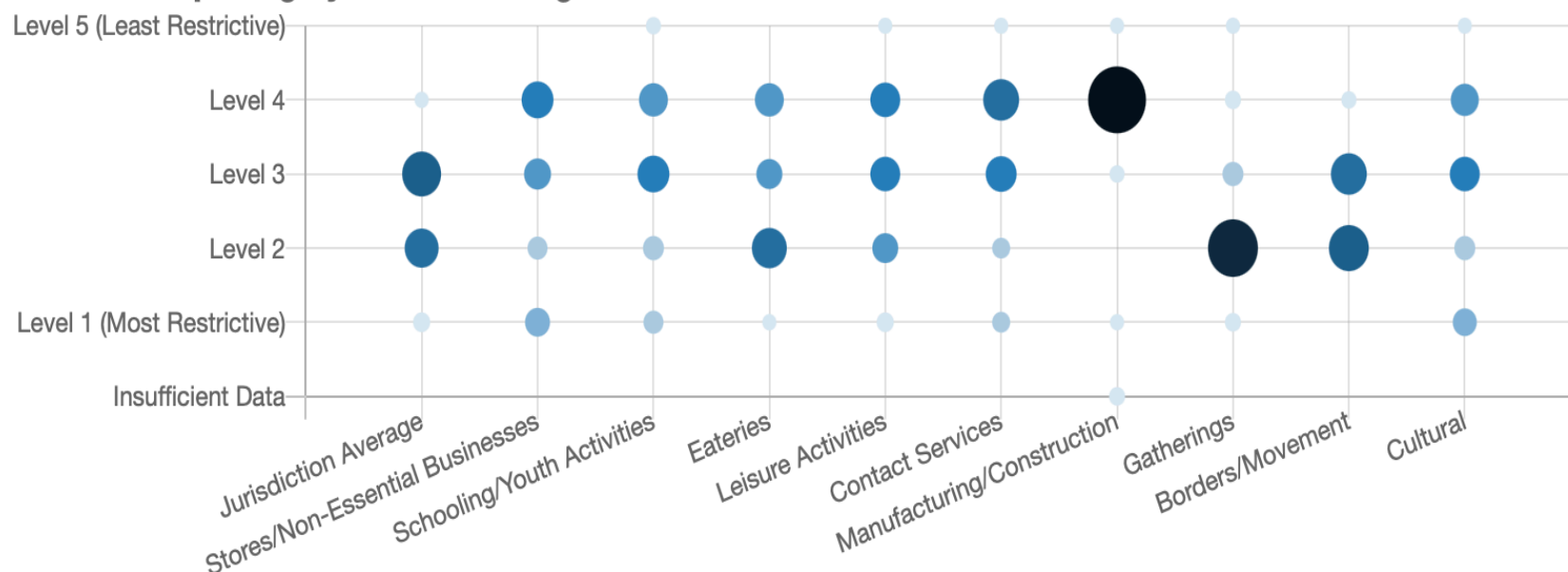
We also provide a weekly qualitative summary of the actions governments are taking and considering taking to reopen their economies and manage the coronavirus.

Our data are updated weekly. You can subscribe to a weekly update by visiting our website: [www.reopeningaftercovid.com](http://www.reopeningaftercovid.com).

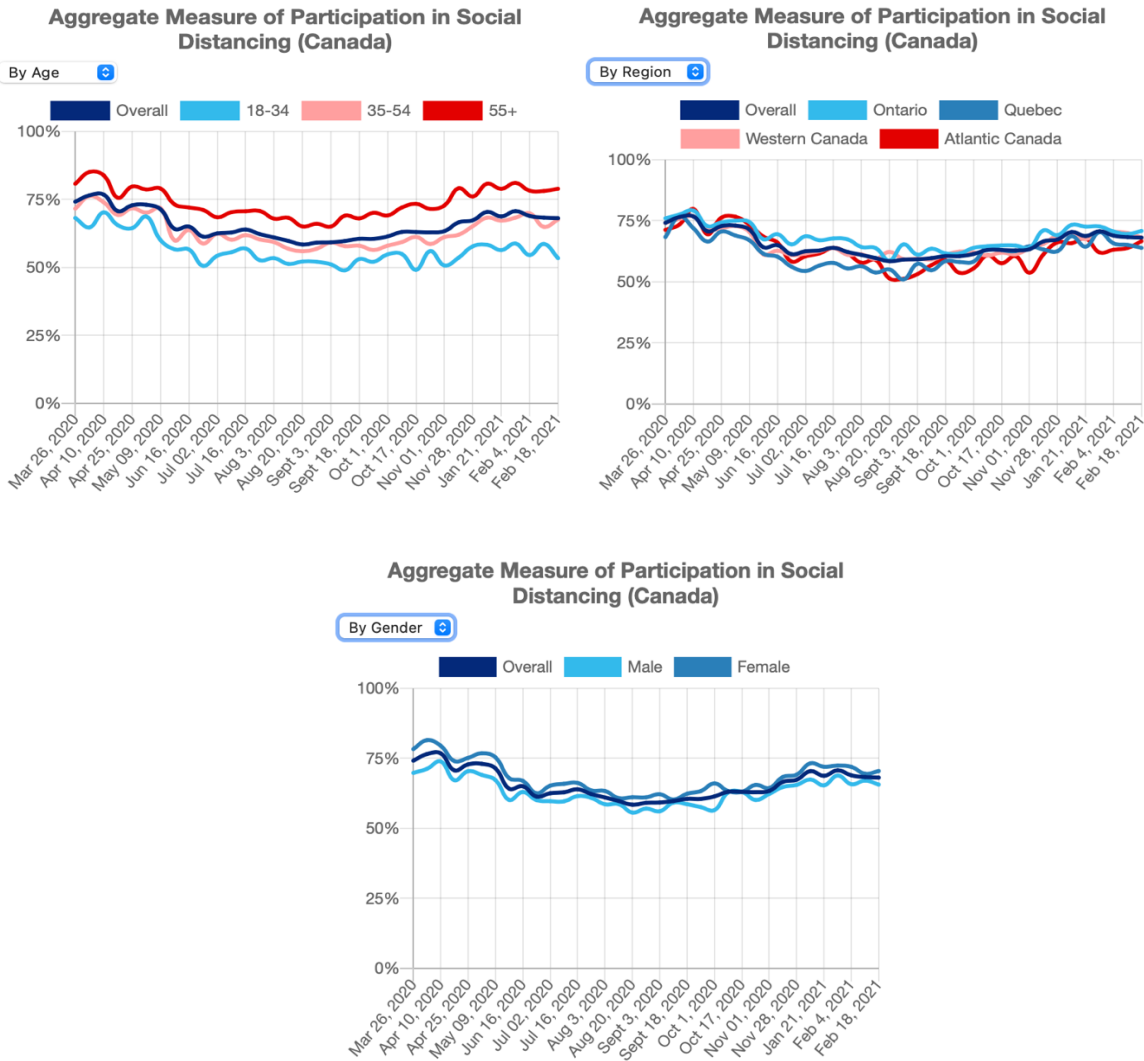
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## **Data Visualizations from Dashboard**

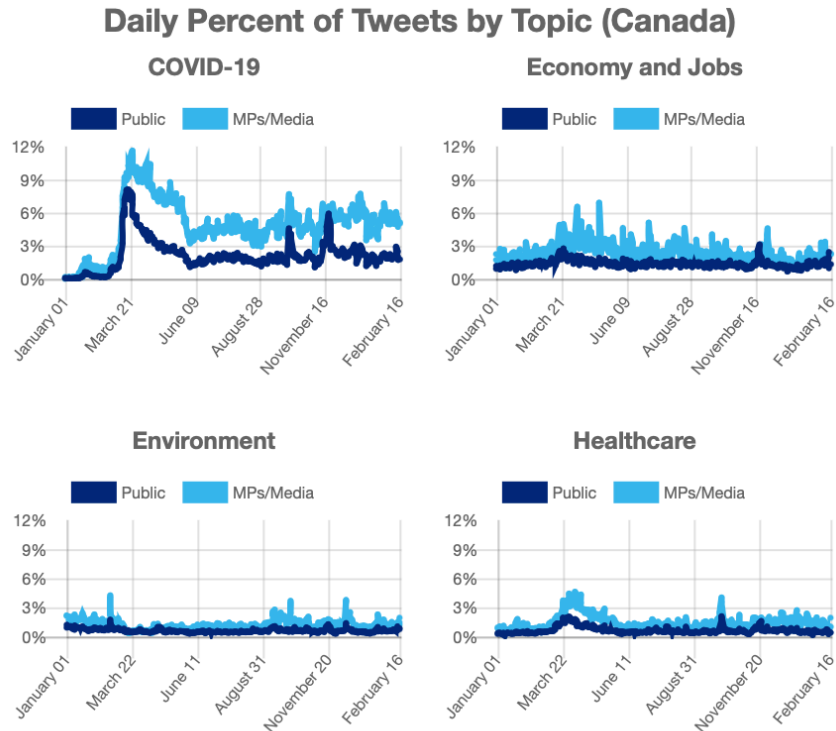
## Level of Reopening by Sector Among OECD Countries and Selected Canadian Provinces and US States



**Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of February 22.** 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](http://www.reopeningaftercovid.com)

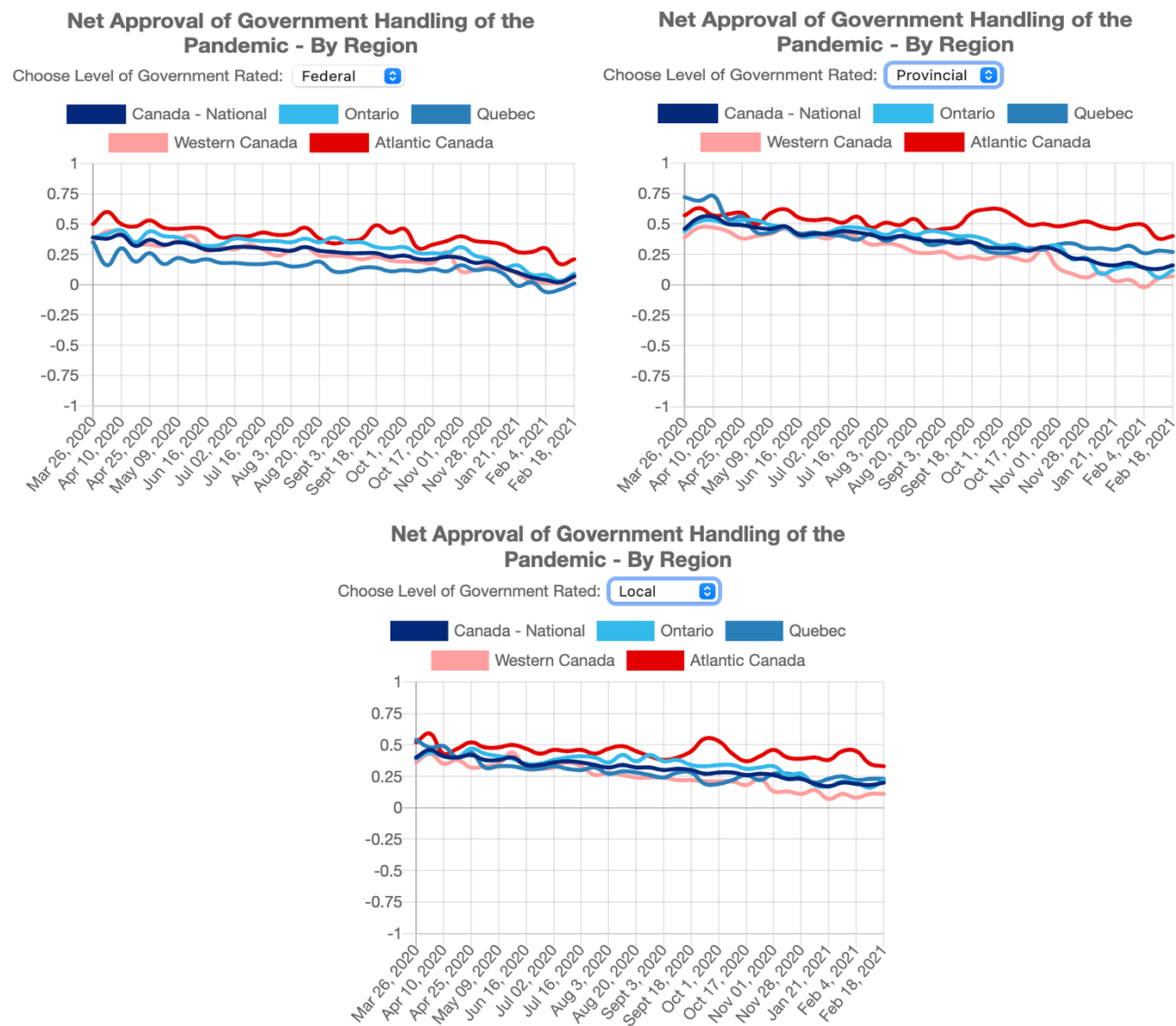


**Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada).** We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre 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 18, there were 415 daily new cases of COVID-19 in Alberta.<sup>1</sup> Some restrictions were eased on February 8 to allow eateries, youth activities, and individual indoor fitness to resume.<sup>2</sup> The health minister believes it is safe to move forward with the province's staged reopening plan on March 1. The threshold to ease restrictions was set at 450 hospitalizations and, as of February 18, Alberta reported 352. The next phase of reopening includes easing restrictions on banquet halls, group indoor fitness activities, and retail stores.<sup>3</sup> The premier announced that all seniors aged 75 and older will be able to book appointments for vaccines beginning on February 24. All residents in long-term care and designated supportive living have received their second dose.<sup>4</sup>

#### → *British Columbia*

British Columbia reported about 37 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people over the 4 days through February 18. The provincial state of emergency has been extended to March 2. The province-wide strict restrictions are likely to stay in place for some additional time, suspending all gatherings and events.<sup>5</sup>

#### → *Manitoba*

On February 18, Manitoba recorded 139 new COVID-19 cases.<sup>6</sup> The province updated the list of those eligible to start booking appointments for their first dose of the vaccine to include people who work in congregate living facilities and are born on or before Dec. 31, 1955.<sup>7</sup>

#### → *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported 4 new cases of COVID-19 on February 21. The province now has a total of 87 active cases, down significantly from 140 cases one week ago.<sup>8</sup> Zone 4 (Edmunston) moved to the province's less restrictive "orange" public health alert level on February 18, joining Zones 1 (Moncton), 2 (Saint John), 3 (Fredericton), 5 (Campbellton), 6 (Bathurst), and 7 (Miramichi).<sup>9</sup> 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 and social distancing measures in place.<sup>10</sup> Students from K-12 can return to in-person classes, post-secondary institutions can operate, and most non-essential business, cultural institutions, and entertainment venues are permitted to open under orange-level restrictions.<sup>11</sup>

#### → *Newfoundland and Labrador*

On February 18, Newfoundland and Labrador reported 48 new cases of COVID-19, substantial increase since early February.<sup>12</sup> The entire province is under total lockdown following an outbreak of the B117 variant in the St. John's region. The province moved to Alert Level 5, the highest in the province's phases system of restrictions, which includes closing all schools, gyms, fitness facilities, non-essential retail stores, contact services, bars, and cinemas. Organized gatherings in the area are limited to 5 people and informal gatherings are being limited to those within the household.<sup>13</sup> Health authorities continue to ramp up testing to slow the spread of the variant in the province. Election Newfoundland and Labrador adopted a plan that relies on mail-in ballots and will delay the results of the provincial election until at least March 12.<sup>14</sup>

#### → *Northwest Territories*

Nine new cases of COVID-19 were recorded in the Northwest Territories last week. The territory-wide public health emergency has been extended through March 2. The territory has been in Phase 2 of its reopening plan for months, with nearly all businesses and activities allowed to open.<sup>15</sup> 39% of the adult population in the territory has received the first-dose vaccination. The government has begun delivering

second doses to priority populations in small, remote communities.<sup>16</sup> Wastewater testing results of the six communities involved are now accessible to the public.<sup>17</sup>

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia reported one new case of COVID-19 on February 21, leaving the province with a total of 19 active cases -- up from 10 one week ago.<sup>18</sup> Non-essential travel between Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island has been permitted since February 10, and most non-essential businesses, including fitness centres and retail stores, can remain open at 75% capacity with hygienic measures in place.<sup>19</sup> Businesses and organizations can 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.<sup>20</sup> The province has extended its state of emergency until March 7.<sup>21</sup>

→ *Nunavut*

There are 30 active cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut as of February 20, all of which are in Arviat. The community remains in lockdown and under travel restrictions, with public health officials urging all residents to avoid close contact with others, maintain physical distance, and to wear a mask when outside the home. Nearly 7,000 people in the territory have received at least one dose of the Moderna vaccine and clinics continue to administer doses.<sup>22</sup>

→ *Ontario*

Ontario reported 1,058 new cases of COVID-19 on February 22, above its 7-day moving average of 1,045 new cases per day.<sup>23</sup> There are currently 10,335 active cases in the province, down from 11,604 one week ago.<sup>24</sup> The province's state of emergency was allowed to expire as scheduled on February 9, but a stay-at-home order remains in place as individual regions transition back to the province's five-tiered, colour-coded public health framework.<sup>25</sup> The Toronto, Peel, and North Bay-Parry Sound Districts will be the last regions to move into the tiered system. York Region made the transition to the "red" zone on February 22.<sup>26</sup> In the red zone, restaurants can accommodate up to 10 patrons indoors at a time, and gyms and fitness classes can also resume limited operations.<sup>27</sup> There are currently 5 regions in the province's least restrictive "green" zone, 4 in the "yellow" zone, 8 in the "orange" zone, 13 in the red zone. One region -- Niagara -- remains in the most restrictive grey "lockdown" phase.<sup>28</sup>

→ *Prince Edward Island*

In Prince Edward Island, one new case was reported on February 18.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> Both rotational workers and the staff and residents of group homes and shelters will begin receiving their first doses of vaccines in the coming weeks.<sup>31</sup>

→ *Quebec*

Quebec reported 769 more cases on February 20, for a total of 8,658 active cases. The seven-day average was 797 new daily cases. Fourteen additional deaths were reported on the same date.<sup>32</sup> However, hospitalizations have fallen, leaving the province with 700 total hospitalizations, including 120 in the ICU.<sup>33</sup> The regions with the most daily new cases are Montreal, Monteregie, and Laurentians.<sup>34</sup> Cinemas can reopen on February 26, excluding live performances, as long as they respect the curfew, close all concession stands, and mandate that all patrons wear masks throughout the entire movie. The government has offered to compensate cinemas for concession stand closures.<sup>35</sup> After the March school break, additional regions may move from red to orange and have fewer restrictions.<sup>36</sup> Outaouais is becoming orange on the province's reopening indicators, allowing swimming pools, indoor rinks, restaurants and gyms to reopen.<sup>37</sup> Approximately 15,386 vaccines were administered on February 19, bringing the provincial total to 329,324 administered vaccinations.<sup>38</sup> Due to a vaccine shortage, second dose deliveries were delayed to allow the

province to give more people their first dose.<sup>39</sup> Long-term care facilities and remote communities currently have priority access to vaccines.<sup>40</sup>

→ *Saskatchewan*

Saskatchewan reported a seven-day average of new cases of 12.5 per 100,000 people on February 21.<sup>41</sup> Due to increasing concerns about COVID-19 variants, public health officials in the province have recommended that anyone who travels interprovincially should get tested twice, one week apart, upon their return.<sup>42</sup> Observers had previously warned that the province needed to step up its surveillance and testing of variants.<sup>43</sup> All public health measures currently in place have been extended through March 19.<sup>44</sup> The province has revised its vaccination plan to expand eligibility to more healthcare workers, but the premier said the change may cause the second phase of the program to be delayed.<sup>45</sup> Saskatchewan's first mass vaccination site is set to begin operations in April, with the facility currently serving as a large drive-thru testing centre in Regina.<sup>46</sup>

→ *Yukon*

One new case of COVID-19 was recorded in Yukon last week. The overall situation in Yukon seems promising. The territory has been in Phase 3 of its reopening plan for about 6 months.<sup>47</sup> The general public vaccination clinic in Whitehorse is expected to open March 1.<sup>48</sup>

*The United States*

→ *California*

Hospitalizations in California fell by 4.9% and the number of ICU patients also declined between February 17 and 18.<sup>49</sup> California reported 7,621 new cases on February 19 and a seven-day positivity rate of 3% on February 20.<sup>50</sup> The state will set aside 10% of the COVID-19 vaccines that they receive every week for teachers, day care workers and other school employees to allow for more students to safely return to in-person learning.<sup>51</sup> In approximately 35 counties, teachers and educators have received priority eligibility for COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>52</sup> The governor is advocating for reopening schools now while the case numbers statewide continue to decline.<sup>53</sup>

→ *Illinois*

Illinois reported about 96 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people last week. The seven-day positivity rate of testing has stayed below 3% for an entire week, the first time in seven months. All 11 regions of Illinois remain in Phase 4 of the state's reopening plan, which is expected to remain in place for some time. Chicago and suburban Cook County have again increased indoor dining capacity at restaurants and bars from 35% to 40%, while still subject to the same upper limit of 50 people.<sup>54</sup> The state is still in Phase 1B of its rollout plan. Heavy snow, together with delayed shipments from the federal government, has led to a drop in vaccine distribution and administration. More than 2 million Illinois residents have been vaccinated against COVID-19 so far.<sup>55</sup>

→ *Michigan*

Michigan reported just above 73 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people last week. All the key epidemiological metrics are improving. No significant policy changes were observed. Due to ongoing winter storm conditions in Kentucky and Tennessee, vaccine shipments to Michigan have been affected and vaccine providers are seeking to reschedule appointments.<sup>56</sup> Staff from the Federal Emergency Management Agency are being dispatched to help the state with vaccine distribution.<sup>57</sup>

→ *New York*

New York reported a statewide positivity rate of 2.99% on February 21; the seven-day average positivity rate has declined for 44 consecutive days.<sup>58</sup> The governor announced that indoor family entertainment

centres may reopen on March 26 at 25% capacity, that outdoor amusement parks may reopen on April 9 at 50% capacity, and that summer camps may begin preparations to open in the summer.<sup>59</sup> Indoor dining in New York City can expand to 35% capacity on February 26. Nursing home visitors will be permitted statewide as long as a rapid test is taken upon arrival.<sup>60</sup> The governor's alleged lack of transparency regarding the state's nursing home data has prompted a federal investigation, with some opposition lawmakers calling for impeachment proceedings to begin. The governor's top aide had allegedly told state lawmakers that the delay in reporting data in the fall was due to a desire to avoid politicization of the issue by the Trump administration.<sup>61</sup> Local officials in New York City have released data that show that residents of higher-income areas in the city have been vaccinated at a much higher rate than areas that are predominantly racialized and lower-income.<sup>62</sup>

#### → *Texas*

There were more than 4,900 new cases, 227 new deaths, and 7,535 total hospitalizations in Texas on February 20.<sup>63</sup> Several vaccination sites have since reopened after closing due to severe winter storms in the state.<sup>64</sup>

#### *Mexico*

Mexico surpassed two million cumulative cases on February 16.<sup>65</sup> Mexico's defense minister has tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>66</sup> Based on Mexico's vaccination schedule, most frontline medical staff will be vaccinated by the end of the month. Other medical staff and people over 60 will receive priority access to the vaccine until April.<sup>67</sup> Mexico has filed an official complaint with the UN Security Council about inequality and inequity in vaccine distribution.<sup>68</sup> At least six people were arrested for selling fake COVID-19 vaccines at a clinic for approximately \$2,000.<sup>69</sup> Mexico is expecting a shipment of 200,000 Sinovac vaccines.<sup>70</sup>

#### *Chile*

Chile reported 3,893 new cases and 77 deaths on February 20.<sup>71</sup> The country has vaccinated approximately 12% of its population, which is slightly less than the US but more than many other Latin American countries. However, Chile has a smaller population and fewer geographic complications than many other countries.<sup>72</sup> Chile has the eighth-best vaccination rate in the world.<sup>73</sup> More than 70% of people older than 80 and approximately 74% of people between 70 and 80 have been vaccinated.<sup>74</sup>

### **WESTERN EUROPE**

#### *France*

France reported 24,116 new COVID cases on February 19, which is fewer than the week prior.<sup>75</sup> Summer festivals will be permitted with a capacity limit of 5,000 and mandatory seating; to assist organizers, the government has set up a 30 million euro fund for festivals that must cancel or alter plans.<sup>76</sup> France's current curfew is between 6 pm and 6 am. Restaurants, bars, museums, theatres, and concert halls are closed. The gathering limit is 1,000 people.<sup>77</sup> Schools are open and the majority of shops and services close by 6 pm. Travelling outside the EU is banned, with some exceptions.<sup>78</sup> Polls show high levels of vaccine hesitancy in France.<sup>79</sup> A citizens panel was created for the country's vaccination process, and will submit its first report on February 23.<sup>80</sup> Members of the government advisory body, the Conseil scientifique, proposed that the government lift the curfew and said there should be a new social contract between younger and older groups, in which younger people would follow preventive measures and older people would abide by precautions and self-isolate.<sup>81</sup>

### *Germany*

On February 19, 9,113 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Germany.<sup>82</sup> COVID-19 cases are rising rapidly in the German border town of Flensburg, with half linked to the UK variant. Flensburg's situation may be a worrying indicator of what the rest of Germany could soon look like.<sup>83</sup> As a result, Denmark partially and temporarily closed its border with Germany to stop the spread of COVID-19 cases; Flensburg sits close to the border with the Scandinavian country.<sup>84</sup>

### *Belgium*

In Belgium, 2,420 new daily cases of COVID-19 were reported on February 19.<sup>85</sup> The current measures have been extended until April 1. Hairdressers, zoos, non-essential stores, museums, and pools are open with safety measures in place. Non-medical contact services, such as beauticians and tattoo shops, are permitted to reopen on March 1.<sup>86</sup> Brussels is creating a plan for “reopening its tourism sector that includes guidelines, best practices, and health certificates that businesses can apply for in an effort to reassure the public that the sector is capable of safely reopening.”<sup>87</sup>

### *Netherlands*

On February 17, 3,416 new confirmed cases were reported by RIVM.<sup>88</sup> A night-time curfew will remain in place. Most parties in parliament indicated support on February 18 for an emergency bill that would circumvent a court order against the curfew.<sup>89</sup>

### *Spain*

Spain reported 11,435 new cases and 397 deaths on February 19. Hospitalizations, however, are falling.<sup>90</sup> The two-week incidence rate in Spain is 427 per 100,000 people.<sup>91</sup> Approximately 35% of people in the ICU have COVID-19.<sup>92</sup> Schools remained open during the country's third wave of COVID-19.<sup>93</sup> The majority of regions are limiting gatherings, bars, restaurants, and gyms and have instituted a curfew.<sup>94</sup> As of February 22, arrivals from Brazil and South Africa must quarantine, even if they produce a negative test.<sup>95</sup> Seven municipalities and 31 basic health care zones in Madrid will have their mobility limitations lifted on February 22, though the start of the nightly curfew was moved from 10 to 11 pm.<sup>96</sup> Catalonia says its mobility restrictions will remain for another week, and that restaurants will be able to serve breakfast and lunch.<sup>97</sup> Gathering limits are being reduced in the Canary Islands in advance of the annual Carnival.<sup>98</sup> Andalusia and Valencia have limited travel.<sup>99</sup> Bars and restaurants can have 30% capacity in Navarre effective February 26.<sup>100</sup> Schools were flagged as the leading environment for COVID-19 clusters in the previous week.<sup>101</sup> Three million vaccines have been delivered across the country.<sup>102</sup>

### *The United Kingdom*

On February 19, the United Kingdom reported 12,057 new cases of COVID-19.<sup>103</sup> Scientists reported that the rate of infections has fallen sharply, days before the prime minister outlined a roadmap for potentially easing lockdown restrictions in England.<sup>104</sup> However, a new variant has been detected with some potentially troubling mutations. The variant appears similar to the South African variant, which has prompted door-to-door tests in areas where it has been found. Researchers from Edinburgh University have found 38 cases so far, in samples dating back to December.<sup>105</sup>

### *Ireland*

On February 16, 744 confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported in Ireland.<sup>106</sup> The prime minister has indicated that the highest level of restrictions could remain in place until the end of April. Next week, the

government is expected to update its Living with COVID plan, however very little is expected to change apart from a phased return to school and construction.<sup>107</sup> Travellers to Ireland from COVID-19 hotspots will have to quarantine in hotels under a new legislation. Mandatory hotel quarantine will be required for passengers arriving from 20 countries, including Austria and Brazil, as well as those without a negative test. Under proposed legislation, which is likely to take two to three weeks to pass, first-time offenders could be fined 4,000 euros and face a month in prison for not following the new hotel quarantine rules.<sup>108</sup>

### *Luxembourg*

On February 19, the Ministry of Health recorded 220 new cases of COVID-19 in Luxembourg.<sup>109</sup> According to the COVID-19 task force, new measures need to be put in place to combat new variants and to avoid a new wave that could peak in May.<sup>110</sup> Pupils and teaching staff are required to submit a COVID test by February 22; those with negative results will be allowed to return to school by February 24.<sup>111</sup>

### *Portugal*

On February 19, Portugal registered 1,940 new cases of COVID-19.<sup>112</sup> Despite a decline in the transmission rates of COVID-19, experts say that lockdown measures still need to stay in place for an additional month and a half.<sup>113</sup> Portugal is now vaccinating people over 80, as well as some individuals over 50 with certain illnesses -- after initially focusing on inoculating healthcare professionals and people at elderly care homes. The government aims to have 70% of the country's adult population vaccinated by the end of the summer.<sup>114</sup>

## **CENTRAL EUROPE**

### *Austria*

On February 19, Austria reported 1,967 daily cases of COVID-19.<sup>115</sup> On February 16, the government extended the current measures at least until the Easter holidays. "Non-essential shops, museums, libraries, and zoos are open with an FFP2 mask requirement for all customers and visitors."<sup>116</sup> Contact services, such as hairdressers, have reopened but proof of a negative test is required for all customers. A stay-at-home order continues to be in effect from 8 pm to 6 am. Eateries can only offer takeout or delivery services and all other culture and leisure facilities remain closed.<sup>117</sup> Germany imposed partial land border closures for Austria's Tyrol region due to variant concerns that have impacted the transit of goods along one of Europe's major truck routes.<sup>118</sup>

### *Greece*

On February 19, Greece reported 1,400 new cases of COVID-19.<sup>119</sup> Effective February 11, the government implemented a full lockdown in Athens and two other regions due to rising cases. All non-essential shops, churches, and schools will be closed until February 28 in an effort to slow the surge.<sup>120</sup> The COVID-19 vaccination drive was delayed following a severe snowstorm; the government ordered inoculation centres to close due to power shortages and water supply cuts.<sup>121</sup> On February 19, the government began issuing digital vaccination certificates for citizens who have received both doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>122</sup> The Greek government is in discussions with the United Kingdom about the feasibility of permitting British tourists with a vaccination certificate to travel to Greece this summer without any restrictions.<sup>123</sup>

### *Italy*

In Italy, 13,755 new cases of COVID-19 were reported on February 19.<sup>124</sup> A colour-coded system of restrictions remains in place.<sup>125</sup> Across Italy, a nighttime curfew remains in effect from 10 pm to 5 am. The



government has extended the ban on travel between regions and postponed the reopening of ski slopes until at least March 5 due to concerns related to COVID-19 variants.<sup>126</sup> Leading health authorities in Italy are calling on the new prime minister to implement stricter measures in response to the variants.<sup>127</sup>

### *Slovenia*

On February 19, 878 new cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded in Slovenia.<sup>128</sup> The country has entered the orange tier of restrictions and will remain in this tier until February 26, after meeting the thresholds set for hospitalizations and cases.<sup>129</sup> All primary and secondary students are back in school for in-person learning, inter-regional movement is permitted, and ski resorts are open for people with proof of a negative test taken within the past week.<sup>130</sup> Taxi drivers are protesting against the government's demand that they be tested every 72 hours by driving around the capital, Ljubljana, honking.<sup>131</sup>

### *Switzerland*

On February 19, Switzerland reported 1,219 new cases of COVID-19.<sup>132</sup> Effective March 1, several restrictions will be eased in the country. Shops, museums, sports facilities, libraries, and the outdoor areas of zoos and botanical gardens will reopen. The ban on outdoor gatherings of more than 5 will be eased to permit up to 15 people to gather. The work-from-home policy will continue and restaurants, cultural, and sporting events will remain banned. The Federal Council is facing pressures from the business community to ease restrictions but health experts are warning not to ease restrictions too early due to the spread of new variants and delays in the vaccination program due to supply shortages.<sup>133</sup>

## **EASTERN EUROPE**

### *Czech Republic*

The Czech Republic reported 6,838 new cases of COVID-19 on February 21, below its 7-day moving average of 9,307 cases per day.<sup>134</sup> The country's epidemiological situation has deteriorated in recent weeks: its infection rate rose to over 1,000 people per 100,000 -- three times the EU average -- and its death rate rose to 174 people per million.<sup>135</sup> The prime minister renewed the country's state of emergency on February 15, just hours before the previous order was set to expire -- despite the measure being voted down by parliament.<sup>136</sup> The prime minister's actions prompted Czech MPs to craft a pandemic law that would reduce the prime minister's influence over any future lockdown restrictions.<sup>137</sup> The law, if approved by the Senate, would go into effect when the current state of emergency ends on February 27.<sup>138</sup> The health minister has said that many regions may soon return to full lockdowns, citing the rapid spread of the UK variant.<sup>139</sup> The minister has also said that residents will have to wear "better" masks -- such as medical grade masks and safety respirators -- in places where large numbers of people gather, including stores, hospitals and on public transportation.<sup>140</sup>

### *Hungary*

Hungary reported 2,912 new cases of COVID-19 on February 21, above the country's 7-day moving average of 2,223 new cases per day.<sup>141</sup> Ongoing coronavirus-related restrictions will remain in place until the country's state of emergency expires on March 1, including: a nationwide curfew during the hours between 5 pm and 8 am; mandatory mask-wearing indoors and outdoors in some public areas of localities with more than 10,000 inhabitants; the closure of many non-essential businesses and activities, including gyms, libraries, cinemas, and in-person dining; and remote learning for secondary and post-secondary students throughout the country.<sup>142</sup>

### *Latvia*

Latvia reported 410 new cases of COVID-19 on February 21, below the country's 7-day moving average of 687 new cases per day.<sup>143</sup> The country's state of emergency and a number of ongoing safety measures, extended from their previous expiry date on February 3, will remain in effect until at least April 6.<sup>144</sup> This means that all public events, as well as the operation of entertainment venues, bars, skating rinks, cultural sites, museums, and food service venues, remain prohibited.<sup>145</sup> In-person shopping remains limited to stores providing essential goods and services, and a weekend curfew remains in effect between 10 pm and 5 am.<sup>146</sup> The country's chief infection expert said that, due to the country's high infection rates, low vaccine supply, and weakened healthcare system, it is not yet possible to lift any restrictions.<sup>147</sup>

### *Lithuania*

Lithuania reported 489 new cases of COVID-19 on February 21, just below its 7-day moving average of 491 cases per day.<sup>148</sup> A nationwide lockdown, which has been in effect since November 7, will remain in effect until at least March 1.<sup>149</sup> This means that 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.<sup>150</sup> Non-essential movement within municipalities is also forbidden, with the same exceptions.<sup>151</sup> However, the Lithuanian government may soon review the rules concerning face masks and travelling between municipalities, the health minister has suggested.<sup>152</sup> Currently, wearing face masks is mandatory in all public places, including on the street.<sup>153</sup> The health minister has also said that the cabinet might next week consider easing restrictions on travel between municipalities. Hairdressers, beauty and massage salons and small non-grocery stores with direct street access have been allowed to reopen as of last Monday.<sup>154</sup>

### *Poland*

Poland reported 7,004 new cases of COVID-19 on February 21, below its 7-day moving average of 7,110 cases per day.<sup>155</sup> Poland remains in the "red zone," but economic restrictions have been gradually relaxed in recent weeks -- including the reopening of cinemas, theaters, sporting venues, and ski resorts at 50% capacity effective February 12. Poland is seeing the beginning of a third wave of coronavirus infections, a health ministry spokesman said on Friday, warning that recent reopening measures may have to be rolled back depending on the pandemic situation. He added that around 10% of COVID-19 cases in Poland are the British variant.<sup>156</sup>

### *Slovakia*

Slovakia reported 1,686 cases of COVID-19 on February 21, below its 7-day moving average of 2,065 cases per day.<sup>157</sup> Despite a tough lockdown, the death rate in Slovakia has risen from 1.68 deaths per 100,000 people on February 1 to 1.78 deaths per 100,000 people as of February 22.<sup>158</sup> Earlier this month, the Slovakian government announced that the British variant has become dominant in the country -- responsible for 74% of all positive samples nationwide over the past few days.<sup>159</sup> The government will meet later this week to discuss the possibility of tightening lockdown measures once again.<sup>160</sup>

## **NORTHERN EUROPE**

### *Denmark*

As of February 22, Denmark reported 55 new cases per 100,000 people over the previous week, continuing a months-long decline.<sup>161</sup> Hospitals across the country have reduced their alert levels, allowing staff to

return to their normal positions due to a lower number of COVID-19 patients.<sup>162</sup> Danish authorities found the first case of the B1351 variant attributed to community spread in the country on February 17, though they emphasized that they believe any approved vaccine will be effective against it.<sup>163</sup> The town of Kolding has closed all schools in the area through the end of February and is asking all of its residents over the age of 12 to get tested for COVID-19 due to a surge in cases.<sup>164</sup> Denmark announced that a number of border crossings with Germany would be closed and security tightened at all others due to a cluster outbreak in a German town close to the border.<sup>165</sup> As part of their plan to ease restrictions, public health officials said that a significant proportion of the population will be asked to get tested twice a week.<sup>166</sup> A Danish man has been sentenced to four months in prison for coughing on a police officer while yelling out “corona” in an incident in March of last year.<sup>167</sup>

### *Estonia*

Estonia reported a two-week infection rate of 763.07 new cases per 100,000 people on February 22, an increase over the past few weeks.<sup>168</sup> As a result, the government announced a number of new restrictions that took effect on February 22. Restaurants and bars are limited to 50% capacity, indoor public events are limited to a maximum of 200 people or 50% capacity, outdoor events must be smaller than 250 people, only individual sports training is permitted, spa centres and water parks must close, swimming pools may only be used for training purposes, and individuals are advised against all domestic and international travel. All middle and high schools will be moved to remote learning for at least one week on March 1 (students are on a school break until then).<sup>169</sup> The ban on the sale of alcohol between 10 pm and 10 am has been extended through March 31.<sup>170</sup> Travellers from Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Greece, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Finland do not need to quarantine upon arrival effective February 22.<sup>171</sup> A study using data from a telecommunications company has found that mobility in Estonia has returned to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>172</sup>

### *Finland*

Finland reported a two-week incidence rate of 104.2 new cases per 100,000 people on February 22, an increase over the previous week.<sup>173</sup> Due to rising concerns about the infection rate, public health officials have urged Finns not to travel internationally or domestically, especially those in the Helsinki region. They also recommended that bars and restaurants in Helsinki close until at least March 14 and that the gathering limit in the region be lowered to six people.<sup>174</sup> However, local authorities expressed resistance to introducing new restrictions, and said they would allow upper secondary and vocational schools to return to in-person learning in March.<sup>175</sup> The government has amended its pandemic law to allow regions to simplify restrictions by not having to distinguish between public or privately-owned businesses.<sup>176</sup> An electronic system for vaccine certificates will be in place by the end of April, with authorities saying it could be used to ease restrictions on private events.<sup>177</sup> The chancellor of justice said that municipal elections that are set for April 18 may be postponed despite opposition from most major political parties.<sup>178</sup>

### *Iceland*

Iceland continues to have the lowest infection rate in Europe, with authorities reporting a two-week incidence rate of 6.5 new cases per 100,000 people on February 22.<sup>179</sup> New border measures were introduced on February 19, mandating that travellers present a negative test result from the previous three days upon their arrival in the country, and requiring those who test positive for a COVID-19 variant to isolate in a quarantine facility. The new measures are in addition to the requirement that all passengers get tested for COVID-19 upon arrival, quarantine for five days, and then produce a second negative test.<sup>180</sup> Authorities said that if the new restrictions prove to be successful at reducing the number of people who test positive after their quarantine period, they may eliminate the period entirely for some travellers as soon as May 1.<sup>181</sup> Public health officials said they would slowly begin to ease domestic restrictions, starting by

allowing ski resorts to operate at 50% capacity and permitting them to resume food and drink sales.<sup>182</sup> Icelandic officials said they expect vaccinate most of the population over the age of 16 by the end of June.<sup>183</sup>

### *Norway*

As of February 22, Norway is reporting an incidence rate of 46 new cases per 100,000 people over the previous week.<sup>184</sup> Hospitalizations and deaths have declined significantly over the past few months, which Norwegian authorities have credited to the success of their vaccination program for the elderly.<sup>185</sup> The national government announced that it would ease its regional restrictions on the Oslo area, but continues to allow municipalities to introduce their own local restrictions.<sup>186</sup> Local officials in Oslo eased some restrictions on February 17, allowing schools to offer more in-person learning, permitting youth indoor and adult outdoor leisure activities, and allowing libraries, non-essential stores not in shopping malls, and restaurants to reopen. Gyms and shopping malls remain closed, and the ban on serving alcohol is still in effect.<sup>187</sup> The government will not move forward with legislation that would have empowered it to issue stay-at-home orders after public health officials said it was unnecessary.<sup>188</sup> Authorities said that they expect to have vaccinated most of the Norwegian population by the end of the summer.<sup>189</sup>

### *Sweden*

Sweden reported a two-week incidence rate of 411 new cases per 100,000 people on February 19, an increase from the previous week. The B117 variant now accounts for over a quarter of all cases in Gothenburg and Skåne.<sup>190</sup> A cluster outbreak of the B1351 variant was discovered in Västmanland in Sweden's first cases not linked to travel.<sup>191</sup> The Swedish government announced that it has introduced new measures that will give it the power to shut down all retail stores, contact services, leisure activities, restaurants, and event venues effective March 11, though authorities said they did not plan to implement the restrictions on that date. Municipalities will also be able to limit capacity at public places, museums will be subject to density restrictions, and the gathering limit framework will be changed depending on the type of event.<sup>192</sup> There are no specific thresholds that will trigger the introduction of these restrictions, as officials said they would assess the situation as a whole.<sup>193</sup> Officials in at least three regions have said that they do not expect to be able to meet the national target of offering all adults a vaccine by the end of June.<sup>194</sup>

## **ASIA/PACIFIC**

### *Japan*

Japan reported about 7 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people last week. Ten prefectures remain under the state of emergency. The vaccination campaign began on February 17, with about 40,000 medical workers receiving the jab in the first phase, followed by other healthcare workers and the elderly.<sup>195</sup> Having received two shipments of the Pfizer vaccine, the country is now able to vaccinate about 420,000 people. The government plans to distribute up to 1.17 million doses to prefectures for medical workers over the two weeks starting March 1. However, with no vaccines produced domestically, the delivery of the vaccination depends heavily on timely shipments from the European Union.<sup>196</sup> The health ministry is now requiring serious cases of COVID-19 to remain hospitalized for at least 15 days after they start showing symptoms. Those patients will also be asked to self-isolate at their homes even after being discharged from hospital.<sup>197</sup>

### *South Korea*

South Korea reported about 6.7 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people last week. Health authorities are still on alert over a potential resurgence following a recent long holiday. The government has been

working on a new social distancing scheme as vaccination is set to start. The country will begin administering vaccines to medical staff this week; the shipment of vaccines is expected to arrive before the weekend.<sup>198</sup>

### *New Zealand*

New Zealand reported about 0.43 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people last week. Auckland has joined the rest of New Zealand at alert level 1 effective February 23. Other than the government decision to mandate face covering on all public transport, gatherings, businesses and activities can resume without restrictions.<sup>199</sup> The government said that it was also actively considering mandating the use of the COVID-19 Tracer app, which helps people to do entry logging.<sup>200</sup> The single-direction quarantine-free travel to Australia resumed on February 21, subject to extra conditions that will be in place until March 1.<sup>201</sup> Starting February 19, New Zealand began administering vaccines to border and managed isolation and quarantine workers.<sup>202</sup> Health officials believe that they will not be able to persuade about 10% of the population to get a vaccine.<sup>203</sup>

### *Australia*

Australia reported about 0.12 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people last week. Victoria is emerging from its snap lockdown, but certain restrictions remain.<sup>204</sup> The Australian Capital Territory is further easing its restrictions starting February 20, allowing for larger crowd sizes at events, venues and stadiums. Patrons can also stand while drinking alcohol, as well as eating, in both indoor and outdoor spaces. Meanwhile, the ACT government is mandating its check-in app for all restricted businesses, effective March 6, to safeguard the reopening of the economy.<sup>205</sup> Australia began the first phase of its vaccination program on February 22, prioritizing residents and staff in aged and disability care -- along with border and hotel quarantine workers and people in frontline healthcare roles.<sup>206</sup>

### *Turkey*

On February 19, Turkey reported 7,419 new COVID-19 cases.<sup>207</sup> The prime minister announced that measures will be lifted on a provincial basis, with plans for a return to normal by March. All 81 provinces will be categorized based on risk level and progress in vaccinations to determine whether any given province is ready for normalization. The risk level will be classified from very high to low in each province and provincial public health boards will be able to decide whether to lift or tighten restrictions based on those levels. The 56-hour lockdown on weekends, which begins Friday night and ends early Monday morning, will be the first measure to be lifted. Nighttime curfews imposed on weekdays are also expected to be removed. Similarly, restrictions on in-person education will be lifted gradually. The fate of restaurants, cafes and similar businesses, which were closed late last year, remains unclear -- but a roadmap for their reopening is underway.<sup>208</sup>

### *Israel*

Israel reported about 283 new cases of COVID-19 per 100 thousand people last week. Entering a major phase of reopening, Israel has scaled back many of its restrictions effective February 21: streetfront shops, malls, markets, museums, and libraries will be open to all Israelis; grades 5-6 and 11-12 will resume in-person classes in low-infection cities or medium-infection ones with high vaccination rates. Meanwhile, gyms, hotels, swimming pools, and sporting and culture events will be permitted to serve vaccinated people carrying the “Green Pass”, the QR-code-based certification issued by the health ministry.<sup>209</sup> Starting February 19, the maximum number of people attending gatherings has been increased to 20 outdoors and to 10 indoors; houses of worship are permitted to reopen, subject to the same limits.<sup>210</sup> Israel has extended

the closure of its airports and land borders until March 6.<sup>211</sup> On February 21, 17 municipalities, including Tel Aviv, announced that they would resume in-person classes for grades 7-10 -- in defiance of the decision made by the national government.<sup>212</sup> Up until last week, over 4.2 million Israelis had received their first vaccine dose -- almost 50% of the population. However, health officials have warned of a shortfall of vaccines and have asked health providers to prioritize administering second doses in the coming two weeks. The military is launching a stepped-up drive to reach a 95% vaccination rate in particular cities and to turn them into the first immunized cities in the world.<sup>213</sup>

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## **Partnerships and Contributors**

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

Reopening data and summaries are produced by a team at PEARL (The Policy, Elections, and Representation Lab) at the Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy: Mitchell Anderson, Haobo Chen, Jad El Tal, Kulsoom Khalid, Blake Lee-Whiting, Anthony Moniuszko, Erika Porco, and Sapphira Thompson-Bled.

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### *Links*

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