

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

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**Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto  
PEARL (Policy, Elections, and Representation Lab)  
Professor Peter Loewen, Lab Director ([peter.loewen@utoronto.ca](mailto:peter.loewen@utoronto.ca))**

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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.

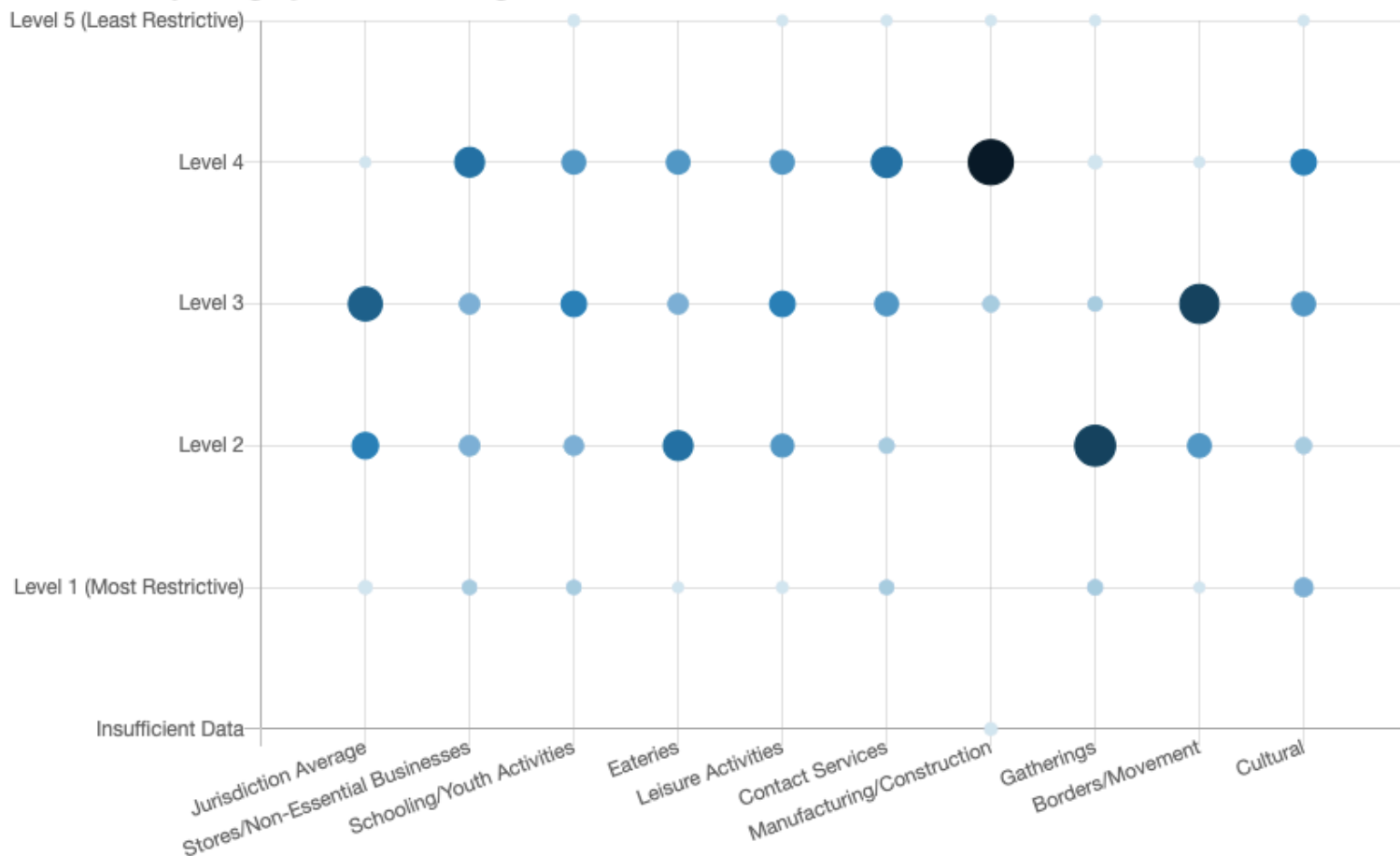
We also provide a weekly qualitative summary of the actions governments are taking and considering taking to reopen their economies and manage the coronavirus.

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

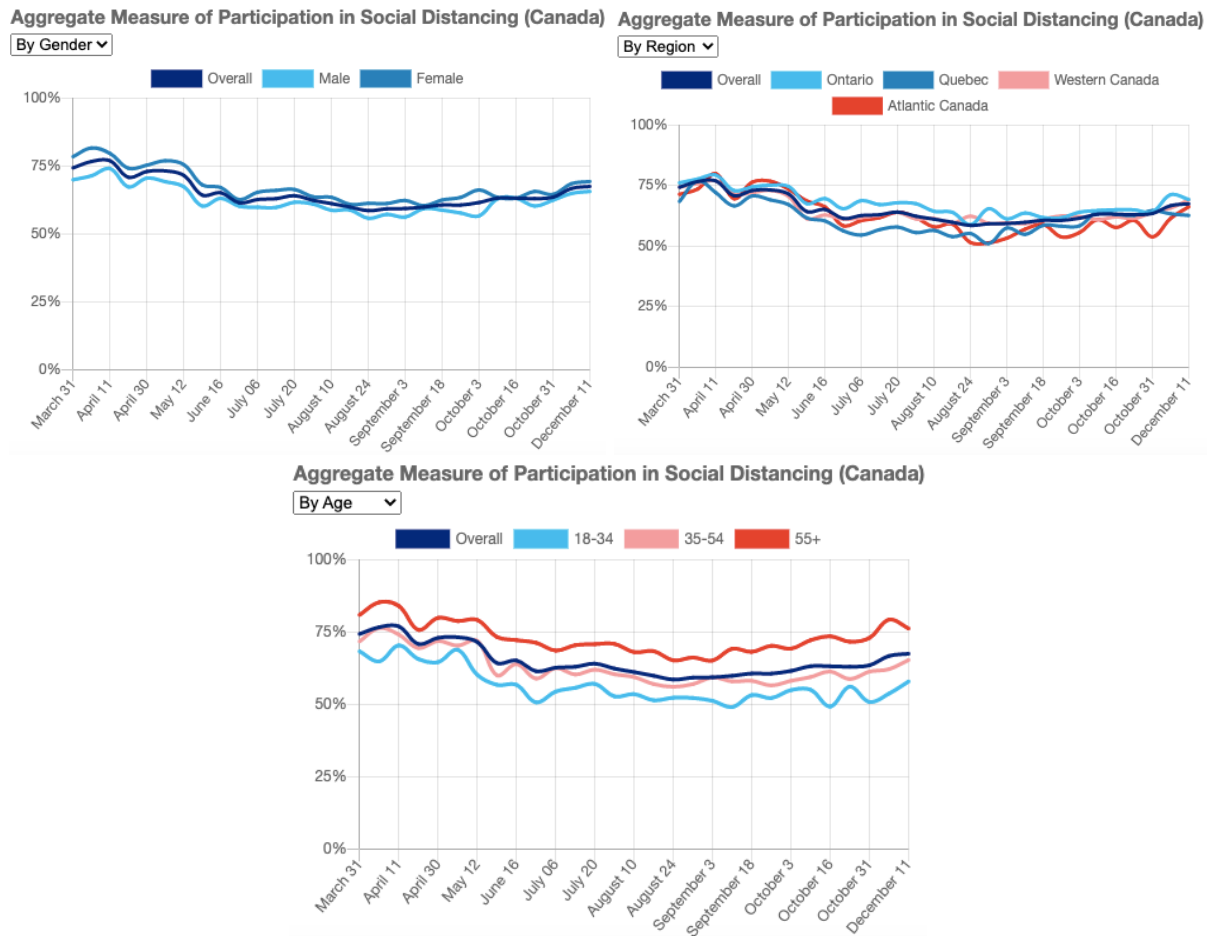
Please direct any questions or comments to [peter.loewen@utoronto.ca](mailto:peter.loewen@utoronto.ca).

## Data Visualizations from Dashboard

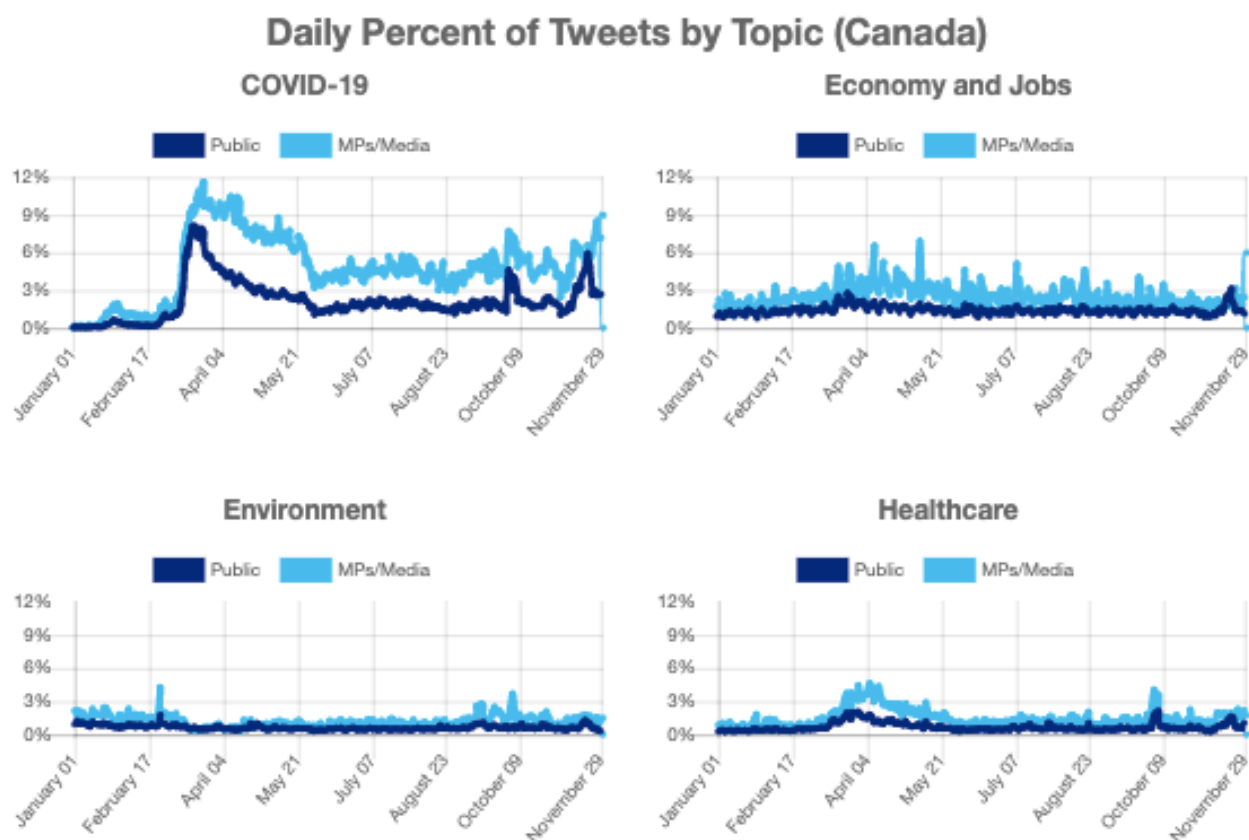
## Level of Reopening by Sector Among OECD Countries and Selected Canadian Provinces and US States



**Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of December 21.** 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).

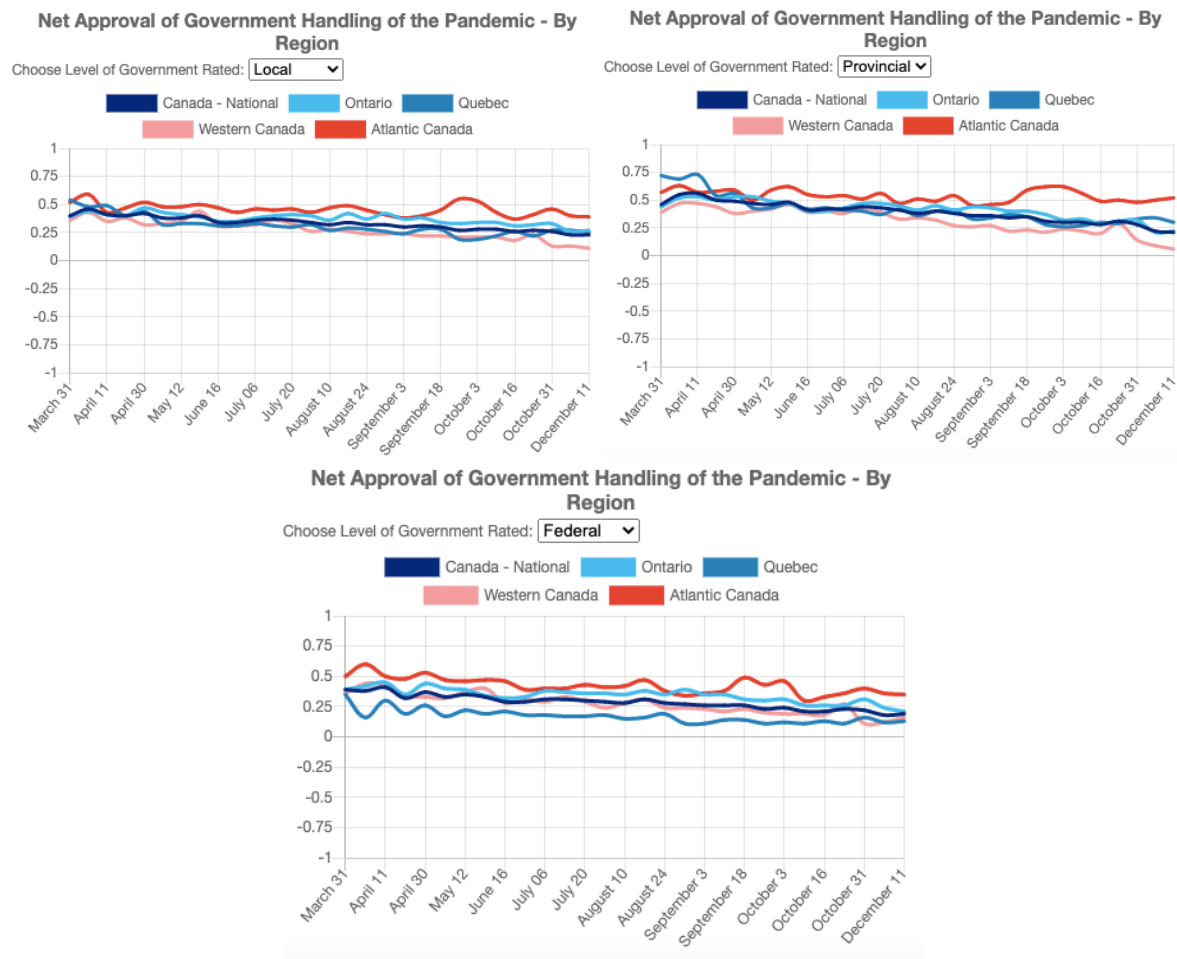


**Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada).** We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre 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 December 18, Alberta reported 1,413 new daily cases of COVID-19, 759 hospitalizations, and 141 people in the ICU.<sup>1</sup> The province is in a state of public health emergency and the current restrictions are set to remain in place for at least four weeks. COVID-19 care teams are being sent to 11 of the worst-hit communities in the province to deliver care packages and provide support to assessment facilities.<sup>2</sup> The province has “set up 16 self-isolation hotels to provide free stays and food to people for 14 days with the majority in Calgary and Edmonton.”<sup>3</sup> On December 14, Alberta received 3,900 doses of the Pfizer vaccine. Alberta has high numbers of vaccine-hesitant people.<sup>4</sup>

#### → *British Columbia*

The number of daily new cases in British Columbia has been fluctuating around 600 since last week. The province’s COVID-19 testing guidelines have been modified to prioritize symptomatic people exposed to a confirmed case and people having any of the symptoms most commonly associated with COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> The provincial COVID-19 ticket enforcement and workplace safety measures are being expanded to better support the response to the pandemic.<sup>6</sup> The COVID-19 immunization program in B.C. began on December 15.<sup>7</sup> All province-wide restrictions will be in place until January 8, 2021.

#### → *Manitoba*

Health officials announced 350 new cases and 10 new deaths related to COVID-19 in Manitoba on December 18 -- bringing the death toll to 547. The Manitoba government announced that an additional 900 healthcare workers can now book immunization appointments for COVID-19.<sup>8</sup>

#### → *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported no new cases of COVID-19 on December 21, and the province’s total number of active cases dropped to 45 on the same date.<sup>9</sup> Most of the province has remained at the less restrictive “yellow” alert level, while Zone 4 (Edmunston) remains at the “orange” level after an outbreak at a local hospital prompted a move towards tighter restrictions last week.<sup>10</sup> At the orange level, residents are restricted to a single-household bubble and masks are required in most public places.<sup>11</sup> New Brunswick administered its first dose of COVID-19 vaccine to a long-term care home resident at the Miramichi Regional Hospital on December 21 -- one week after 1,950 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine arrived in the province.<sup>12</sup>

#### → *Newfoundland and Labrador*

On December 17, Newfoundland and Labrador reported 24 active cases of COVID-19.<sup>13</sup> Following an outbreak at two mines in British Columbia, “rotational workers returning to the province from these sites must self-isolate for 14 days.”<sup>14</sup> The province’s vaccination plan began on December 16, with priority being given to front line healthcare workers, seniors in long-term care homes, older residents, and remote or isolated Indigenous communities.<sup>15</sup>

#### → *Northwest Territories*

Five new cases of COVID-19 were identified in the Northwest Territories last week, all of which are travel-related. The state of emergency in Yellowknife has been extended through January 1, 2021. The government has released its holiday guidelines, reminding residents to comply with rules regarding quarantine, gatherings, and social distancing.<sup>16</sup> The territorial government is still in Phase 2 of its reopening plan and is not expected to seek further reopening until the nationwide situation is under control.

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia reported two new cases of COVID-19 on December 21, leaving the province with a total of 38 active cases.<sup>17</sup> New restrictions came into effect across the province on December 21, including a limit of 10 people at household gatherings.<sup>18</sup> All retailers in Nova Scotia must now limit the number of staff and customers in their stores to 25% of their legal capacity, and catering establishments must close by 10 pm.<sup>19</sup> The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and neighbouring Hants County, which were previously under stricter public health rules, are now under the same restrictions as the rest of the province.<sup>20</sup> As of December 21, Nova Scotians are no longer being advised to avoid non-essential travel to the HRM.<sup>21</sup> Gyms, libraries and museums can also reopen in the HRM, and long-term care homes will start allowing family visitors and two designated caregivers.<sup>22</sup> Restrictions that came into effect on December 21 will last until at least January 10.<sup>23</sup>

→ *Nunavut*

There are 34 active cases of COVID-19 in Nunavut as of December 18, all of which are in Arviat. Nunavut reported its first two COVID-19 related deaths on December 19. One is a person from Arviat; the other is a person from Rankin Inlet who contracted the disease while out-of-territory.<sup>24</sup> Four weeks after the last positive case in Sanikiluaq recovered, the outbreak in that community has been declared over. Voluntary rapid testing in isolation hubs is expected to begin on December 21, with authorities urging all those in the facility to get tested before they re-enter the territory. All current restrictions will remain in place indefinitely, with all residents urged to avoid large Christmas gatherings.<sup>25</sup> Two medical-grade freezers have arrived in Iqaluit to store the Moderna vaccine once it is approved and available. The vaccine will be prioritized for at-risk groups.<sup>26</sup>

→ *Ontario*

Ontario's 7-day rolling average has increased to 2,250 cases per day.<sup>27</sup> On December 17, the Ontario Hospital Association called on the government to, at a minimum, "implement and robustly enforce a four-week lockdown in every public health unit with an infection rate of 40/100,000 population or higher."<sup>28</sup> The government is implementing a province-wide lockdown as of 12:01 a.m. on December 26 that will last for 28 days in the southern portions of the province (south of Sudbury) and 14 days in the northern parts.<sup>29</sup> The lockdown will look similar to the province-wide shut-down in March, with only essential businesses being allowed to remain open. Under the province-wide lockdown, the winter break for students will be extended.<sup>30</sup> This decision was made based on the COVID-19 modelling data, which projected that at the current rate of transmission, ICU admission would grow to 700 patients by the end of January.<sup>31</sup> There are currently 261 patients infected with the disease in ICUs across the province. The Ontario Hospital Association says that once the number surpasses 300, care for other medical needs will become nearly impossible.<sup>32</sup>

→ *Prince Edward Island*

On December 18, Prince Edward Island reported 17 active cases of COVID-19.<sup>33</sup> Effective December 18, "some of the circuit-breaker restrictions have been eased and the following measures will remain in place until January 11."<sup>34</sup> Museums, libraries, gyms, fitness facilities, and shops must operate at 50% capacity. Contact services can reopen but can only operate on an appointment basis and masks must be worn at all times. Households can gather with up to 10 additional people and weddings and funerals can be held with up to 50 people. Organized gatherings, such as concerts or religious services, can occur with up to 100 people -- with an approved operational plan. At restaurants, indoor dining can resume but must close at 11 pm and no more than 10 people can be seated at a table. The province will remain out of the Atlantic bubble during this time.<sup>35</sup> On December 16, P.E.I. received 1,950 doses of the vaccine to be administered to long-term care staff and front line healthcare workers.<sup>36</sup>

→ *Quebec*

On December 19, Quebec reported 44 deaths and 2,038 new cases after conducting 11,476 tests -- for a positivity rate at 18%. The rate of active cases at 210.71 per 100,000.<sup>37</sup> The province's death rate is 90.93 per 100,000.<sup>38</sup> There are over 1,000 COVID-19 hospitalizations in Quebec, which is the highest since the spring.<sup>39</sup> Schools, offices and non-essential services are closed until January 11, leaving the majority of stores closed between December 25 and January 11.<sup>40</sup> Grocery stores, pharmacies, liquor stores, cannabis stores, banks, hardware stores and pet stores can operate and big box stores are permitted to sell only essential items.<sup>41</sup> Between December 17 and January 11, regions designated yellow were moved to orange and regions designated orange were moved to red on the province's reopening indicators. In red, restaurants, gyms, museums and theatres are closed.<sup>42</sup> But, people in red zones may have outdoor gatherings in public.<sup>43</sup> Outdoor hockey games can have up to eight players and one coach. Skiing is permitted.<sup>44</sup>

#### → *Saskatchewan*

There are 3,880 active cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan as of December 20. Most cases are in Saskatoon and Regina.<sup>45</sup> On December 14, the provincial government announced a number of new restrictions set to take effect over the next two weeks. Private indoor gatherings were banned from December 17, with private outdoor gatherings limited to 10 people. On December 19, casinos and bingo halls must close, personal care services can operate at half-capacity, and indoor public spaces can have up to 30 people. Starting on December 25, small retail stores are limited to 50% capacity, while large retail stores are limited to 50% capacity. All restrictions will be in place for at least four weeks following their implementation. The leader of the opposition criticized the provincial government for waiting until Christmas to limit capacity in stores and said their "chaotic" announcement would lead to confusion.<sup>46</sup> More doses of the vaccine are expected to arrive in Saskatchewan next week.<sup>47</sup>

#### → *Yukon*

Only one new case of COVID-19 was reported in Yukon last week. As of December 14, every person who signed a declaration when they entered Yukon will receive an automated text message approximately 72 hours after their arrival, reminding them of the self-isolation requirement.<sup>48</sup> Starting January 4, children aged five and up (rather than 10 years or older) are required to wear a mask on school buses.<sup>49</sup>

### *The United States*

#### → *California*

As of December 19, California reported nearly 17,400 COVID-related hospitalizations, which is more than double the July peak. Officials estimate that the number of hospitalizations could reach as high as 75,000 by the middle of January.<sup>50</sup> The state also reported 3,600 confirmed or possible COVID-19 patients in the ICU.<sup>51</sup> Much of the state, with the chief exception of northern California, is at the stay-at-home level of reopening.<sup>52</sup> Some hospitals cancelled non-essential elective surgeries, like hip replacements, because of the demand for medical care created by COVID-19.<sup>53</sup> Doctors are receiving calls from wealthy people in southern California offering to pay in order to receive the COVID-19 vaccine earlier than permitted; the governor said they will monitor these requests.<sup>54</sup> Restaurant owners had a caravan protest to call for reopening and outdoor dining.<sup>55</sup> Eleven state senators are asking the governor to declare restaurants essential.<sup>56</sup>

#### → *Illinois*

Illinois' seven-day statewide test positivity from December 13 to December 19 has decreased since last week, and is now at 9.6%.<sup>57</sup> On December 19, 79 deaths related to COVID-19 were reported -- the first time since early December that the death toll fell below 100 per day.<sup>58</sup> For the last two months, health officials said that the highest number of cases has been people ages 20 to 29 years old. Similar to Thanksgiving, the government is recommending that residents only celebrate Christmas and New Year with

those in their household.<sup>59</sup> Now that the first vaccines have been administered in the state, the governor reiterated that returning to normal -- or "Phase 5" under his government's plan -- is still months away.<sup>60</sup>

→ *Michigan*

Michigan's seven-day moving average has declined to 4,000 new cases per day.<sup>61</sup> As of December 19, there were 3,261 inpatients with COVID-19 at Michigan hospitals.<sup>62</sup> On December 21, Michigan's new COVID-19 order officially came into effect, allowing many entertainment venues to reopen with limited capacity. Through January 15, bowling alleys, casinos, cinemas, museums, libraries, amusement parks and stadiums may reopen, but patrons must remain masked and socially distanced.<sup>63</sup> Venues are not allowed to serve food or drinks. Total capacity at those indoor venues will be capped at 100 or 30% of the venue's maximum capacity (whichever comes first), and groups are limited to six people from the same household. Individualized activities with distancing and face masks are still allowed under the revised order, including retail shopping, personal-care services and exercise at a gym -- with extra spacing between machines.<sup>64</sup> In-person classes will also be allowed to resume in high schools. Restaurants and bars still remain closed, limited to carry-out and delivery. The governor says that indoor dining creates the inherent risk of bringing people from multiple households together and allowing them to remove their masks.<sup>65</sup>

→ *New York*

New York's statewide positivity rate has increased to 5.18%, as of December 19.<sup>66</sup> Hospitalizations continue to increase, with 6,208 beds filled with COVID-19 patients.<sup>67</sup> The state's 7-day rolling average is now 10,500 cases per day, which is higher than the peak during the first wave when New York City was considered a global epicenter. Nevertheless, no new statewide restrictions have been introduced. Bars, restaurants and gyms may open but must close in-person service from 10 pm to 5 am daily. Indoor and outdoor gatherings at private residences are limited to no more than 10 people.<sup>68</sup> On December 20, the governor called on the federal government to consider action against the highly contagious variant of COVID-19 circulating in the United Kingdom -- including by imposing mandatory testing of individuals traveling from the UK on flights to the US.<sup>69</sup>

→ *Texas*

On December 19, Texas reported 272 new deaths in the past 24 hours -- bringing the state to more than 25,000 total deaths. This is the second most deaths in the US.<sup>70</sup> Counties in the Nacogdoches-Lufkin area, Angelina, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto and Tyler regressed in reopening after hospitals exceeded a 15% COVID-19 occupancy rate for more than one week straight.<sup>71</sup> The North Texas hospital region reached approximately 18% COVID-19 occupancy, which is their highest occupancy since April.<sup>72</sup> 224,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have already been delivered to Texas and the state is receiving 620,000 additional COVID-19 doses.<sup>73</sup> The new doses will be delivered to emergency rooms, health departments and clinics to be given to healthcare workers and long term care residents first.<sup>74</sup>

*Mexico*

On December 16, Mexico reported 10,297 new COVID-19 cases in the past day and 670 additional deaths.<sup>75</sup> In response to the deteriorating COVID-19 situation in Mexico City, the city is imposing extraordinary measures.<sup>76</sup> The state of Mexico will similarly stop non-essential activity between December 19 and January 10 since hospitals there are at 75% capacity.<sup>77</sup> The state of Mexico and Mexico City are in red, which only permits essential services to operate, hotels at 30% capacity, and restaurants with delivery. It also prohibits indoor dining, gyms, sports clubs, hair and beauty salons, shopping centres, malls, cinemas, theatres, bars, clubs and retail from operating.<sup>78</sup> Police have had to break up underground parties throughout the pandemic, including one with up to 250 attendees.<sup>79</sup> On December 18, members from a union for approximately 8,000 healthcare and hospital workers in Baja California threatened to walk off the job if

they were not paid. The state's secretary of health said that they were paid for the last two weeks and would receive their next pay.<sup>80</sup> Since reopening, Cancun has now had three million tourists.<sup>81</sup>

### *Chile*

On December 18, Chile reported 2,404 new COVID-19 cases in the past day, which is the highest number since July. It also reported 44 deaths.<sup>82</sup> On December 16, the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine was approved in Chile and officials hope that vaccinations can begin this month for health workers, police, military, and high-risk individuals.<sup>83</sup> Chile's Pfizer contract is for ten million doses, which should vaccinate five million people.<sup>84</sup> Chile expects to receive some of the Chinese Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines.<sup>85</sup> Chile expects to get 30 million vaccine doses in 2021 and hopes to vaccinate 20,000 people with the Pfizer vaccine in the first quarter of the new year.<sup>86</sup> Restrictions on movement and gatherings in the Metropolitan area will apply on weekends and will last until 2021.<sup>87</sup> Chile has completed more than six million PCR tests and on December 19 the country conducted 40,000 tests.<sup>88</sup>

## **WESTERN EUROPE**

### *France*

France's 7-day moving average of new cases has increased since last week and is now at 13,700 cases per day.<sup>89</sup> France's second stage of reopening began on December 15, with an 8 pm to 6 am curfew instead of a stay-at-home lockdown. After 6 pm, no one is allowed to leave their homes unless they have an emergency, are going to work, or are traveling.<sup>90</sup> Restaurants and cafés will remain closed until at least January 20. Curfew measures will be lifted on December 24, but not on December 31.<sup>91</sup> On December 20, France announced that it would suspend all travel from the United Kingdom, including the transport of goods, for 48 hours. The decision came after the president called an emergency health council meeting to discuss how to react to the UK government tightening COVID-19 measures due to the spread of a new strain of the virus that could be up to 70% more infectious.<sup>92</sup> On December 17, the president tested positive for COVID-19, especially worrying after he attended an EU summit of leaders the week prior. He remains in stable condition.<sup>93</sup> La Haute Autorité de Santé said that people who have already had a symptomatic form of the virus will not 'systematically' need a vaccine.<sup>94</sup>

### *Germany*

Germany's 7-day R-value has decreased since last week and is now 1.04. The country's 7-day moving average of new cases has increased slightly to 25,000 daily cases.<sup>95</sup> Numerous clusters have been linked to private gatherings, nursing homes, and religious gatherings.<sup>96</sup> While cases in the younger population are falling, they are still rising among older people. Germany recorded more than 10,000 COVID-19 deaths in December and is on course to see the number of fatalities double from last month. Comparatively, the death toll was 5,800 in November, 964 in October, and 190 in September.<sup>97</sup> On December 20, Germany suspended all UK-bound flights amid growing concerns of an "out of control" new variant of COVID-19, which is spreading at a much faster pace. On December 21, the country introduced restrictions for South African flights because of the same variant.<sup>98</sup>

### *Belgium*

On December 18, Belgium reported a reproduction rate of 1.0 with variation between the provinces. The daily number of new COVID-19 infections continues to increase.<sup>99</sup> Effective December 18, "non-residents entering Belgium must show a negative COVID-19 test certification in order to be permitted into the

country.”<sup>100</sup> The country plans to begin vaccinations on December 27. There are large regional differences in testing across the country, with efforts being made in Brussels and Wallonia to scale up testing efforts.<sup>101</sup>

### *Netherlands*

COVID-19 cases in the Netherlands jumped by nearly 13,000 on December 17, according to data released by the Dutch health authorities.<sup>102</sup> The country entered a second lockdown on the same day, after a “partial lockdown” imposed in mid-October failed to stem a rapidly rising second wave of infections in the run-up to Christmas. Gatherings--indoor and outdoor--will be limited to two people, although for three days at Christmas three adult visitors will be allowed to visit another household.<sup>103</sup> Effective December 15, Delta launched a new Covid-tested travel corridor for flights from Atlanta to Amsterdam, which allows passengers to enter the Dutch capital without having to comply with the country's 10-day quarantine advisory.<sup>104</sup> The Netherlands has banned UK flights from December 20 to January 1, following the spread of a new, possibly more infectious variant of COVID-19 in the south of England.<sup>105</sup>

### *Spain*

On December 16, Spain reported 11,078 daily new COVID-19 cases, which is the most cases in one day in weeks.<sup>106</sup> Hospitalizations decreased on December 19, leaving 9% of hospital beds and 20% of ICU beds occupied with COVID-19 cases.<sup>107</sup> On December 16, the number of deaths decreased to 195, which is the lowest daily number since October.<sup>108</sup> Although regions can also implement restrictions, the federal Health Ministry supports people visiting friends and family over the holidays and will relax curfew and permit gatherings of ten on specific days.<sup>109</sup> Galicia will permit gatherings of six from two households.<sup>110</sup> In Catalonia, students will not return to school until January 11,<sup>111</sup> gatherings of ten are permitted over the holidays, and as of December 21 restaurants can open between 7:30 - 10:30 am and between 1 - 3 pm.<sup>112</sup> The premier of Madrid will not impose stricter restrictions over the Christmas holidays, but between December 23 and January 6 inter-regional travel is closed except to people visiting family and close friends. Restaurants, stores and bars can open over the holidays.<sup>113</sup> On December 26, Asturias enters another lockdown with daytime curfews, the closing non-essential stores, and remote learning between January 7 and 15. However, the region will use mass testing to allow exemptions from some of the restrictions as of January 18.<sup>114</sup>

### *The United Kingdom*

The UK's 7-day rolling average has increased to 27,000 new cases per day.<sup>115</sup> This sharp increase is due to a new coronavirus variant in south England and London that is 70% more infectious than the current strain. On December 19, the British government put several parts of England into "Tier 4" restrictions, the most restrictive level.<sup>116</sup> The new restrictions in London and most of south England are broadly similar to the national restrictions that were in place last month. Residents can't leave their homes except for essential trips; non-essential retail, indoor gyms, movie theaters and hairdressers have been forced to close.<sup>117</sup> If people want to spend time with those outside their household, it can only be with one person at a time and it needs to be outdoors. No mixing of different households can occur. One difference from November's restrictions is that communal worship can still take place. Outside the Tier 4 areas, up to eight people from three households will be able to meet on Christmas Day only.<sup>118</sup> Winter school break has been extended to January 11 to allow room for testing capacity building.<sup>119</sup> As of December 21, more than 30 countries have banned UK flight arrivals because of concerns related to the new variant of coronavirus.<sup>120</sup>

### *Ireland*

On December 17, 484 cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Ireland, with three more virus-related deaths.<sup>121</sup> COVID-19 restrictions have been eased effective December 18--allowing up to three households to mix



with each other. Previously, households were not allowed to mix unless they were already in a 'bubble'. People are also allowed to travel outside of the county that they live in under the new rules. The measures are due to be in place for three weeks. However, government ministers are likely to look at tightening restrictions again in late December.<sup>122</sup>

### *Luxembourg*

On December 18, 449 new cases of COVID-19 and six new deaths were recorded by the Ministry of Health, bringing the total death toll to 434. The effective reproduction rate is 0.80.<sup>123</sup> The government has announced its plan to extend the Christmas break or re-introduce homeschooling after the holidays. It also plans to close down different branches of the economy in order to curb infections. Luxembourg has not restricted its border from other European visitors, although travel from outside Europe is banned until December 31.<sup>124</sup>

### *Portugal*

On December 18, Portugal registered 75 more deaths related to COVID-19 and 4,336 new cases of infection, according to the Directorate-General for Health (DGS).<sup>125</sup> On New Year's Eve, from 31 December to 1 January, there will be a curfew from 11 pm. An additional curfew will come into effect from 1 pm on January 1, 2 and 3. The measures apply to all municipalities in mainland Portugal, regardless of the level of risk that is in place.<sup>126</sup>

## **CENTRAL EUROPE**

### *Austria*

On December 18, 2,085 new daily cases of COVID-19 were reported. On December 17, 218 new daily COVID-19 deaths were reported.<sup>127</sup> Effective December 26, Austria will enter its third lockdown, 11 days after its second lockdown ended. All non-essential shops, restaurants, schools, museums, and theatres will close until January 18. Despite the lockdown, ski lifts will open.<sup>128</sup> A second round of mass testing will occur between January 15 and 17 at facilities in the country. People who participate and test negative will not be subject to lockdown measures but those who do not get tested will remain in lockdown until January 24.<sup>129</sup>

### *Greece*

Greek health authorities reported 901 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection on December 19.<sup>130</sup> The current lockdown measures will mostly remain in effect over the holiday period. However, bookstores and hairdressers can reopen. Effective December 18, the compulsory quarantine requirements for travellers arriving in the country will be reduced from 10 to 3 days. Also in effect on January 7, the night-time curfew will be changed from 9 pm - 5 am to 10 pm - 5 am.<sup>131</sup> Greece should receive its first vaccines on December 26. These will be given to healthcare workers, long-term care workers, and people over 65 years old.<sup>132</sup>

### *Italy*

On December 18, 15,401 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection were reported in Italy. Over the holidays, Italy will go into a nationwide red-zone lockdown. On December 25-27, December 31-January 3, and January 5-6, eateries and non-essentials shops will be closed and people will not be permitted to leave their

homes for non-essential reasons. On the days that fall in between, orange zone rules will be in effect. “Other measures include a ban on inter-regional travel between December 21 and January 6 and a national curfew from 10 pm to 5 am.”<sup>133</sup> The country will begin its vaccination plan in early January and will give priority to healthcare workers, residents in long-term care homes, and people over 80.<sup>134</sup>

### *Slovenia*

On December 16, Slovenia recorded 1,642 new daily infections and 1,229 hospitalizations.<sup>135</sup> The “state of coronavirus epidemic” was extended by 30 days on December 18. Between December 19 and 23, some specialty shops will be permitted to reopen. In four regions with improving epidemiological situations, more shops, museums, galleries, and libraries will be permitted to reopen. Religious ceremonies will also be permitted effective December 19.<sup>136</sup>

### *Switzerland*

On December 18, 4,478 new daily cases of COVID-19 were reported in Switzerland. In the country, the level of COVID-19 infections and death remain persistently high.<sup>137</sup> The current measures restricting the operating hours of restaurants, bars, and shops remain in effect until January 22. However, the Swiss national COVID-19 science taskforce has concluded that the new measures are insufficient. Many health experts fear a third COVID-19 wave following the skiing holidays in mid-January.<sup>138</sup> Vaccinations in Switzerland will begin in January pending approval.<sup>139</sup>

## **EASTERN EUROPE**

### *Czech Republic*

The Czech Republic reported 8,830 new cases of COVID-19 on December 19 -- the country’s highest single-day increase since November 11.<sup>140</sup> The Czech government is expected to extend its state of emergency -- originally set to expire on December 23 -- until January 23, as the country struggles to contain the spread of COVID-19 leading up to Christmas.<sup>141</sup> Hotels, restaurants, and indoor sports venues and swimming pools -- which had been permitted to reopen at the beginning of December -- were required to close again on December 18.<sup>142</sup> All public gatherings must now be limited to six people and a nationwide curfew has been implemented between 11 pm and 5 am.<sup>143</sup>

### *Hungary*

Hungary reported 2,967 new cases of COVID-19 on December 20, after recording 1,893 cases on December 15 -- which was the country’s lowest single-day tally since October 24.<sup>144</sup> On November 10, Hungary extended its state of emergency until January 11. Ongoing restrictions include the obligation to wear a mask in public in localities with more than 10,000 residents. All students in grades 8 and above, including post-secondary, are restricted to remote learning. Primary schools will reopen to students on January 4. A national curfew remains in force between 5 pm and 8 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. All leisure facilities, such as gyms, indoor swimming pools, museums, libraries, cinemas, zoos and skating rinks, must suspend services.<sup>145</sup> The Hungarian government has also banned the sale and use of fireworks and other pyrotechnics used on New Year’s Eve in order to limit gatherings.<sup>146</sup>

### *Latvia*

Latvia reported 1,004 new cases of COVID-19 on December 17, a new single-day record for the country.<sup>147</sup> On December 2, Latvian officials extended the country's ongoing state of emergency 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.<sup>148</sup> Additional restrictions include a limit of 2 people per group in public gatherings, and a mandatory mask policy for all students, teachers, and staff in primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.<sup>149</sup>

### *Lithuania*

Lithuania reported 2,930 new cases of COVID-19 on December 20 -- below the country's single-day record of 4,551 new cases set on December 3.<sup>150</sup> On December 14, officials held a press conference to announce the move towards a nationwide lockdown.<sup>151</sup> From December 16 to January 11, 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.<sup>152</sup> Non-essential movement within municipalities is also forbidden -- with the same exceptions. There are no new restrictions on international travel or borders. 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 are prohibited and all non-essential shops must move online.<sup>153</sup>

### *Poland*

The spread of COVID-19 has continued to stabilize in Poland last week, with 8,590 new cases reported on December 20.<sup>154</sup> Poland extended its lockdown until at least December 27 in the gastronomy, culture and fitness sectors, with restaurants, cinemas, theaters, and gyms required to remain closed. However, shopping malls are allowed to reopen for Christmas shopping under strict sanitary regulations and with customer limits. Schools across Poland are being asked to close and online distance learning provided until at least December 23.<sup>155</sup>

### *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. A record 3,991 new cases were reported on December 20; the previous single-day record of 3,363 new cases was on October 30.<sup>156</sup> New restrictions were introduced this week on the recommendation of Slovakia's pandemic commission, with the current lockdown set to last until January 10, 2021. Under new restrictions, all commercial establishments must close, including theatres, hairdressers, driving schools, and fitness centres. Only essential businesses, such as pharmacies and grocery stores, can remain open. All mass events, including those with fewer than 6 people, are prohibited.<sup>157</sup>

## **NORTHERN EUROPE**

### *Denmark*

Denmark reported 4,508 new cases of COVID-19 on December 18 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>158</sup> The Danish government extended its partial lockdown measures to all municipalities in the country on December 16, with all eateries moving to takeout and delivery only, all cultural venues closed, and all leisure activities prohibited.<sup>159</sup> Denmark will progress into a full lockdown by Christmas. All shopping centres were forced to close on December 17. All personal care services and

schools shut their doors on December 21 and all other non-essential stores will be closed from December 25 until at least January 3. The government said that there are no plans to implement domestic travel restrictions but is strongly recommending that all Danes see no more than 10 people socially.<sup>160</sup> Denmark has banned flights from the UK for at least 48 hours due to the discovery of a new highly infectious strain of COVID-19.<sup>161</sup> Denmark is set to begin vaccinating its residents on December 27, and potentially earlier if doses have arrived in the country.<sup>162</sup>

### *Estonia*

The two-week average infection rate in Estonia is 516.11 new cases per 100,000 people as of December 21.<sup>163</sup> A top public health official said that the growth in new cases has started to decline, and authorities are optimistic that the infection rate will stabilize within the next few weeks.<sup>164</sup> The head of the government's scientific council said that a complete lockdown would not be effective at reducing the infection rate, and pointed to France and Germany as examples where the situation remains dire.<sup>165</sup> Border officials have increased monitoring of all incoming travellers' compliance with quarantine requirements.<sup>166</sup> The government announced that Estonia will be ready to begin vaccinating residents on December 27, with hospital staff and long-term care home residents receiving it first.<sup>167</sup> The minister of social affairs said that Estonia expects to vaccinate 100,000 people by the end of March.<sup>168</sup> Estonia has banned all flights from the UK indefinitely due to the new strain of COVID-19.<sup>169</sup>

### *Finland*

The infection rate in Finland has remained relatively stable over the past week.<sup>170</sup> Public health officials are optimistic that the infection rate in Helsinki has declined, though they emphasized that restrictions should not be lifted as it remains the most affected region in the country.<sup>171</sup> The prime minister said that she is not currently looking to re-introduce the emergency powers her government had during the first wave of the pandemic, but the government will continue to discuss the situation as it evolves.<sup>172</sup> Finland has banned all passenger flights from the UK for at least the next two weeks due to the discovery of a new highly contagious strain of COVID-19.<sup>173</sup> Vaccinations in Finland are set to begin on December 27, as in other EU countries. The first batch of vaccines will arrive close to Christmas.<sup>174</sup>

### *Iceland*

The two-week average domestic infection rate in Iceland is 28.9 new cases per 100,000 people as of December 21.<sup>175</sup> All bonfires traditionally held on New Year's Eve have been cancelled.<sup>176</sup> The chief epidemiologist of Iceland is in quarantine after being deemed a close contact of a staff member who tested positive.<sup>177</sup> Police at Iceland's international airport have stepped up monitoring after a number of Icelanders were found to have picked up returning travellers without isolating afterwards. Any person that picks up a traveller at the airport must quarantine with them for at least five days.<sup>178</sup> Delays in vaccine delivery have caused authorities to revise their projected vaccination schedule. Iceland is now projected to reach vaccine-based herd immunity in the second half of the year. Restrictions are expected to be removed slowly as the proportion of vaccinated residents increases.<sup>179</sup>

### *Norway*

The infection rate in Norway has remained relatively stable over the past week.<sup>180</sup> All national restrictions will remain in place until at least January 31 and the local restrictions in Oslo are also expected to remain until the same date.<sup>181</sup> Local officials in Trondheim announced that they would introduce a mandatory mask policy in all indoor public spaces until at least January 9.<sup>182</sup> Local officials in Bergen lifted all of their city-wide restrictions on December 18, with the city returning to the national measures on the same date.<sup>183</sup> Norway has banned all passenger flights from the UK for at least 48 hours due to the discovery of a new

strain of COVID-19. Authorities said they would test all those who have arrived from the UK in the past two weeks for COVID-19.<sup>184</sup> Norway is expected to begin its vaccination program on December 27 if the EU approves the Pfizer vaccine by December 23, as in other European countries. The first vaccines will be administered in Oslo -- with long-term care home residents and healthcare workers expected to receive it initially.<sup>185</sup>

### *Sweden*

Sweden reported 9,659 new cases of COVID-19 on December 19 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>186</sup> The Swedish government announced a number of new restrictions on December 18. Starting on December 24, restaurants will not be permitted to serve alcohol after 8 pm. All stores, gyms, and restaurants have been asked to set capacity limits, though there is no specific limit they must set. Upper secondary schools will continue distance learning until January 24. Non-essential public services are closed until the same date. The government also recommended wearing a mask on public transit during peak travel times and urged everyone who can work from home to do so. Sweden has extended its entry ban on all non-EU travellers until March 31.<sup>187</sup> The Swedish government said they would ban all travel from the UK due to the new strain of COVID-19, with a formal announcement expected in the coming days.<sup>188</sup> Sweden is expected to begin vaccinating its residents on December 27.<sup>189</sup>

## **ASIA/PACIFIC**

### *Japan*

The number of daily new cases has stayed around 2,900 in Japan since late last week. As of December 15, seven prefectures have been at the highest-level alert for their healthcare system, indicating a serious disruption of regular medical services caused by COVID-19. The Tokyo metropolitan government has asked hospitals to increase the number of beds allocated for seriously ill COVID-19 patients by 50 to 250.<sup>190</sup> A renovated medical facility designed to exclusively treat COVID-19 patients with mild or moderate symptoms opened in Tokyo on December 16.<sup>191</sup> The metropolitan government has started offering free hotel rooms over the New Year to people who have lost their homes.<sup>192</sup> Japan's health ministry has suggested that the screening of the Pfizer vaccine will be fast-tracked. Local governments are ordered to prepare for the vaccination of medical workers, potentially beginning in February 2021.<sup>193</sup> The government will suspend its domestic travel campaign between December 28, 2020 and January 11, 2021. Authorities have urged residents of Tokyo and Nagoya to refrain from travelling.<sup>194</sup>

### *South Korea*

Facing its largest outbreak since the start of the pandemic, South Korea has been reporting more than 1,000 new cases per day since December 16. The government has been hesitant to move to its most restrictive social distancing rules, which would close more than 2 million shops and facilities nationwide. An emergency order was issued last week mandating that about 40 private general hospitals, as well as state-run university hospitals, allocate at least 1% of their beds to critical COVID-19 patients.<sup>195</sup> A total of 77 students and four officers from the military nursing academy were sent to COVID-19 treatment centers on December 18.<sup>196</sup> Meanwhile, 960 additional soldiers and 41 medical staff will be dispatched to the Greater Seoul Region to facilitate testing over the coming three weeks. Several military hospitals have started to admit COVID-19 patients.<sup>197</sup> The city of Seoul will be testing all workers at high-risk facilities, including courier companies, nursing homes, and public transportation.<sup>198</sup> South Korea has extended its special advisory against overseas travel until January 16.

### *New Zealand*

There are no active domestic cases in New Zealand. The government has announced additional funding for its COVID-19 response, allocating \$1.1 billion until June 2022 to bolster testing and contact tracing. It has also allocated \$1.7 billion for government-managed isolation following a report that identified failings with its testing strategy for border staff.<sup>199</sup> The health ministry has outlined its plan to cope with a possible resurgence, which advises different actions based on three scenarios with different risks of virus exposure. People could be asked to stay at home again in the worst-case scenario.<sup>200</sup> Another 18.32 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been secured from AstraZeneca and Novavax, enabling the government to offer every New Zealander free vaccination. The expectation is that the first vaccines will be delivered to front-line workers as early as in the second quarter of 2021.<sup>201</sup>

### *Australia*

A new outbreak in New South Wales has interrupted the reopening process in Australia. A localized lockdown has been placed on the Northern Beaches area from December 19 to December 23. Residents are asked to stay home and not travel out of the area; no entrance to the area is permitted without a valid reason. Hospitality venues will close except for takeaway services, and gyms, places of worship and function centres will close. Local residents are strongly advised to wear a mask while indoors. The premier of New South Wales has urged residents of Sydney to increase their mask wearing.<sup>202</sup> Further restrictions have also been introduced for residents of Greater Sydney from December 21. No more than 10 people are allowed to gather at private homes. Hospitality venues and places of worship will face stricter density requirements and a 300-person capacity limit. Residents are urged not to visit residential aged-care facilities, disability services or vulnerable people unless necessary.<sup>203</sup> All other states except for South Australia have imposed new border restrictions on the Northern Beaches, Sydney, or New South Wales as a whole.<sup>204</sup>

### *Turkey*

On December 16, Turkey recorded 29,718 new cases of COVID-19, including 4,893 symptomatic patients -- according to Health Ministry data.<sup>205</sup> Talks are underway to increase the number of COVID-19 vaccines to be delivered to Turkey, with the country also looking at alternatives to secure injections. Turkey has already signed a deal to buy at least 50 million doses of an experimental vaccine being developed by China's Sinovac. Vaccinations are likely to start at the end of December or in the first week of January 2021.<sup>206</sup>

### *Israel*

The number of daily new cases has gone up to almost 3,000 in Israel at the end of last week. While the health ministry has pushed for the suspension of commercial activities and remote learning for all grades above kindergarten in areas with high morbidity, the cabinet has yet to reach an agreement on any additional restrictions.<sup>207</sup> The nationwide vaccination campaign began on December 20: prioritizing medical staff, at-risk populations and those over 60. By December 20, nearly 170,000 people had made vaccination appointments. The high volume of appointments almost crashed the ministry's call centers.<sup>208</sup> The health ministry is reportedly aiming to vaccinate about 60% of the population by the end of the first quarter of 2021. Entry to Israel has now been barred for all foreign citizens arriving from the UK, Denmark and South Africa -- where new mutations of COVID-19 have been recorded. Israelis returning from these countries have been ordered to isolate in quarantine hotels.<sup>209</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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