

PEARL

**POLICY, ELECTIONS &
REPRESENTATION LAB**



Weekly COVID Update:

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

December 7, 2020

**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)**

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Foreword

Canada, like many countries around the world, is beginning to reopen its economy. At the same time, we are still confronting a serious public health threat in the SARS-CoV-2 virus and in COVID-19.

How are we reopening, compared to other countries? And how are we doing as a country at maintaining social distancing and the public support and attention necessary to sustain the fight against COVID-19?

On our Dashboard, we present unique quantitative data on:

- The openness of the economy on nine different dimensions in 52 different jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories.
- Trends in social distancing in Canada.
- Trends in social media attention to COVID-19 and selected other topics.
- Trends in support for federal, provincial, and local government management of COVID-19.

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

Our data are updated weekly. You can subscribe to a weekly update by visiting our website: www.reopeningaftercovid.com.

Please direct any questions or comments to peter.loewen@utoronto.ca.

Data Visualizations from Dashboard

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

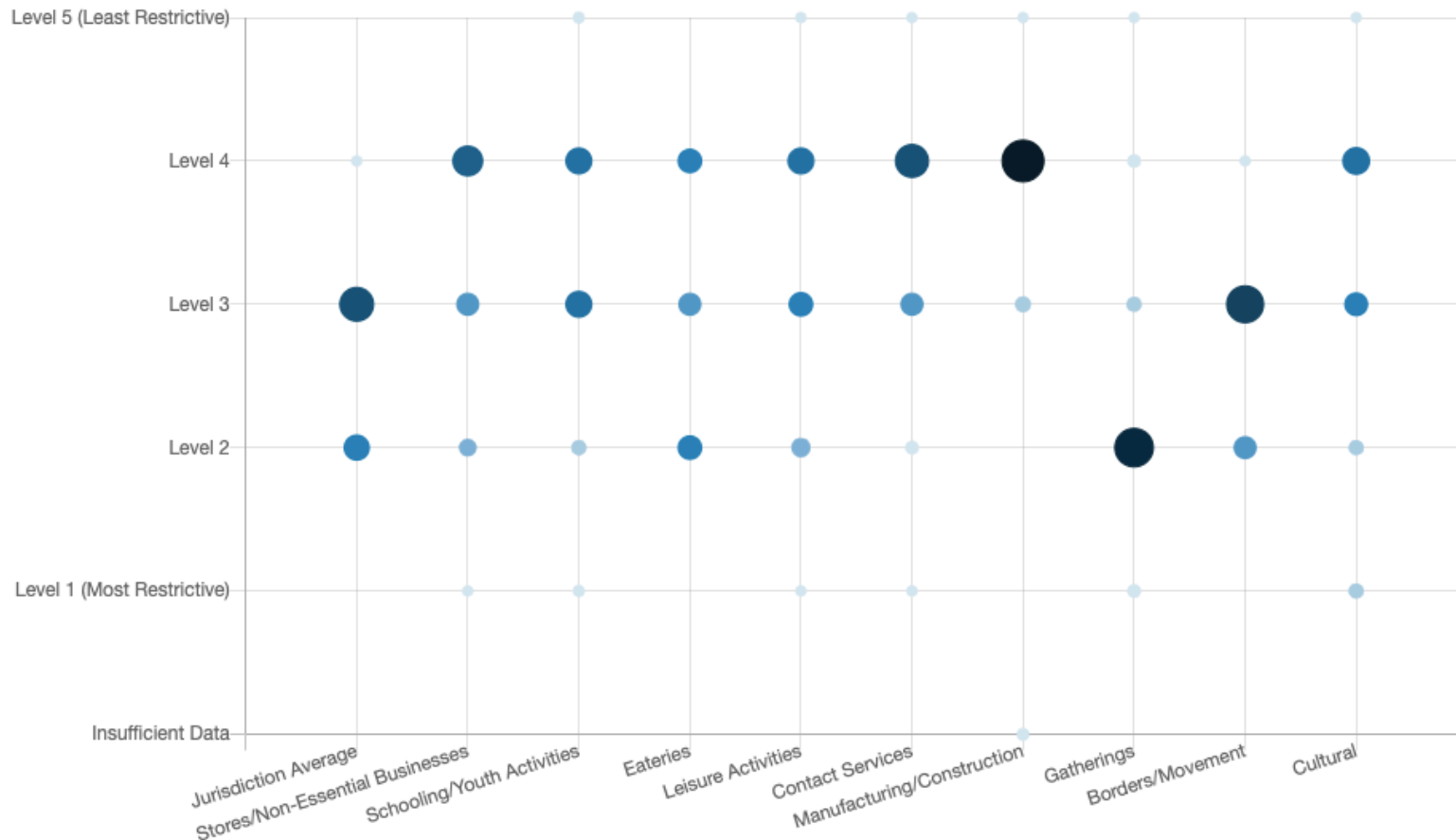


Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of December 7. The reopening policies of 52 jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories. For each jurisdiction, we classify a total of 9 different sectors: Stores/Non-Essential Businesses, Schooling/Youth Activities, Eateries, Leisure Activities, Contact Services, Manufacturing/Construction, Gatherings, Borders/Movement, and Cultural. Each sector is assigned a level of reopening from Level 1 (Complete Lockdown) to Level 5 (Unrestricted Access). The larger and darker a dot is, the more jurisdictions are at that level of reopening. For details, see www.reopeningaftercovid.com.

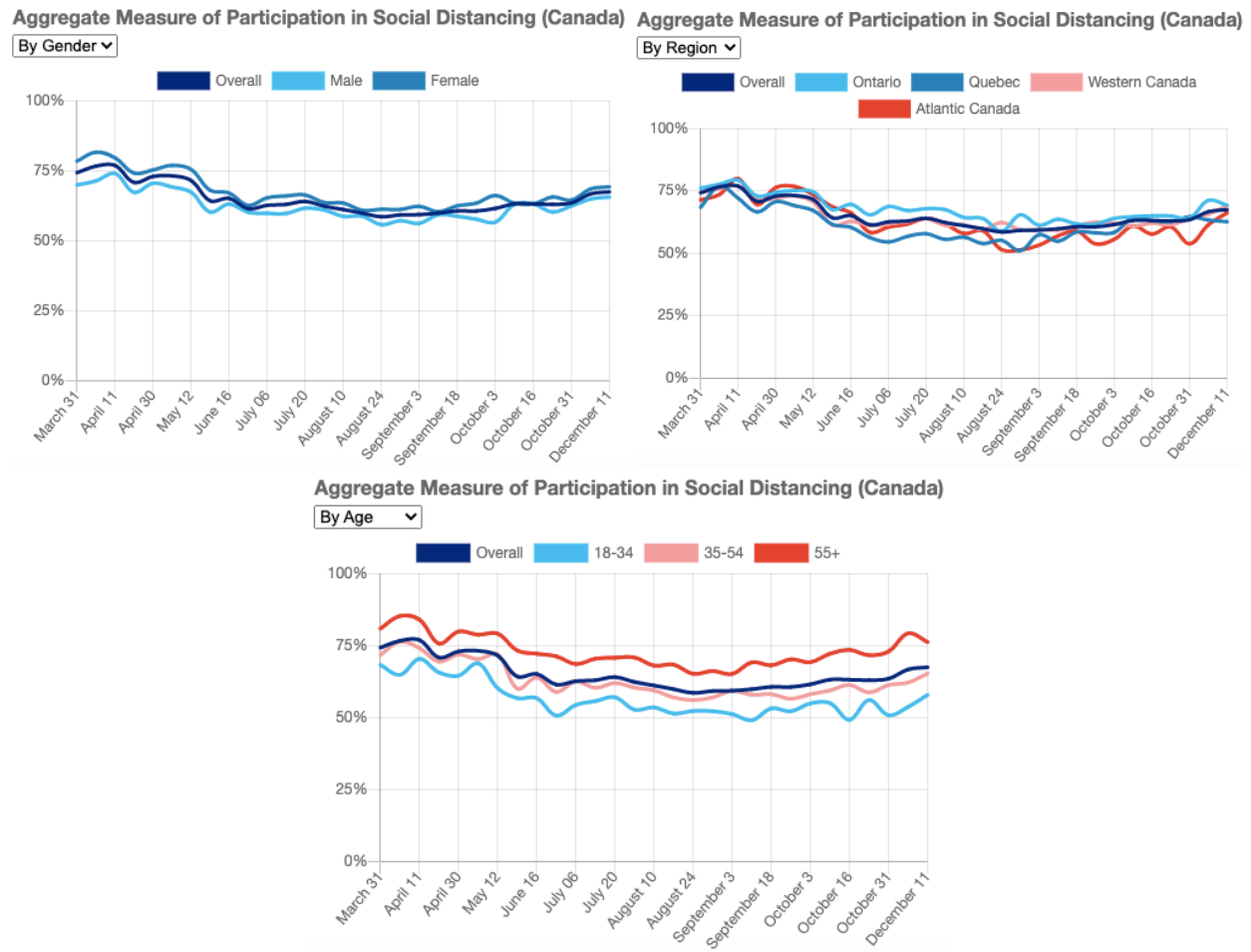


Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada). We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre distance from others; avoided domestic travel; avoided public transit; and avoided the grocery store at peak times. The graph displays the percentage of these measures taken by the average survey participant. The surveys used to collect these data were run in partnership with the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO). Each survey has a sample size of approximately 2,500 people. For each survey, we worked with a leading sample provider to generate a nationally representative, online sample of Canadians. In addition, following data collection, we applied survey weights to each survey so that—within each province—the sample is representative of the population age and gender.

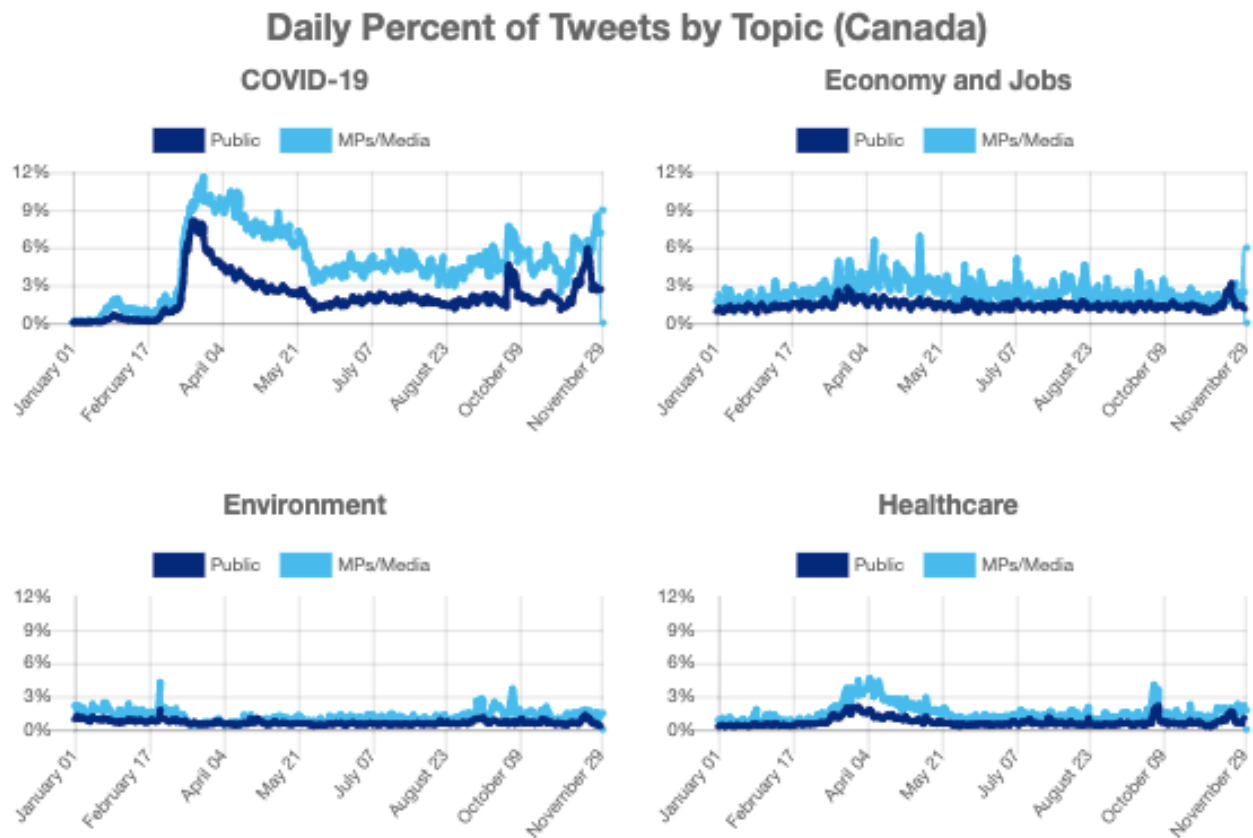


Figure 3 – Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada). The graphs report the percentage of daily tweets containing one or more keywords associated with the particular topic. The results are presented separately for MPs, senators, and journalists, on the one hand, and for the Canadian public, on the other. The Twitter data are provided by the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO). It aims to capture the entire Canadian Twitter conversation. To do so, MEO identified a set of politicians, political journalists, public intellectuals, and Canadian-specific hashtags and collected every Twitter user that touched one of these themes or individuals. MEO then evaluated each individual, looking at their follower or friending behaviour, biographies, self-identified location, and hashtag use and included them in the sample if they were determined to be algorithmically likely to be Canadian. The dataset contains approximately 200,000 tweets a day. The analysis uses a 10% sample of the public’s daily tweets and the full set of daily tweets from MPs, senators, and journalists.

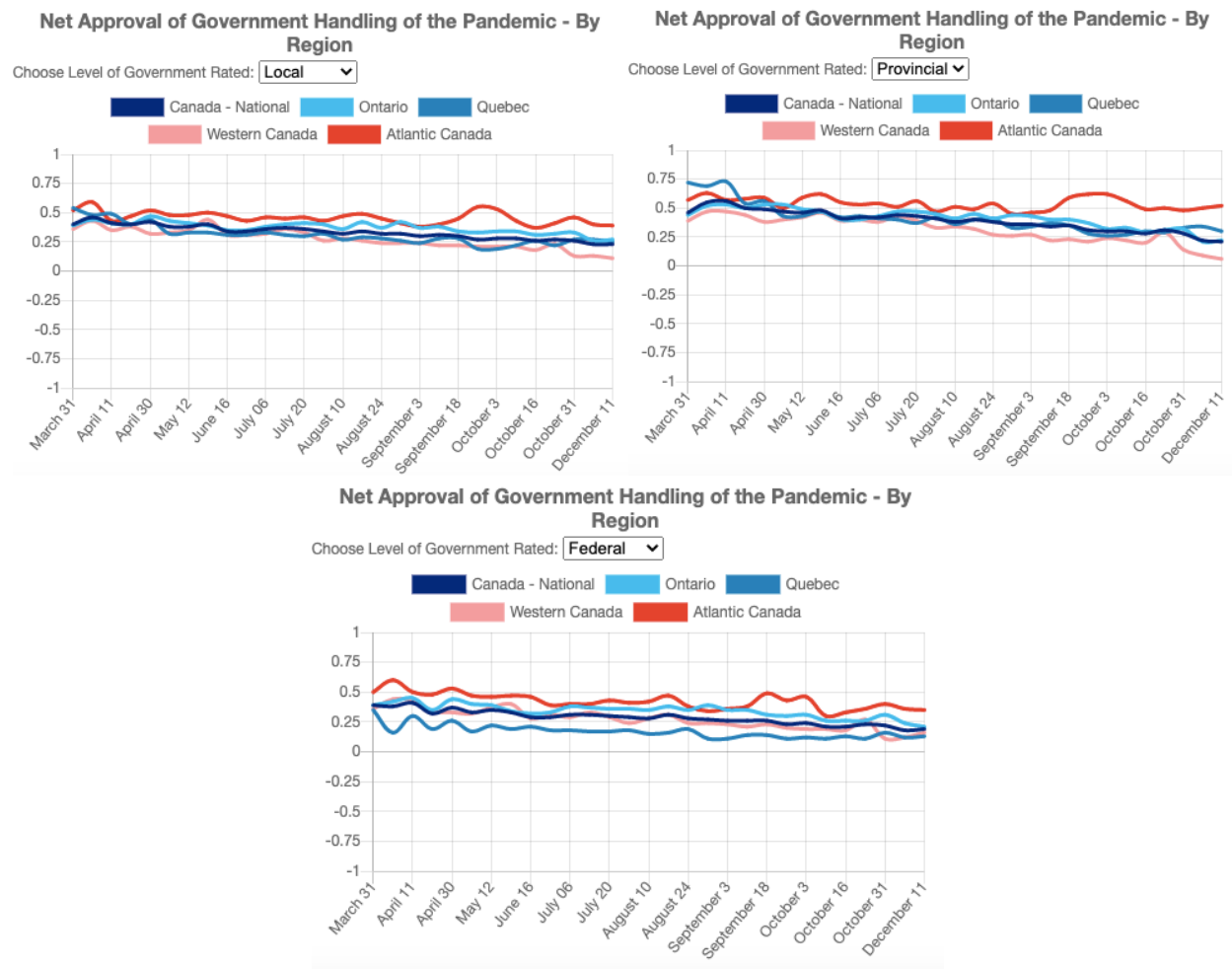


Figure 4 – Net approval of government handling of the pandemic by region. We asked Canadians whether they approved of how each level of government (the federal government, their provincial government, and their local government) was handling the coronavirus pandemic so far. To obtain a net approval score, participants' answers were coded as follows: strongly approve (1); somewhat approve (0.5); neither approve, nor disapprove (0); somewhat disapprove (-0.5); and strongly disapprove (-1). The graph displays the average score. The surveys used to collect these data were run in partnership with the Media Ecosystem Observatory (MEO). Each survey has a sample size of approximately 2,500 people. For each survey, we worked with a leading sample provider to generate a nationally representative, online sample of Canadians. In addition, following data collection, we applied survey weights to each survey so that—within each province—the sample is representative of the population age and gender.

Individual OECD Country Profiles

THE AMERICAS

Canada

→ *Alberta*

“Alberta continues to set new daily infection records and leads Canada in the number of active cases per capita.”^{1A} On November 24, the province introduced restrictions on social gatherings and group fitness activities. Schooling was moved online for students in grades 7 to 12. Masks were made mandatory in indoor workplaces in Edmonton and Calgary. Restaurants and bars remain open with restrictions and retail businesses are open with a capacity limit of 25%.^{1B} The province has requested additional resources from the federal government and the Canadian Red Cross to help staff field hospitals and offset the strain COVID-19 is having on the healthcare system. Critics are calling on the provincial government to implement stricter measures related to eateries and schools and to adopt the national contact tracing app -- which has not been adopted despite major contact tracing issues. Eighty-five percent of the cases in Alberta have no known source.^{1C}

→ *British Columbia*

The number of daily new cases in British Columbia has dropped slightly over the past week to around 700, lower than the infection rate experienced two weeks ago. On December 5, Fraser Health changed its exposure notifications for school communities: a letter will now be sent out “specifically informing people in a class whether they have been exposed or not.”¹ All current province-wide restrictions will remain in effect until December 7. All indoor adult team sports are now prohibited.²

→ *Manitoba*

On December 4, health officials in Manitoba reported 320 new infections.³ The provincial government announced an extension to the province’s state of emergency by another 30 days. Since Manitoba first entered a state of emergency on March 20, the province has extended it eight times. Manitoba’s top doctor says an announcement on the province’s plans to extend the current public health orders around COVID-19 should come early next week.⁴ The government is also instituting two weeks of remote learning for students in grades 7 through 12 -- following the holiday break -- in an effort to prevent COVID-19 cases. The mandatory move to at-home learning for older students will start January 4. Parents of students in kindergarten to grade 6 can also move their kids to remote learning over the same time period if they wish.⁵

→ *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported a total of 81 active cases on December 7⁶, down from 119 one week ago.⁷ As of December 7, Zones 1 (Moncton) and 3 (Fredericton) have been moved back to the “yellow” alert level along with most of the province. Zone 2 (St. John) remains at the “orange” level due to the higher number of active cases and risk of transmission in the region.⁸ At the yellow alert level, masks are required mainly in public, indoor spaces, while orange-level restrictions mandate the use of masks in both indoor and outdoor settings.⁹ Additional orange-level restrictions include a limit of 50 participants for outdoor gatherings.¹⁰

→ *Newfoundland and Labrador*

Newfoundland and Labrador remains at Alert Level 2. On December 4, the province reported 30 active cases of COVID-19. Effective December 1, documentation will be required for people entering the province.^{10A} The health minister is facing criticism from opposition parties after attending a political fundraising event hours after urging the public to be cautious about holiday gatherings.^{10B}

→ *Northwest Territories*

No new cases have been recorded in the Northwest Territories over the past week -- aside from one mine worker who came from outside the territory. The state of emergency in Yellowknife has been extended through December 18. The territorial government has made changes to its isolation centre payment policies. Starting on January 5, 2021, the costs for isolation centre stays related to discretionary or personal travel will no longer be covered by the NWT government. Residents are encouraged to make their own arrangements for self-isolation in private residences or other paid accommodations. Enforcement of behaviour protocols in self-isolation centers will be stepped up.¹¹ No significant changes to restrictions have been announced over the past week. NWT remains at phase 2 of its reopening plan.

→ *Nova Scotia*

Nova Scotia reported a total of 88 active cases on December 6¹², down from 126 one week ago.¹³ The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and neighbouring Hants County, the province's hardest hit regions, have remained under stricter public health rules -- in addition to the stricter province-wide restrictions that were originally introduced on November 26.¹⁴ Nova Scotians are advised to avoid all non-essential travel to the Halifax area and to other Atlantic provinces.¹⁵ Public gatherings in the HRM are limited to 5 people, and catering establishments are restricted to take-out and delivery services.¹⁶ Province-wide measures are mostly advisory in nature, but do include a ban nursing homes visits -- with the exception of volunteers.¹⁷

→ *Nunavut*

There are 51 active cases in Nunavut, 49 of which are in Arviat and 2 in Whale Cove. All cases in Rankin Inlet and Sanikiluaq have been resolved.¹⁸ Public health officials said that "a handful" of Nunavut residents have had to be medically evacuated to Winnipeg because of COVID-19 over the past week.¹⁹ Nunavut lifted its territory-wide lockdown order on December 2. Restaurants and bars have reopened, while individual physical activity is now permitted at gyms and swimming pools. The outdoor gathering limit was raised to 50 people; the indoor gathering limit is 15 people. Cultural venues and places of worship may have up to 50 people or 50% capacity, whichever is lower. All schools have returned to in-person learning. All daycares, parks, playgrounds, offices, and personal care services have reopened. Arviat remains in lockdown and under travel restrictions, while restrictions are slightly stricter in Rankin Inlet and Whale Cove than in the rest of the territory.²⁰ A number of students in Arviat are still waiting on computers intended for distance learning.²¹

→ *Ontario*

Ontario's 7-day rolling average has increased to 1,820 cases per day and the province saw record-high case numbers for December 5, 6 and 7.²² Three more regions in Ontario are facing tougher public health restrictions as of December 7, but none are joining Toronto or Peel at the "lockdown" level. Middlesex-London and Thunder Bay are now in the Orange-Restrict level, while Haliburton, Kawartha, and Pine Ridge are moving to the Yellow-Protect level.²³ The differences between the levels are mostly related to the number of people in food and drink establishments. For example, the number of customers allowed in restaurants is unlimited in Yellow-Protect, 50 customers in Orange-Restrict, and ten in Red-Control.²⁴

→ *Prince Edward Island*

On December 4, Prince Edward Island reported five active cases of COVID-19. The province will not rejoin the Atlantic bubble until at least December 21.^{24A} Fifty five new front-line positions will be added to schools across the province to provide support to students and staff.^{24B}

→ *Quebec*

On December 5, Quebec reported 2,031 new COVID-19 cases and 11 deaths.²⁵ The premier announced that gatherings in "red zones" over the Christmas holidays will be prohibited.²⁶ Additional regions of the eastern Bas Saint-Laurent area entered the red, or maximum, alert level on December 4.²⁷ On December 4, new

rules were introduced for malls that tie customer capacity to the available surface area of businesses. Stores are required to enforce social distancing in the store and in lines outside. The fines for noncompliance are between \$1,000 and \$6,000.²⁸

→ *Saskatchewan*

There are 4,550 active cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan. The province has reported an average of 272 new cases per day over the past week.²⁹ The premier hinted that the government is considering easing some restrictions over the holiday season in order to allow residents to see their families. However, the premier acknowledged that the government would only do this if the restrictions currently in place seem to be working. The leader of the opposition said that the premier missed his opportunity to introduce restrictions to lower the infection rate, and there is nothing in the data to suggest that cases will fall in time for the holidays.³⁰ The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation is calling for more support for distance learning and more predictable thresholds for changing restrictions -- as hundreds of students across the province have been forced to self-isolate.³¹

→ *Yukon*

The total number of cases in Yukon has continued to increase slowly over the past week. The territory had 12 active cases as of December 4. Due to fears of possible community transmission, the government is now testing some individuals even if they are asymptomatic.³² Starting December 7, restaurants and bars are required to maintain a daily list of patrons to assist with contact tracing. The records will be kept for 30 days.³³ Masks became mandatory in all indoor public spaces on December 1. The gathering limit of 10 people indoors and 50 outdoors remains unchanged.

The United States

→ *California*

On December 4, California reported 25,000 new cases and 209 deaths in the previous day.³⁴ Approximately 33% of California's hospitalizations are COVID-19 cases.³⁵ The average number of cases for the last week was 16,821 cases per day, which is a 60% increase compared to two weeks prior.³⁶ Since ICUs in several regions have little available space, on December 6, Southern California and San Joaquin Valley's stay-at-home orders began: closing bars, hair salons, and barbers, and only permitting take-out and delivery.³⁷ San Francisco Bay area also began a lockdown, which will be from December 6 to January 4.³⁸ Central Valley also began a similar lockdown. The lockdowns are anticipated last a minimum of three weeks, which will include the Christmas holidays, but supermarkets and shopping centers may operate at 20% capacity.³⁹ California's lockdowns come into effect in regions that have less than 15% of available ICU capacity; the lockdown closes many businesses like sports, salons, and in-person dining, but schools with waivers can remain open for in-person learning.⁴⁰ Religious services and beaches remain open. Individual and outdoor fitness classes are permitted, but gatherings are prohibited.⁴¹

→ *Illinois*

Illinois' seven-day statewide test positivity from November 29 to December 5 was 11.8%.⁴² Currently, 5,160 people in Illinois are reported to be hospitalized with COVID-19. Of those, 1,103 patients are in the ICU and 643 are on ventilators.⁴³ Deaths have exponentially increased as Illinois moved past a total of 13,000 COVID-19 deaths on December 5 -- just eight days after marking 12,000 deaths. Funeral homes are reaching capacity.⁴⁴ Statewide restrictions -- including closure of all cultural institutions (such as museums, casinos and zoos), banning indoor gatherings, teleworking if possible, and grocery stores at 50% capacity -- remain in place.⁴⁵ Illinois plans to distribute its initial allocation of roughly 109,000 doses of a new COVID-19 vaccine to the 50 counties across the state with the highest death rates from the virus.⁴⁶

→ *Michigan*

Michigan's seven-day moving average is still hovering around 7,000 new cases per day.⁴⁷ Hospitalizations and deaths have increased steadily for the last five weeks. Current restrictions include halting in-person dining at bars and restaurants, moving high school and college-level classes online, and closing movie theaters, bowling alleys and other entertainment venues. These restrictions, as part of a "COVID-19 three week pause," expire on December 9.⁴⁸ When the governor announced the 3-week pause right before Thanksgiving, she set a goal of lowering the positive test rate to 3%. The current positivity rate has actually increased, breaking 16% on December 2. The state had not yet announced a decision on an extension as of December 7.⁴⁹ Michigan hospitals and health systems are urging the state to extend the restrictions through the holiday season.⁵⁰

→ *New York*

New York's positivity rate is 6.22% in "focus zone" areas and 4.71% statewide.⁵¹ Hospitalization and ICU occupancy rates are increasing, as are deaths, but the governor is continuing his micro-cluster strategy. A survey showed that more than half of New York City firefighters would refuse the vaccine.⁵² As of December 7, some NYC schools are phasing out hybrid learning and moving toward resuming in-person classes on December 7.⁵³

→ *Texas*

On December 1, Texas reported 15,182 new cases and 170 deaths.⁵⁴ Over the past 14 days, hospitalizations in Houston increased approximately 30% according to the Texas Medical Center.⁵⁵ After one week of COVID-19 cases occupying over 15% of hospital capacity, additional restrictions are taking effect in the North Texas region. Elective surgeries will be postponed. Restaurants, stores, and gyms will need to reduce capacity and bars will close.⁵⁶ Statewide, approximately 2,900 bars, distilleries and breweries reclassified as restaurants, allowing them to remain open.⁵⁷ Approximately 49,000 COVID-19 vaccine doses are going to Harris County, 27,000 to Dallas County, 18,000 to Tarrant County, 28,000 to Bexar County, and 13,000 to Bexar County for health care workers and vulnerable groups first.⁵⁸ Long-term care home residents were added to the first-tier list of COVID-19 vaccine access.

Mexico

On December 4, Mexico reported 12,127 new cases.⁵⁹ Although the Mexico City government said that if hospital occupancy passed 54% they would impose a stay-at-home order, the government has not yet issued that order -- despite the criteria being met.⁶⁰ As of December 7, only Baja California and Zacatecas are in red, the most restrictive reopening category.⁶¹ The Mexico City government is encouraging people to stay home and is decreasing the number of work hours for public servants.⁶² The Mexican government and Pfizer made a deal to produce and distribute 3.4 million COVID-19 vaccines. The government hopes to have 250,000 doses by December, but the first vaccines will be for frontline medical workers and vulnerable groups.⁶³ The government is encouraging people to cancel their Christmas plans this year.⁶⁴ Hospitals are anticipating having to increase capacity and staff during the winter holidays.⁶⁵ The Mexican president referred to politicians who impose lockdowns and curfews as behaving like dictators.⁶⁶

Chile

On December 5, Chile reported 1,533 new cases in the previous 24 hours.⁶⁷ In anticipation of a spike in cases after the holidays, the health minister proposed a plan to add 1,000 more hospital beds. The government anticipates between 3,000 and 9,000 new cases per day after the holidays. The president extended the state of emergency to allow the government to impose lockdowns and curfews. Mass gatherings will not be permitted across Chile between December 24 at 8 pm and December 25 at 5 am, although social gatherings of up to 30 people will be permitted. Mass gatherings will again be banned between 8 pm on December 31 and 5 am on January 2.⁶⁸

WESTERN EUROPE

France

France's 7-day moving average of new cases has decreased since last week and is now plateauing at around 10,500 cases per day.⁶⁹ France's second stage of reopening is set to begin on December 15 -- with lockdown measures set to be lifted and replaced with a curfew. However, France must reach an average of 5,000 new daily COVID-19 cases and at most 2,500-3,000 patients in the ICU to move to the second stage; currently, these metrics are at 10,500 and 3,200, respectively.⁷⁰ Public health experts warned that the country is not on track to hit the December 15 goal. The French government is facing a large anti-vaccination movement: only 53% of the population say they would get vaccinated -- one of the lowest uptake rates in Europe.⁷¹ Vaccine rollout is set to begin in January. Nursing homes will be first in line before the programme is extended in February to the vulnerable elderly and those with underlying health conditions. By spring, the vaccine is expected to be available to the rest of the population. Vaccination will be free for everyone and will not be mandatory.⁷²

Germany

Germany's 7-day R-value increased above the 1.0 target and is now 1.10. The country's 7-day moving average of new cases increased slightly to 18,500.⁷³ Numerous clusters have been identified in private households and nursing and long-term care homes.⁷⁴ Although the lockdown-lite restrictions fended off an exponential surge, experts and politicians say that they are insufficient to decrease the number of cases.⁷⁵ The state premier of Bavaria urged Germany's federal and state leaders to hold another top-level meeting before Christmas to discuss tightening restrictions. Currently, the lockdown-lite measures will remain in effect till January 10, with a reprieve during the Christmas period that lifts the five-person maximum for private gatherings to ten.⁷⁶ The health minister warned that the rollout of vaccinations will be limited in the first few months, estimating that there would be three million doses in January. Health workers, the elderly and those at high risk of severe complications from COVID-19 will get those doses. The minister expects that by summer it would be possible to carry out vaccinations in doctors' clinics and that the country could be "out of the woods" by the fall of 2021.⁷⁷

Belgium

On December 3, Belgium reported 3,040 new daily cases of COVID-19. In Belgium, all major COVID-19 indicators continue to decrease. The government has agreed on a threshold that must be met before easing can occur -- including getting daily number of infections below 800 for 14 days and a maximum number of hospital admissions per day of 75. The most recent measures will be in effect until January 15 and include the reopening of non-essential businesses, museums, and swimming pools.⁷⁸

Netherlands

During the week of December 1, 33,949 new cases were recorded. The positivity rate fell from 12% to 11.1%. Infections have declined across nearly all age groups, though the 13-17 group still has the highest rate. There was a slight increase among children under 13 years of age.⁷⁹ Effective December 1, the Netherlands has made it compulsory to wear a face mask in all indoor public space. It is one of the last countries in Europe to introduce such a measure. The rule will be applicable to those over the age of 13 in all public buildings such as shops, railway stations and hairdressers. It will remain in place for at least three months; those who ignore it facing a fine of up to 95 euros.⁸⁰ The government is aiming to start vaccinating people in the first week of January 2021.⁸¹

Spain

On December 5, Spain reported 8,745 new cases and 214 deaths, which placed the country eighth for the most cases globally and ninth for the most deaths.⁸² Catalonia will not ease its lockdown on December 7 as originally planned because of the worsening COVID-19 situation. This has led some ski slopes to postpone reopening.⁸³ The limit for Christmas and New Year's Eve parties will be ten instead of six people.⁸⁴ The curfew between December 24 and December 31 will be 1:30 am instead of 11 pm.⁸⁵ Inter-regional movement is banned between December 23 and January 6 with the exception of visiting family, although no enforcement plans were released.⁸⁶ Regions are permitted to implement stricter regulations on movement.⁸⁷ Rapid tests will be available in Spanish pharmacies soon.⁸⁸

The United Kingdom

The UK's 7-day rolling average has held steady at approximately 15,000 new cases per day.⁸⁹ On December 2, a nationwide lockdown in England -- which closed pubs, restaurants and stores selling items deemed to be non-essential -- was lifted.⁹⁰ A tougher three-tiered system of local restrictions came into force in England.⁹¹ Most of England is in Tier 3 (Very High Alert), where non-essential shops in all areas can reopen, as can gyms, hairdressers and other personal care businesses, but restaurants, pubs, bars, museums and other hospitality/cultural establishments must remain closed.⁹² The end of lockdown came as Britain became the first country to roll out the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine on December 8. In week one, 800,000 vaccines will be administered from 50 hospitals. The National Health Service is giving top priority to people over age 80, frontline health-care workers and care home staff and residents.⁹³ Impending Brexit negotiations will impact the rollout because the vaccines are manufactured and stored in Belgium (EU).⁹⁴ In response to the anti-vaccination movement, the Queen and Prince Phillip will receive the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine within weeks due to their advanced ages.⁹⁵

Ireland

A total of 265 new cases were recorded on December 4, along with six additional deaths.⁹⁶ A COVID-19 vaccination programme is likely to be rolled out across the country in the new year. Pfizer/BioNTech sought market authorisation for their COVID-19 vaccine on December 1 from the European Medical Agency (EMA). A vaccine can only be rolled out in a European Union country if it is approved by the EMA. The government said that the infrastructure to store the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine at -70C is already being set up.⁹⁷

Luxembourg

On December 4, the ministry of health recorded 588 new cases of COVID-19. The effective reproduction rate is 0.91.⁹⁸ The government stated that it was too early to make a decision on whether the current restrictions will be lifted after December 15. The government is expected to meet next week to discuss the partial lockdown's effects and decide on a process for Christmas. Vaccines will be rolled out in a few months; it will not be obligatory. The vaccines will be free and issued through an invitation system similar to that of the large-scale testing programme. Priority for the vaccine will be given to staff in the healthcare sector, including care home employees. This group will be made up of those working in close proximity to the most vulnerable members of society and will cover roles from doctors to catering staff. The second priority group will be made up of the vulnerable and elderly and will include retirement home residents.⁹⁹

Portugal

On December 2, Portugal recorded 3,384 new cases of COVID-19.¹⁰⁰ Portugal will ease restrictions over the Christmas period to allow people to visit loved ones, but measures will be reimposed a few days later

to limit New Year's Eve parties. While a ban on domestic travel will not be imposed between December 23 and 26, the prime minister urged people to avoid spending too long in large festive gatherings without wearing a face mask. For New Year's Eve, street parties will be banned and outdoor gatherings will be limited to a maximum of six people. People will still be allowed to meet at each other's houses as long as they stay in their own municipalities and return home before the 2 am curfew.¹⁰¹ Portugal is aiming to vaccinate almost 1 million people between January and April. The priority group for vaccinations will include 400,000 people over age 50 who have illnesses that make them vulnerable to severe COVID-19 symptoms, 300,000 frontline health care workers and emergency responders, and 250,000 people living and working in care homes. A second phase, covering 1.8 million people, would vaccinate those over 65-years-old as well as people between 50 and 65 who have health problems. The third phase will cover the rest of Portugal's population.¹⁰²

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria

On December 3, Austria reported 3,969 new daily cases of COVID-19. Effective December 7, several changes will be made to Austria's current COVID-19 measures. People will now be permitted to leave their homes for non-essential purposes, but a nighttime curfew will take effect from 8 pm to 6 am. Gatherings of up to 6 adults and 6 children from a maximum of two households are now permitted. Over the Christmas holidays, exceptions will be made to allow up to 10 adults from any number of households to gather, not including children. Schools and kindergartens will reopen but upper schools and universities will remain online. In school, masks must be worn by anyone over 10 years old. Gyms, sporting facilities, and eateries remain closed. Non-essential shops, contact services, museums, and libraries may reopen, but only one customer is allowed per 10 square metres and masks are mandatory. Despite pressure from neighbouring countries to ban skiing over the holidays, Austria has decided to reopen ski hills effective December 24. However, hotels will be closed until January 7 -- so only day trips are possible. Additionally, quarantine requirements have been extended to 10 days for people arriving in Austria from high-risk areas.

Greece

On December 3, Greece reported 1,882 daily new cases of COVID-19. The government has decided to extend the existing measures until December 14 due to rising infections, hospitalizations, and deaths. However, stores selling seasonal goods may reopen on December 7 and supermarkets may resume selling holiday items.¹⁰³ The government has extended restrictions on domestic and international travel until December 7 and December 14, respectively.¹⁰⁴ The development ministry announced the country's first locally produced rapid antigen test, which is aimed at improving health authorities' ability to conduct mass testing.¹⁰⁵

Italy

In Italy, new infections and hospital admissions have slowed but the country is reporting the most daily COVID-19 fatalities in Europe.¹⁰⁶ New restrictions will be in effect from December 21 to January 6 in efforts to avoid a rise in infections over the holidays. Movement between regions will only be permitted for essential travel. On Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Year's Day, people are not permitted to leave their towns. During this time, a 14-day quarantine will be in effect for anyone entering the country and ski resorts will be closed.¹⁰⁷ In a joint statement, regional governments were critical over the lack of consultation by the federal government about the new measures and the impacts they are having on families and small businesses. There has been tension between the federal government and regional authorities since the pandemic began.¹⁰⁸

Slovenia

On December 4, Slovenia reported a 7-day rolling average of 1,461 daily infections and 1,289 people in hospital. The government has adopted a five-tiered strategy for easing restrictions, which includes black, red, orange, yellow, and green tiers. The strategy is based on a 7-day rolling average of daily infections and the number of COVID-19 hospitalizations. Currently, the country is in the black tier and all existing restrictions have been extended. As the number of daily infections and hospitalizations decline, the country will begin moving toward the green tier, in which all restrictions are lifted but with precautions in place.¹⁰⁹ The government has cut funding for the Slovenia Press Agency.¹¹⁰ In the past, the prime minister has expressed dissatisfaction with the work of the agency. The opposition is calling on the government to withdraw its decision.

Switzerland

On December 4, Switzerland reported 4,382 new daily cases of COVID-19.¹¹¹ Swiss ski resorts will remain open -- putting the country on a “collision course with Italy, Germany, and France, who want to prevent their citizens from skiing abroad.”¹¹² However, measures such as capacity restrictions or the early closing of eateries should be put in place in cantons to avoid large social gatherings.¹¹³ Beginning December 11, Graubünden will become the first Swiss canton to carry out voluntary mass testing. The pilot project will take place in three regions and aims to contain the spread and save the winter season in the canton’s tourism and ski regions.¹¹⁴

EASTERN EUROPE

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic reported 2,654 new cases of COVID-19 on December 6 -- up from the 2-month low of 1,074 cases on November 29, but below its 7-day moving average of 3,872 cases.¹¹⁵ The country will remain in a state of emergency until at least December 20 as Czech officials attempt to gradually ease restrictions throughout the country.¹¹⁶ On November 30, the country moved from level 4 (red) to level 3 (orange) on its alert system -- one week after transitioning from level 5 (purple) to 4.¹¹⁷ As of December 7, high school and first-year university students are permitted to return to the classroom at the discretion of their school directors. Ski resorts have been given clearance to open for the season, subject to certain restrictions.¹¹⁸

Hungary

The Hungarian prime minister announced on December 7 that the country will remain in lockdown until at least January 11 as new cases continue to emerge across the country.¹¹⁹ On the same day, Hungary reported 3,870 new cases and 116 deaths, with nearly 8,000 people currently hospitalized due to the virus.¹²⁰ A number of restrictions introduced on November 11 will be extended until the new year -- including: a curfew from 7 pm to 5 am, a complete ban on all public gatherings, the limitation of catering and restaurant services to take-out and delivery, the closure of all leisure facilities (including swimming pools, gyms, and spas) and the transition of all secondary and post-secondary education to remote learning.¹²¹ The prime minister has also urged Hungarians to refrain from holding New Year’s Eve parties and street balls.¹²²

Latvia

Latvia reported 930 new cases of COVID-19 on December 3, a new single-day record for the country.¹²³ On December 2, Latvian officials extended the country’s state of emergency -- first declared on November

9 -- until January 11, prohibiting all public events as well as the operation of all entertainment venues, bars, skating rinks, cultural sites, museums, and food service venues until 2021.¹²⁴ Additional restrictions include a limit of 2 people per group at public gatherings, and the mandatory use of masks for all students, teachers, and staff of primary, secondary, and post-secondary schools.¹²⁵

Lithuania

Lithuania reported 4,551 new cases of COVID-19 on December 3 -- a new single-day record for the country and nearly twice its previous record of 2,338 new cases on November 27.¹²⁶ On November 25, the Lithuanian government decided to extend the country-wide restrictions, originally set to expire on November 29, until December 17 -- leaving all Lithuanian municipalities in the red “quarantine” zone.¹²⁷ This means that all commercial and non-commercial events remain prohibited in the country, with the exception of high-level professional sports competitions (without spectators) and funerals with a maximum of 10 participants.¹²⁸ Catering establishments are still limited to takeaway or delivery services.¹²⁹ Public gatherings of more than five people remain prohibited, except for family members, and it is mandatory to keep a distance of at least two metres from other people or groups of people.¹³⁰ Pre-school children and primary school pupils can still attend educational establishments, while older students will continue remote learning.¹³¹ Under the new restrictions, Lithuanians will be allowed to visit libraries and museums under strictly defined conditions as of December 10.¹³²

Poland

The spread of COVID-19 continued to slow in Poland last week -- with 9,176 new cases of the virus reported on December 6, the third time that the country’s single-day tally has fallen below 10,000 since October 21.¹³³ Still, all of Poland remains in the “red” zone, which means that all secondary, post-secondary, and primary school students above grade 3 will continue remote learning, cultural events remain limited to fewer than 25 people, all restaurants and catering establishments remain limited to take-out and delivery services, all swimming pools, theme parks, spas, and fitness facilities remain closed, and masks remain mandatory at all times outside of home.¹³⁴ Libraries were permitted to open on November 28, provided that for every person there is at least 15 square metres of space available.¹³⁵ The limit on private gatherings organized at home has also been increased to 5 people.¹³⁶

Slovakia

According to the Slovakian prime minister, the country’s mass-testing and quarantine operation -- in which millions of Slovaks were tested twice over a 3-week period -- has helped to cut the new infections in the country by more than half.¹³⁷ With a total population of 5.5 million, Slovakia tested 3.6 million people during the first weekend of November and moved those testing positive into quarantine.¹³⁸ Slovakia repeated the test for just over 2 million people last weekend, with a much lower infection rate.¹³⁹

NORTHERN EUROPE

Denmark

Denmark reported 1,745 new cases of COVID-19 on December 6 -- the country’s largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic. Hospitalizations are expected to increase significantly over the next week.¹⁴⁰ On December 9, a partial lockdown will be put in place in 38 municipalities across Denmark, including Copenhagen, Aarhus, and Odense. Restaurants and bars can only offer takeout services. All leisure activities and cultural venues must close, though professional sport is exempted from the restrictions. All schools for those in grades 5 and up will move to distance learning, including universities and adult

education. All public sector workers will work from home. The nationwide gathering limit of 10 people, restrictions on alcohol sales, and mask requirements have been extended until the end of February. Local officials had previously introduced stricter restrictions in Copenhagen.¹⁴¹

Estonia

Estonia reported 561 new cases of COVID-19 on December 5 in the country's largest daily increase since the beginning of the pandemic. Health authorities reported a test positivity rate of 8.8% on the same date.¹⁴² As of December 7, the two-week average of new cases has reached 396.62 per 100,000 people.¹⁴³ The government announced that stores and all other indoor public spaces nationwide must limit their capacity to 50%, while entertainment venues without seating must close by 10 pm. Restaurants and bars must also close by 10 pm.¹⁴⁴ Recreational team sports in Ida-Viru County have been suspended, with only individual sessions permitted.¹⁴⁵ The prime minister is in isolation after being deemed a high-risk close contact of an infected individual, though he has since tested negative.¹⁴⁶ Estonia is expected to administer 100,000 vaccinations in the first few months of 2021. Healthcare workers and at-risk groups will be prioritized in the first wave of vaccination.¹⁴⁷

Finland

The number of daily new cases has rapidly increased in Finland over the past two weeks, though hospitalizations have fallen slightly.¹⁴⁸ Most Finnish provinces are in the accelerating or spreading phase of the pandemic. The capacity and operating hours of all bars and restaurants have been limited.¹⁴⁹ Local officials in Helsinki have banned hospital visits except for palliative care, children, and expectant mothers.¹⁵⁰ Public health officials have warned the public that the country is facing a COVID-19 testing shortage and they no longer have the capacity to test asymptomatic people.¹⁵¹ Authorities announced that healthcare workers will be vaccinated in January, followed by at-risk groups in February.¹⁵²

Iceland

On December 7, Iceland reported a two-week average of 55.9 new cases per 100,000 people. The epidemiological situation in Iceland appears to be improving, but officials remain hesitant to ease restrictions. Public health officials announced that all current restrictions will remain in place until at least December 9.¹⁵³ Authorities said that they are planning to vaccinate up to 75% of the country's population by the end of April.¹⁵⁴ Iceland's colour-coded COVID-19 warning system has been officially unveiled, with all regions in the 'red' level. Face masks are required in all indoor public spaces and the public is asked to limit their social contacts. The system is meant to increase the predictability of restrictions for the general public.¹⁵⁵

Norway

On December 4, Norway reported a two-week average of 121 new cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people.¹⁵⁶ Infections, hospitalizations, and deaths have been falling for the past three weeks. Public health officials have decreased their risk assessment from 'high' to 'moderate' but warned of an increasing infection rate due to the holidays.¹⁵⁷ In spite of this warning, authorities said they may raise gathering limits for a few days during the holidays to allow residents to see up to 10 people at their home. At the same time, the government continues to urge Norwegians to limit their social contacts.¹⁵⁸ The government expects most healthcare workers and members of at-risk groups will be vaccinated by the end of March, with the general public following soon after.¹⁵⁹

Sweden

The epidemiological situation in Sweden has stabilized over the past week, though the infection rate remains very high.¹⁶⁰ The majority of patients in the country's ICUs are hospitalized due to COVID-19, though capacity still remains.¹⁶¹ Public health officials said that asymptomatic children should stay home from school if someone in their household tests positive for COVID-19.¹⁶² Upper secondary schools around the country will move to online learning until at least January 6. Exceptions apply for introductory language classes, exams that must be conducted in-person, and classes for those with special needs.¹⁶³ A temporary ban on visits to long-term care facilities in 32 municipalities has been put in place until at least December 12. The ban mostly affects municipalities in the Stockholm region.¹⁶⁴

ASIA/PACIFIC

Japan

The level of daily new cases in Japan remains high, staying above 2,000 for most of the past week. Hospitals across the country are struggling to balance regular services with the surge in COVID-19 infections. The Osaka prefecture declared a state of medical emergency on December 3.¹⁶⁵ The Tokyo metropolitan government is planning to ask medical institutions to secure additional beds for COVID-19 patients.¹⁶⁶ Japan's health ministry is likely to recommend that prefectural governments set criteria for hospitalizing COVID-19 patients to ease the burden on medical facilities.¹⁶⁷ The government is asking people who arrive from overseas to arrange their own vehicles when leaving the airport instead of using public transport. It is also arranging buses to shuttle eligible overseas travellers from the international airports in Haneda and Narita to some hotels in Tokyo.¹⁶⁸ Despite the high level of transmission, the government intends to extend its tourism campaign to the end of June next year. Meanwhile, it is asking people aged 65 or older or anyone with underlying health conditions to avoid travel to and from Tokyo through December 17.¹⁶⁹

South Korea

The number of daily new cases has been steadily increasing in South Korea, topping 600 at the end of last week. As of December 2, the number of people self-isolating at home was at an all-time high of over 70,000. Concerns are mounting over a possible shortage of hospital beds for critical COVID-19 patients. The authorities will designate December 7 to January 3 as a special period to strengthen quarantining amid concerns over year-end gatherings.¹⁷⁰ On December 5, the city of Seoul was placed under a 2-week quasi-curfew between 9 pm and 5 am. Theaters, internet cafes, game arcades, amusement parks, beauty salons, barber shops, and large stores will close. Public transport will operate at reduced capacity. The city lights will be turned off for the first time. All municipal-run facilities will be completely shut down during the same period. Middle and high schools in Seoul have also moved their classes online until December 20.¹⁷¹ On December 8, the entire Greater Seoul Region moved up to Level 2.5 of social distancing requirements. All gatherings of 50 or more people are banned. Gyms, indoor concert venues, karaoke rooms, nightclubs and bars that allow dancing must close. No spectators are allowed at sporting events and religious services may only be held online or by broadcast. All other areas will follow Level 2 social distancing rules.¹⁷²

New Zealand

No new community cases have been recorded in New Zealand over the past week. The managed isolation emergency allocation criteria have been expanded to a two-tiered system, allowing more people with urgent needs to get a place at isolation facilities.¹⁷³ The government is considering long-term funding for the expensive program of government-managed isolation, which is due to go over budget before the end of the year.¹⁷⁴ There continues to be no restrictions on movement, gathering, businesses, or activities in New Zealand.

Australia

Few locally acquired cases have been reported in Australia over the past week. New South Wales has been told to tighten its hotel quarantine measures after overseas travellers accidentally bypassed quarantine and boarded a domestic flight.¹⁷⁵ South Australia and Victoria have started to admit international flights once again. The Victorian government will be introducing legislation on December 8 to charge all returning travellers a quarantine contribution fee.¹⁷⁶ Officials in Victoria also announced further reopening. Starting December 7, households are able to have up to 30 visitors per day at their homes and outdoor gatherings can have up to 100 people. Capacity limits no longer apply, but density limits remain for weddings, funerals, religious gatherings, restaurants and businesses with less than 25 patrons. Nightclubs are only allowed to have a maximum of 50 people. Staff in both the private and the public sector will be returning to their offices on January 11. Masks will still be required in indoor shopping venues, in taxis, and on public transport.¹⁷⁷

Turkey

On December 4, Turkey reported 32,736 more COVID-19 infections -- including 6,903 symptomatic patients -- over the previous 24 hours.¹⁷⁸ The country has announced new restrictions. Effective December 3, a curfew will be implemented on weekdays between 9 pm and 5 am and a complete lockdown will take place on weekends. Grocery stores and food delivery services will be exempt from the lockdowns during certain hours. In addition, people older than 65 or younger than 20 will no longer be permitted to use public transportation. Shoppers will have to use a contact tracing code. A maximum of 30 people will be able to attend weddings and funerals. New Year's Eve public celebrations will be cancelled.¹⁷⁹ Turkey's health minister has also announced a plan to start using an experimental Chinese COVID-19 vaccine later this month amid a surge in infections and deaths. Vaccination efforts would be rolled out in four stages with priority given to health care workers, citizens above 65 years of age, and people living in protective care homes.¹⁸⁰

Israel

Just weeks after the second nationwide lockdown, Israel is heading towards another resurgence. The number of daily new cases topped 1,500 at the end of last week. The government is reportedly looking at introducing a new quarantine-tracking system that will automatically check with those ordered to quarantine twice a day at random times.¹⁸¹ On November 30, further limits were put on shopping malls, which had previously reopened as part of a pilot program, after they were filled with customers. Instead of one person being allowed for every 7 square metres, only one person per 15 square metres will be permitted.¹⁸² A number of Israeli museums have been permitted to reopen as of December 1 as part of the same pilot program. Any visitors to the museums must order tickets online and admission will be limited.¹⁸³ On December 6, many students in grades 7 to 10 began returning to their classrooms in communities with low-to-medium infection rates. The students will alternate between in-person and remote education.¹⁸⁴

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Links

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