

Weekly COVID Update:

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

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Foreword

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

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

On our Dashboard, we present unique quantitative data on:

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

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

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

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

Data Visualizations from Dashboard

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

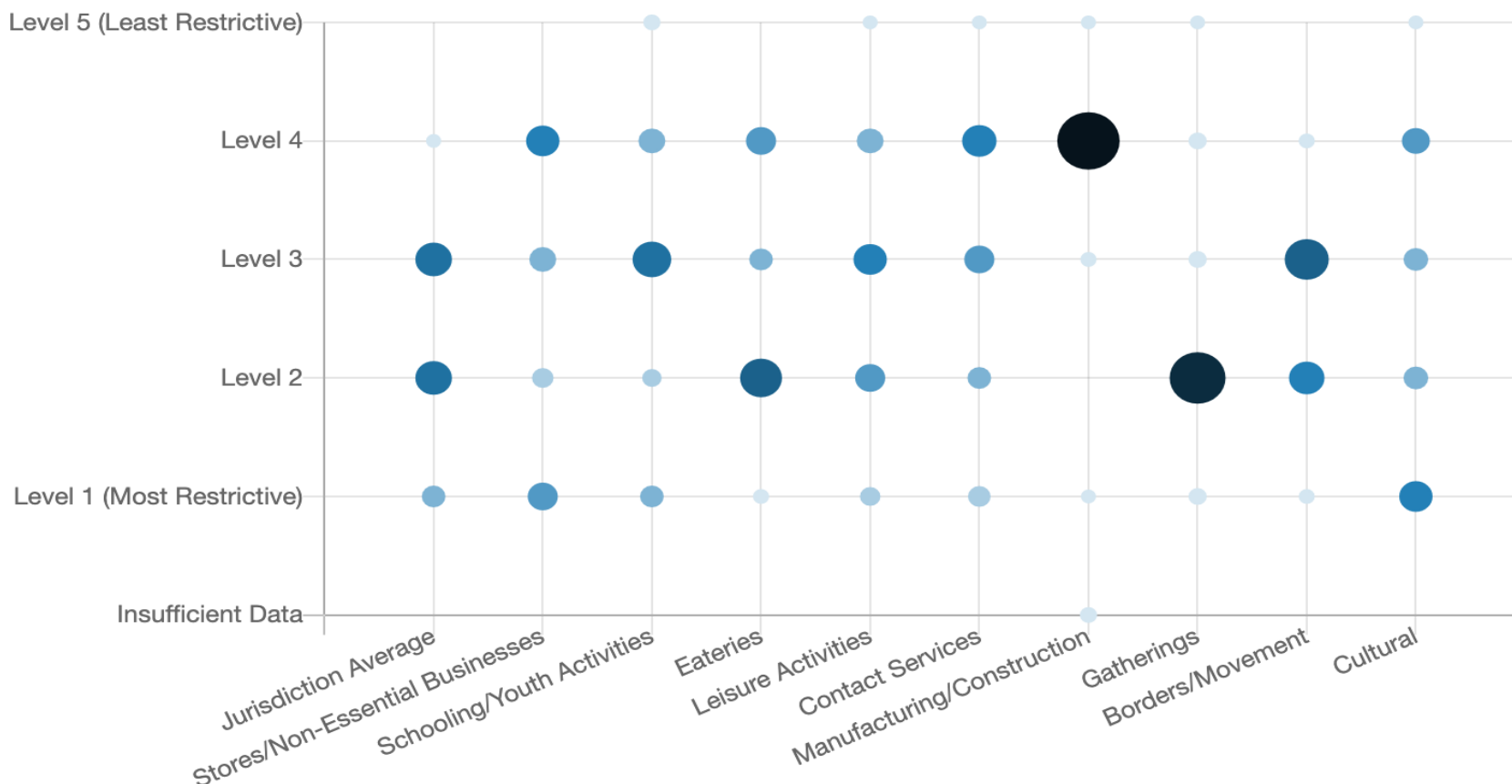


Figure 1 – Level of reopening among 52 different jurisdictions as of January 18. The reopening policies of 52 jurisdictions: 34 OECD countries, 5 US states, 10 Canadian provinces and 3 Canadian territories. For each jurisdiction, we classify a total of 9 different sectors: Stores/Non-Essential Businesses, 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.

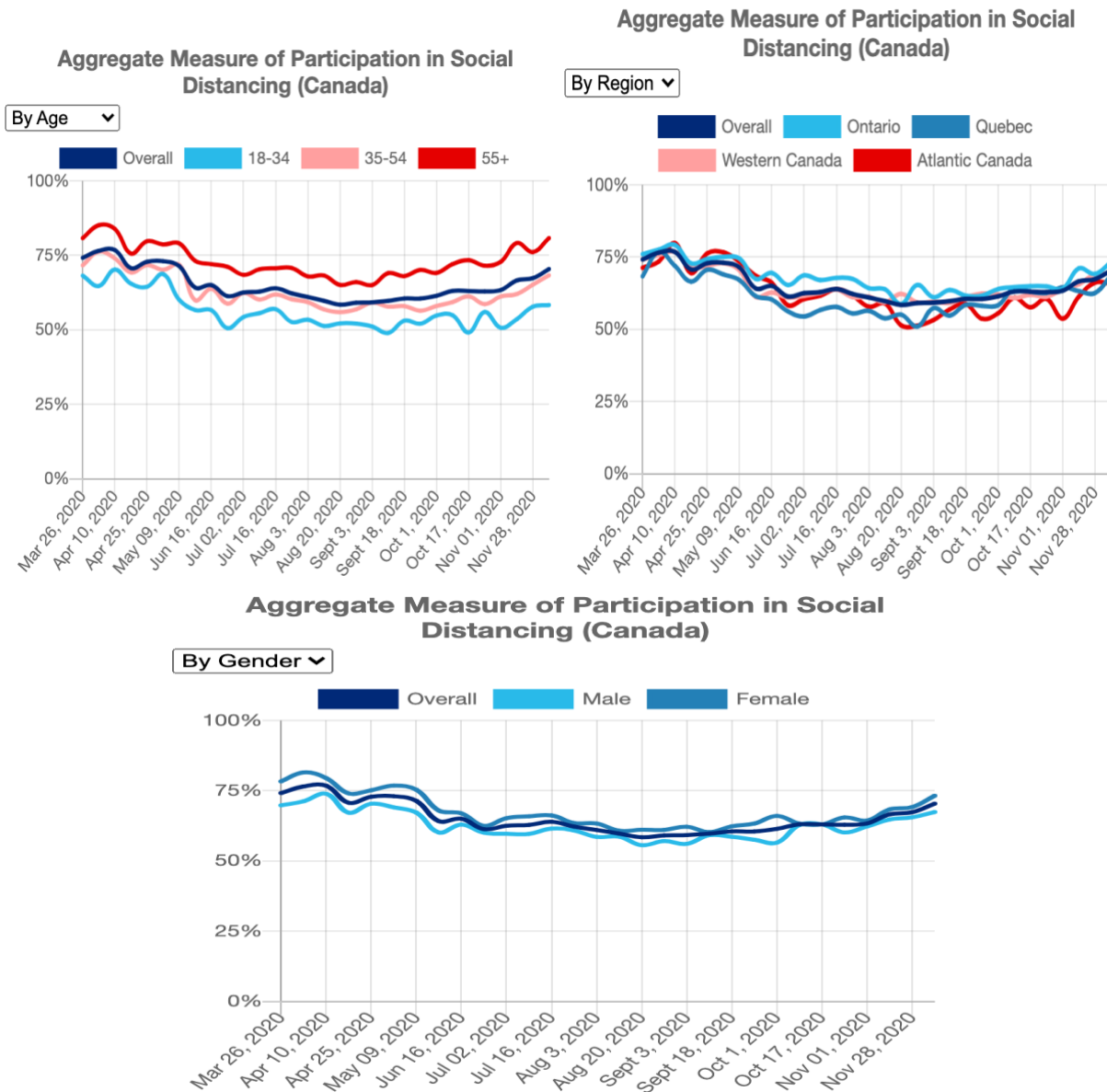


Figure 2 – Aggregate survey measure of participation in social distancing (Canada). We asked Canadians whether, as a result of the pandemic, they had taken any of the 6 following actions: avoided crowded places; avoided in-person contact with friends, family, and acquaintances; maintained 2 metre distance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

Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada)

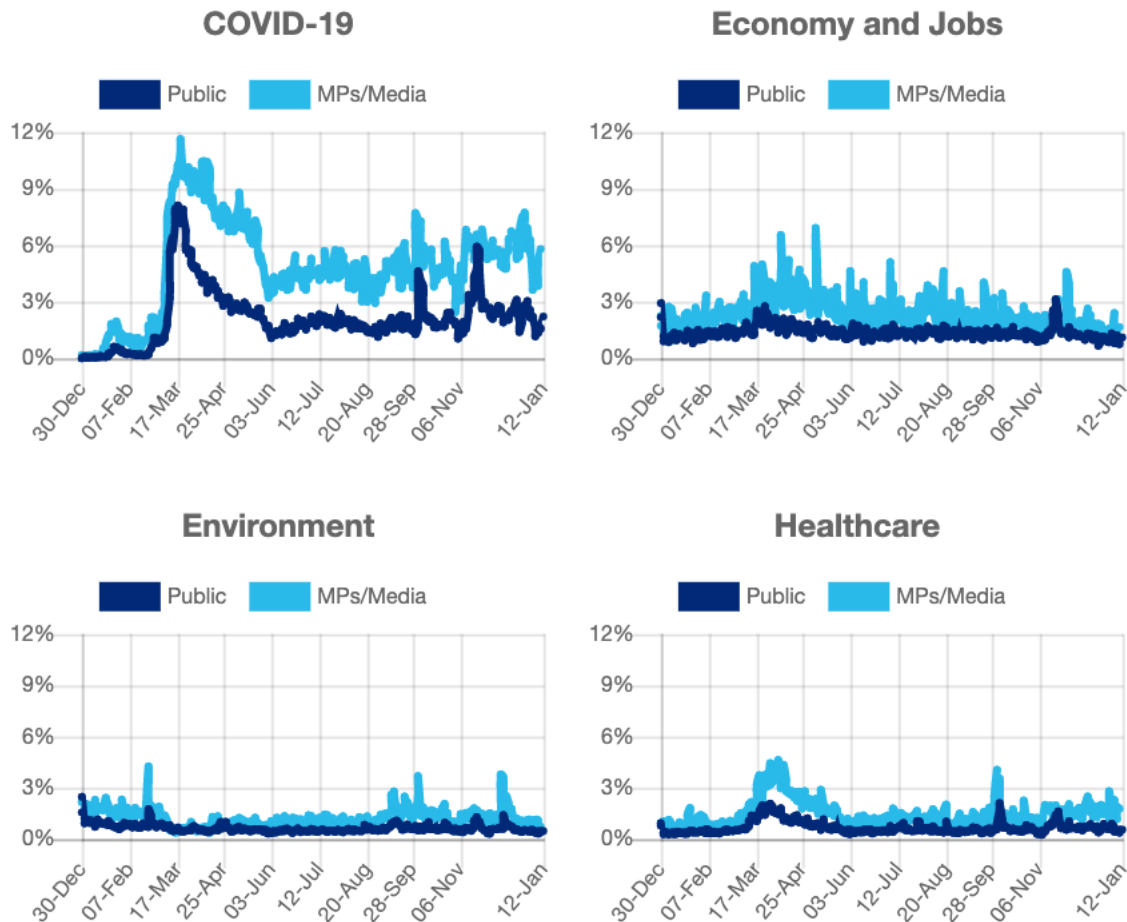


Figure 3 – Daily Percent of Tweets by Topic (Canada). The graphs report the percentage of daily tweets containing one or more keywords associated with the particular topic. The results are presented separately for MPs, senators, and journalists, on the one hand, and for the Canadian public, on the other.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

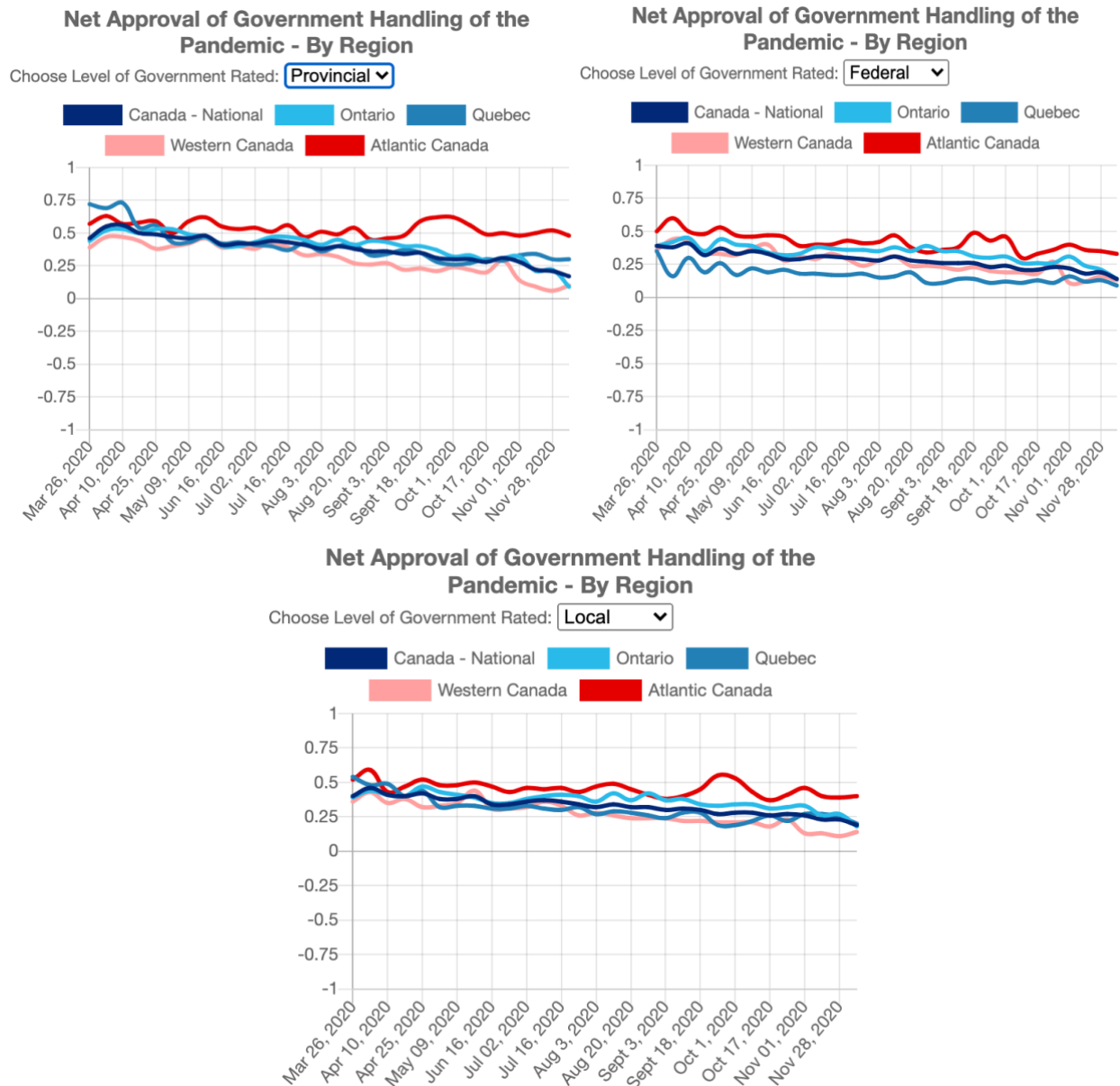


Figure 4 – Net approval of government handling of the pandemic by region. We asked Canadians whether they approved of how each level of government (the federal government, their provincial government, and their local government) was handling the coronavirus pandemic so far. To obtain a net approval score, 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 January 15, there were 785 new daily cases of COVID-19 in the province.¹ There are currently mandatory restrictions in place that apply province-wide and will remain in effect until at least January 21. Recreation facilities, museums, libraries, and theatres are closed. Eateries are close for in-person dining but can offer takeaway or delivery services. Students from K-12 resumed in-person classes on January 11.² Effective January 18, contact services can reopen by appointment only and people can gather outdoors in groups of 10, with a maximum of 20 people allowed to attend funerals. Indoor gatherings remain prohibited, along with funeral receptions.³ Contact tracing efforts have improved -- the percentage of cases with unknown sources now stands at 47% after spending the past few months above 80%.⁴

→ *British Columbia*

British Columbia has reported an average of about 500 new cases of COVID-19 per day over the last week. Province-wide strict restrictions, which have been in place since November 2020, have been extended through to February 5.⁵ The province began distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine in December 2020, prioritizing high-risk individuals such as those living in remote and isolated Indigenous communities.⁶

→ *Manitoba*

Manitoba reported 189 new COVID-19 cases on January 18, with more than half of the cases in the northern part of the province.⁷ Students in grade 7 and above, who have been learning remotely since the beginning of January, will be returning to school for in-person learning this week. However, each school division is responsible for implementing students' return to the classroom.⁸

→ *New Brunswick*

New Brunswick reported a record single-day increase of 36 new cases on January 17, bringing the province's total number of active cases to 292 – its largest number of active cases since the beginning of the pandemic.⁹ 24 of the new cases were located in Zone 4 (Edmundston) and are linked to a single poultry processing facility.¹⁰ As a result, Zone 4 was moved to the “red alert” level on January 18, while the rest of the province remains at the “orange” level.¹¹ Red-alert restrictions include the closure of many non-essential businesses, including gyms, spas, barbershops, hair salons, and bars, while catering establishments must transition to take-out and delivery services only.¹² New Brunswick's red alert guidelines initially included moving schools online, but the education minister announced on January 17 that K-12 schools will remain open even at the red level.¹³

→ *Newfoundland and Labrador*

On January 14, Newfoundland and Labrador reported 1 new case of COVID-19 and 4 active cases.¹⁴ The province remains at Alert Level 2 and has eased restrictions to permit eateries, leisure, and cultural facilities to reopen and operate with reduced capacity.¹⁵ Due to high numbers of infection in New Brunswick, the Newfoundland and Labrador premier has decided to remain outside of the Atlantic bubble until early February.¹⁶ In the province, vaccinations continue for priority groups, which include front-line health care workers, long-term care residents, and people living in isolated Indigenous communities.¹⁷

→ *Northwest Territories*

One active case of COVID-19 remains in the Northwest Territories. Statistics Canada began work with the Government of the Northwest Territories' COVID-19 Coordinating Secretariat at the beginning of January to conduct symptom and wellness checks for people who are self-isolating after travelling across territorial borders.¹⁸ The state of emergency in Yellowknife has been extended through January 28. The territory

remains in Phase 2 of its reopening plan. Distribution of the COVID-19 vaccination began on December 31, with initial doses prioritizing residents at higher risk of life-threatening complications due to the virus. Vaccines have also been administered in some remote communities in the past week.¹⁹

→ *Nova Scotia*

On January 18, Nova Scotia confirmed 4 new cases of COVID-19.²⁰ One of the new cases has been attributed to a student at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax; other recent cases have also been linked to universities.²¹ The province's number of active cases dropped to 29 as of January 18.²² Catering and licensed liquor establishments in Halifax and Hants county were permitted to re-open for dine-in service on January 4; these localities were previously under tighter restrictions than the rest of the province due to a concentration of cases in the Greater Halifax Area.²³

→ *Nunavut*

There are no active community cases in Nunavut. Twelve people were evacuated from the Meliadine gold mine after a worker there tested positive. No Nunavut community members currently work at the mine, and the risk of transmission to the closest community is very low.²⁴ Public health officials lifted most remaining restrictions in the communities of Arviat and Whale Cove on January 12 after they had been free of all COVID-19 cases for nearly two weeks. All schools, government offices, and private businesses were allowed to reopen, and travel restrictions between the communities were lifted. The territory's chief medical health officer continues to advise against non-essential travel.²⁵ Vaccinations across the territory continue, with just under 1,000 residents having received their first dose.²⁶ Elderly residents of Arviat, the territory's hardest-hit community, received their first doses on January 14.²⁷

→ *Ontario*

There were 2,578 new cases of COVID-19 in Ontario on January 18.²⁸ The province's seven-day moving average now stands at 3,074 cases per day – which is 10% less than the level last week.²⁹ However, the data are based on the 40,000 COVID-19 tests processed on January 17, Ontario's lowest testing rate in over two weeks.³⁰ There are now 28,621 active cases across the province, down from the peak of 30,141 six days ago.³¹ The government of Ontario announced on January 16 that nearly all emergency orders currently in effect under the Reopening Ontario Act (ROA) will remain in effect until at least February 19.³² Orders under the ROA enable the province to restrict public gatherings, order business closures, and manage outbreaks in hospitals and long-term care homes.³³ The stay-at-home order issued by the province remains in effect.³⁴

→ *Prince Edward Island*

In Prince Edward Island, 8 active cases were reported on January 14.³⁵ The government implemented measures to help curb the spread of infection in the province that will remain in place until January 25. Fitness facilities, museums, libraries, and stores can reopen but must operate at 50% capacity. At eateries, in-person dining is permitted but there are limits on the number of people per table and a closing time of 11 pm has been imposed. Contact services, such as salons, may operate on an appointment basis. Schools are open and full-time learning continues for students from K-12.³⁶

→ *Quebec*

As of January 16, Quebec had 9,734 active cases, including 1,474 hospitalizations.³⁷ Quebec has had more than 9,000 total COVID-19 deaths.³⁸ On January 15, the government imposed additional restrictions on the construction and manufacturing sector after receiving multiple non-compliance complaints. Between December 27 and January 2, the sector saw 33 outbreaks at construction sites, leading to 134 people contracting COVID-19.³⁹ The entire province, except Nord-du-Quebec, is under curfew between 8 pm and 5 am. Grocery stores must close by 7:30 pm, but pharmacies and gas stations may remain open during the curfew.⁴⁰ These measures are in effect until February 8. Indoor dining is not permitted, students in grades

5 and 6 are required to wear masks, and houses of worship must close -- except for funerals with up to 10 people.⁴¹ More children and adolescents have been hospitalized in this wave compared to the spring, with that age group comprising 1% of all hospitalizations, up from 0.5% previously.⁴²

→ *Saskatchewan*

As of January 17, there are 4,121 active cases of COVID-19 in Saskatchewan, including a record-high 203 hospitalizations.⁴³ This represents the highest infection rate in Canada, with 351 active cases per 100,000 people.⁴⁴ The province's top public health official said that he will recommend to the government further restrictions next week if case numbers do not drop.⁴⁵ The provincial government had previously announced that all current restrictions would remain in place until at least January 29, with the premier saying he was confident they were enough to slow the spread of the virus.⁴⁶ An independent investigation will be conducted by the provincial ombudsman into a COVID-19 outbreak at a Regina long-term care home that led to 43 deaths. Opposition MPs said the investigative process was not transparent enough and that the residents of Saskatchewan deserve more accountability.⁴⁷

→ *Yukon*

Two active cases of COVID-19 remain in Yukon. The territory has remained in Phase 3 of its reopening plan. The COVID-19 vaccination has started in Yukon. Starting January 18, vaccine clinics will open in rural communities and limited clinics will start in Whitehorse.⁴⁸

The United States

→ *California*

The occupancy rate for ICU beds and the COVID-19 positivity rate have both fallen; the positivity rate was 14% on January 8 and fell to 13.4% by January 15.⁴⁹ Between January 1 and January 15, over 6,300 Californians died from COVID-19, accounting for nearly 20% of total COVID-19 fatalities in the state.⁵⁰ Approximately 530 Californians die daily from COVID-19.⁵¹ Almost 90% of Californians are affected by stay-at-home orders, with projections suggesting that ICU capacity will be in a critical situation for at least four more weeks.⁵² Los Angeles County is running out of space for deceased COVID-19 patients and has ordered additional refrigerated storage units.⁵³ L.A.'s Dodger Stadium, San Diego's Petco Park and Sacramento's Cal Expo will become mass vaccination sites, while the Disneyland Resort in Anaheim will be the first "super" COVID-19 vaccination site in Orange County.⁵⁴ After the governor said that schools might reopen in February, several superintendents wrote a letter asking him for state standards to determine when it is safe to return to school.⁵⁵

→ *Illinois*

The epidemiological situation in Illinois seems to be improving, and the seven-day positivity rate on all tests dropped to 6.1% as of January 18. The first case of the more contagious UK variant in Illinois was identified on January 15.⁵⁶ Due to continued declines in key metrics, including positivity rates and hospitalizations, Regions 2 and 5 were moved to Tier 1 mitigations last week and Region 1 was moved to Tier 2. The other 8 regions will remain in Tier 3. Tier 2 allows casinos, cultural institutions, indoor fitness classes, organized group recreational activities and offices to reopen subject to public health rules. Tier 1 enables further reopening and indoor service is permitted at restaurants.⁵⁷ Starting January 25, the state is entering Phase 1B of its vaccination plan, which centers on residents aged 65 years and older and frontline essential workers.⁵⁸

→ *Michigan*

As of January 16, the 7-day moving average of daily cases in Michigan was 2,350. The state recorded its first case of the UK COVID variant on January 16.⁵⁹ COVID-19 rules put in place in November have been extended until January 31, with some changes; colleges and universities can have students return to campus

for the winter semester and restart in-person courses as of January 18.⁶⁰ Starting January 11, the state has extended eligibility for vaccination to additional health care workers, those in long-term care facilities, residents 65 and older, and childcare, corrections and K-12 school staff.⁶¹

→ *New York*

As of January 17, the statewide test positivity rate in New York is 5.61%. There are 8,771 hospitalized COVID-19 patients statewide.⁶² The governor announced that indoor dining would be able to resume in most of the state following a court decision that allowed restaurants in the Buffalo area to reopen. Indoor dining, with a 50% capacity limit, will be permitted in all Orange Zones, including in Syracuse and Rochester. The governor's office criticized the decision, indicating an intention to appeal.⁶³ The mayor of New York City said that local healthcare providers would run out of their vaccine supply early next week and urged state and federal officials to provide the city with more doses. Several large hospitals have cancelled thousands of upcoming appointments.⁶⁴

→ *Texas*

Texas has surpassed two million total COVID-19 cases. On January 13, the state reported 405 deaths, including a backlog from December 8 to January 11.⁶⁵ On January 5, Houston met the criteria to increase its lockdown after seven consecutive days with record-level COVID-19 hospitalizations. Restaurants in the city must reduce to 50% capacity, elective surgeries are paused, and bars must close.⁶⁶ Texas will open additional vaccination sites, including some in Houston. The first vaccines are designated for front-line healthcare workers, people older than 65, and people with a chronic medical condition that could develop into a serious illness.⁶⁷

Mexico

Mexico reported 21,366 new cases and 1,106 deaths on January 16, nearly double the number of cases reported a week earlier.⁶⁸ This marked two days in a row that the number of new cases was higher than 20,000. Mexico City reported that approximately 88% of hospital beds in the region were full.⁶⁹ The Canada-US-Mexico border closure was extended until February 21.⁷⁰ Ten states are in the red zone on the country's reopening indicators (up from five), 19 are orange, two are yellow, and one is green.⁷¹ A ban on non-essential activities was implemented in Mexico City and Mexico State on December 18. The ban was originally supposed to be in place until January 10 but was recently extended.⁷² Around 500 restaurants were reported to have violated the ban in Mexico City by opening.⁷³ Mexico's vaccination program began in late December with the Pfizer vaccine, the first country in Latin America to vaccinate people.⁷⁴ Mexico has also approved the AstraZeneca vaccine and is considering approving the Russian-made Sputnik vaccine for emergency use.⁷⁵

Chile

On January 14, Chile reported 4,177 new COVID-19 cases and 90 deaths in the previous 24 hours.⁷⁶ The nationwide curfew between 10 pm and 5 am has been extended.⁷⁷ Santiago's international airport will remain open.⁷⁸ Chile was the first South American country to begin its COVID-19 vaccination program.⁷⁹ Chile has negotiated deals for vaccines with AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Sinovac. Chilean authorities are aiming to vaccinate 80% of Chileans in the first half of 2021.⁸⁰ The first doses of the Pfizer vaccine are being administered to healthcare workers in Santiago and in the southern part of Chile.⁸¹

WESTERN EUROPE

France

France has now reported approximately 70,000 deaths from COVID-19, the seventh highest death toll in the world. The number of new daily infections has plateaued at around 20,000 daily cases, but hospitalizations and ICU occupancy continue to rise.⁸² Although the lockdown measures were scheduled to end soon, public officials are contemplating whether or not to extend them. France continues to have a curfew, while eateries, cafes, theatres and cultural venues remain closed.⁸³ A new curfew time of 6 pm to 6 am was introduced on January 18. Some stores want to open at 7:30 am to make up for lost sales caused by the reduced hours.⁸⁴ To ensure curfew compliance, police are using checkpoints.⁸⁵ On January 4, schools reopened and many people returned to work.⁸⁶ Authorities said that the scheduled reopening date of January 20 for restaurants and cafes is unlikely to hold.⁸⁷ France is working on improving its vaccine rollout after a slow start.⁸⁸

Germany

Germany surpassed 2 million COVID-19 infections on January 16 and the death toll reached almost 45,000.⁸⁹ The rise in cases is attributed to the new British strain of the virus and has led the Chancellor to announce an extension to the current COVID-19 measures for another 8 to 10 weeks. Under the lockdown, schools, non-essential shops and services, eateries, leisure, and cultural facilities are closed. Private gatherings are permitted to include a maximum of one other person not living in the household.⁹⁰ For districts with a 7-day incidence of more than 200 new infections per 100,000 residents, movement is restricted to a 15 km radius around one's residence -- unless there is a valid reason to travel further. Effective January 11, people arriving in Germany from risk areas must take a COVID-19 test prior to their arrival. Additionally, a mandatory 10-day quarantine is in effect -- but can be reduced to five days if the individual tests negative.⁹¹

Belgium

In Belgium, 2,637 new daily cases of COVID-19 were reported on January 15.⁹² The current measures have been extended for an additional two weeks until March 1.⁹³ Non-essential stores, museums, and swimming pools are open with safety measures in place. Non-medical contact services, eateries, and amusement parks remain closed.⁹⁴ Curfews remain in place in the regions of Brussels, Wallonia, and Flanders. The media is criticizing the government's extension of the current measures -- suggesting that it may have a negative impact on people's willingness to follow the rules.⁹⁵ On January 5, Belgium's vaccination campaign began its first phase in nursing homes. The second phase will give priority to hospital and health professionals.⁹⁶

Netherlands

On January 17, there were 5,360 new confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the Netherlands.⁹⁷ On January 12, the prime minister announced the extension of its COVID-19 restrictions until February 9 due to concerns about the new UK variant of the virus. Under the current restrictions, schools and nonessential businesses have been closed, and people are banned from having more than two visitors in their homes. An evening curfew is being considered.⁹⁸ The Netherlands also delivered its first COVID-19 vaccine dose on January 13 to a care home nurse, nearly two weeks after other European Union nations began inoculations.⁹⁹

Spain

Spain reported 39,000 new cases on January 13 and 35,000 new cases on January 14 -- some of the country's highest recorded numbers for daily new cases.¹⁰⁰ Critical care and other medical personnel are worried about the rising number of cases.¹⁰¹ Madrid, Aragon, and Castille and Leon imposed additional measures to slow the spread. Curfews have been extended, business hours for eateries and bars have been shortened, and municipal lockdowns have been imposed.¹⁰² Curfews in most provinces begin at 10 pm, but will begin at 6 pm in the Basque Country and at 8 pm in Castille and Leon.¹⁰³ In Madrid, the curfew begins at 11 pm, while bars and eateries must close by 10 pm.¹⁰⁴ The central government has been hesitant to impose a strict lockdown, but some public officials are calling for home confinement.¹⁰⁵ As of January 18, 19 municipalities across the country have restricted mobility. Murcia cancelled non-essential surgeries and medical visits will be virtual.¹⁰⁶ Spain anticipates that it will immunize 70% of the population by the summer.¹⁰⁷ Vaccine distribution is improving despite initial complaints.¹⁰⁸

The United Kingdom

On January 17, 38,598 new cases and 671 new deaths were recorded by the ministry of health.¹⁰⁹ Currently, England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are under strict lockdown due to rising infection rates and the emergence of a contagious COVID-19 variant. People are required to stay at home and only go out for essential reasons; indoor and outdoor gatherings are banned. However, outdoor exercise once a day with a person from another household in an open public space is permitted, provided that the individuals stay two metres apart. Eateries, non-essential stores, and sports facilities are closed. Childcare services remain open, but primary and secondary schools will be closed until February -- with exceptions for vulnerable students and children of essential workers.¹¹⁰ Effective January 18, pre-departure COVID-19 testing will be required 72 hours prior for those travelling to England and Scotland. Travellers arriving from places not on the UK's travel corridor list must still self-isolate for 10 days. Wales and Northern Ireland are expected to announce plans for pre-arrival testing in the upcoming days.¹¹¹

Ireland

On January 16, 3,231 new cases of COVID-19 were reported -- bringing the total number of cases in Ireland to 169,780.¹¹² Ireland remains under a Level 5 lockdown, the most restrictive form of measures, with the public urged to remain at home and a 5 km limit on movement enforced until January 31. People are required to stay at home except to travel for work, education, or other essential purposes, and will be permitted to exercise within 5 km of their homes. Schools and childcare services remain closed, along with all construction activities. Pubs and restaurants will be required to remain closed until the end of March.¹¹³ Effective January 16, all travellers arriving in Ireland must present a negative test result from a pre-departure COVID-19 test carried out no more than 72 hours prior to arrival. Additionally, arrivals from Great Britain and South Africa will be required to isolate for 14 days. Doctors have been advised to weigh the benefits of giving the vaccine to people who are very frail or approaching end of life.¹¹⁴

Luxembourg

On January 17, the ministry of health recorded 135 new cases of COVID-19, with an R-rate of 0.86.¹¹⁵ New measures came into effect on January 11, with schools reopening for in-person instruction -- along with non-essential stores and establishments. A curfew is in effect between 11 pm and 6 am throughout the week. These re-openings take place within "a strict framework", with everyone required to wear masks in closed spaces and respect the 2 m distance rule. Guided tours at cultural establishments will be limited to groups of 10 people. Audiences in cinemas, theatres, and music halls will be limited to 100 people to allow for safe distancing. Some rules remain in place, such as limiting the number of guests at home to two and a prohibition of alcohol in public spaces. The hospitality sector also remains closed. These restrictions are

expected to last until January 31.¹¹⁶ On January 11, Luxembourg became the first member of the European Union to receive a Moderna vaccine delivery, which contained a total of 1,200 doses.¹¹⁷

Portugal

On January 18, 10,385 new cases were reported by the ministry of health. Hospitals in the worst-affected areas are quickly running out of intensive care beds to treat COVID-19 patients.¹¹⁸ The country entered a strict nationwide lockdown on January 15 with rules similar to those applied in March 2020 -- although schools remain open. Teleworking continues to be mandatory and people who breach the rules face serious consequences. Businesses that were closed in the first lockdown are closed again. Supermarkets and pharmacies remain open, with restrictions on the number of people present at a time.¹¹⁹

CENTRAL EUROPE

Austria

On January 15, Austria reported 3,510 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection.¹²⁰ Austria is in its third lockdown, with the current measures in effect until at least January 24. Current restrictions include the closure of all non-essential stores, culture and leisure facilities, and eateries for indoor dining. Effective January 15, "all travellers entering Austria will be required to register in advance of their arrival and obtain a pre-travel clearance to show at the border."¹²¹ The free testing scheme that would have permitted people who tested negative to exit lockdown on January 18 has been cancelled by the government.¹²² On January 18, Austrians schools will receive 5 million testing kits; tests will be voluntary for students and teachers. However, the timeline for when schools will reopen for in-person instruction remains unclear.¹²³

Greece

On January 15, Greece reported 595 daily new cases of COVID-19.¹²⁴ Effective January 18, the government eased restrictions on retail stores and hair salons, allowing them to reopen. However, customers must wear masks and no more than 4 customers are permitted per 100 square metres.¹²⁵ On January 11, elementary and special education schools reopened with measures in place to stagger arrival times and use multiple entrances.¹²⁶ On January 16, vaccination of the general population began -- starting with those 85 and older.¹²⁷

Italy

In Italy, 17,243 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection were reported on January 15.¹²⁸ The state of emergency first introduced in January 2020 has been extended until the end of April 2021.¹²⁹ Following the holidays, Italy returned to its three-tier system, which applies different measures to different regions based on their classification as yellow, orange, or red zones. A new white zone was created for regions with low risk levels and incidence rates. Within white zones, restrictive measures used in the other zones do not apply.¹³⁰ On January 14, the current measures in place were extended until March 5. Ski resorts will not be permitted to reopen until February 15.¹³¹ Secondary schools resumed in-class learning on January 11 for 50% of students. Following internal disagreement about how the government was planning to use EU funds to tackle the economic crisis, the Italia Viva Party withdrew from the governing centre-left coalition.¹³²

Slovenia

On January 15, 1,793 daily new cases of COVID-19 infection were recorded in Slovenia.¹³³ The current measures in place have been extended until January 22. The temporary ban on gatherings remains in effect

and students will continue to learn remotely. Movement between regions is prohibited between 10 pm and 6 am with some exceptions for essential purposes.¹³⁴ On January 14, anti-maskers and anti-vaxxers gathered to protest the current COVID-19 restrictions related to mask-wearing and vaccine recommendations.¹³⁵

Switzerland

On January 15, Switzerland reported 2,474 new daily cases of COVID-19 infection.¹³⁶ The government announced new restrictions that will come into effect on January 18 and extended the current measures adopted on December 22 until the end of February. Effective January 18, non-essential shops must close and teleworking becomes mandatory. Service providers and gas stations are subject to a 7 pm curfew. Private demonstrations and gatherings are now limited to a maximum of 5 people, including children. The closure of sports facilities, museums, libraries, and eateries has been extended.¹³⁷

EASTERN EUROPE

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic reported 5,253 new cases of COVID-19 on January 17 – less than a third of the country's record single-day increase of 17,773 cases on January 7.¹³⁸ The country's reproduction rate stands at 0.71 as of January 18.¹³⁹ A consistent decline in new cases over the past two weeks has prompted the government to move the country down one level from the highest level of its anti-epidemic scale (PES).¹⁴⁰ Hotels, restaurants, indoor sports venues, and swimming pools must remain closed, all public gatherings remain limited to six people, and a nationwide curfew between the hours of 11 pm and 5 am remains in place.¹⁴¹ Current restrictions will last until January 22, or until the country has remained at the red alert level (current level; 4 on a 5-point scale) for at least 7 days.¹⁴² The Czech State Health Institute (SZU) confirmed on January 16 that the more contagious variant of COVID-19 first identified in the United Kingdom has been detected in the Czech Republic.¹⁴³ The SZU said that the number of cases is not yet known, but that more details will be available next week.¹⁴⁴

Hungary

Hungary reported 1,241 new cases of COVID-19 on January 17 – below the country's 7-day moving average of 1,370 new cases per day.¹⁴⁵ On January 8, the prime minister announced that restrictive measures imposed due to the pandemic, set to expire on January 11, will be extended until February 1.¹⁴⁶ Ongoing restrictions include: a requirement to wear a mask in public in localities with more than 10,000 residents; remote learning for all students in grade 8 and above (primary schools reopened on January 4); a national curfew between the hours of 5 pm and 8 am; the limitation of catering establishments to pick-up and delivery services; a requirement to hold professional sporting events behind closed doors; and the closure of all non-essential businesses, services, and activities -- including gyms, indoor swimming pools, museums, libraries, cinemas, zoos and skating rinks.¹⁴⁷

Latvia

Latvia reported 567 new cases of COVID-19 on January 17 – below the country's 7-day moving average of 878 cases per day.¹⁴⁸ The cabinet of ministers decided on January 10 to extend many of the ongoing safety measures from January 11 until January 25, and announced amendments to some of those restrictions.¹⁴⁹ This means that all public events, as well as the operation of all entertainment venues, bars, skating rinks, cultural sites, museums, and food service venues, remain prohibited until January 25.¹⁵⁰ Additional ongoing restrictions include a maximum 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.¹⁵¹ In-person shopping remains limited to establishments providing essential services, and the national curfew has been extended to cover the hours between 10 pm and 5 am on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.¹⁵² Four new cases of the UK COVID-19 variant were detected in Latvia last week.¹⁵³

Lithuania

Lithuania reported 836 new cases of COVID-19 on January 17, which is the country's lowest single-day tally since November 4.¹⁵⁴ The nationwide lockdown, which has been in effect since November 7, was extended until at least January 31.¹⁵⁵ This means that Lithuanians remain 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.¹⁵⁶ Non-essential movement within municipalities is also forbidden, with the same exceptions.¹⁵⁷ Services that require physical contact for more than 10 minutes are prohibited and all non-essential business must be conducted online.¹⁵⁸

Poland

Poland reported 5,970 new cases of COVID-19 on January 17, which is below the country's 7-day moving average of 7,151 new cases per day.¹⁵⁹ The entirety of Poland will remain in the "red" alert zone until the end of January, with restaurants, cinemas, theaters, and gyms required to remain closed.¹⁶⁰ Some non-essential businesses and services were allowed to resume before Christmas, under strict sanitary regulations and with customer limits.¹⁶¹ Students in grades 1–3 will return to classes on January 18, while all students in grade 4 and above continue to learn remotely.¹⁶²

Slovakia

Slovakia reported 573 cases of COVID-19 on January 17, just over two weeks after setting the country's single-day record of 6,315 new cases.¹⁶³ The country will remain in lockdown until January 31, with ongoing restrictions shuttering all non-essential establishments, including theatres, hairdressers, driving schools, and fitness centres.¹⁶⁴ Only essential businesses, such as pharmacies and grocery stores, can remain open at this time.¹⁶⁵ All mass events, including those with fewer than 6 people, remain prohibited. Shoe repair shops were added to the country's list of essential businesses on January 11.¹⁶⁶

NORTHERN EUROPE

Denmark

The epidemiological situation in Denmark has been improving over the past several weeks, with just 659 new infections reported on January 16 -- the lowest number in nearly three months.¹⁶⁷ Despite the encouraging decline in case numbers, the government has extended its lockdown measures by another two weeks to February 7. All travel restrictions have also been extended, with the government urging residents to avoid all international travel.¹⁶⁸ People attempting to enter Denmark through a land border with Germany may be able to access a rapid test where a negative result would give them access to the country. The travellers would then need to take a PCR test when they reach their destination in Denmark, which they can use for re-entry for up to a week.¹⁶⁹ Over 2% of the Danish population has received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, by far the highest rate in the EU. The government said they would have vaccinated an even greater proportion of the population if they did not run out of their vaccine supply.¹⁷⁰

Estonia

As of January 18, Estonia's two-week average infection rate was 589 per 100,000 people, with a national positivity rate of 10%.¹⁷¹ Some restrictions in Harju and Ida-Viru counties will be lifted over the next few weeks. On January 18, individual athletic training will be permitted, museums and exhibition halls may reopen with 50% capacity, and indoor dining may resume with a 25% capacity limit. All schools will resume in-person learning on January 25. All other restrictions in both counties will continue until at least February 1.¹⁷² The national restriction on the sale of alcohol between 10 pm and 10 am will remain in place until the end of February.¹⁷³ The outgoing government, which recently resigned due to a corruption scandal, has set a goal of beginning vaccinations for non-risk groups in Estonia by May but it is unclear if the new government will keep this goal in place.¹⁷⁴

Finland

The number of confirmed cases in Finland has remained stable over the past few weeks, with most cases concentrated in the Helsinki area.¹⁷⁵ Recent reports suggested that the prime minister has been looking to introduce further travel restrictions and increase testing capacity at border entry points, but they are running into legal issues. In order to introduce these restrictions, the government may implement another state of emergency.¹⁷⁶ The city of Helsinki will begin testing passengers on ferries arriving from Estonia, though it will remain optional for all arrivals.¹⁷⁷ A vaccine is being developed in Finland that is meant to inoculate fur farm animals in an attempt to provide safeguards against another potential mink-borne mutation.¹⁷⁸ The interim minister of education said that the government is considering moving all primary schools nationwide to distance learning due to the increasing spread of the UK variant of COVID-19.¹⁷⁹

Iceland

As of January 18, the two-week average infection rate in Iceland is 16 new domestic cases per 100,000 people.¹⁸⁰ Several restrictions were lifted on January 13. The gathering limit was raised to 20 people and ski hills and gyms may reopen with a 50% capacity limit. Up to 50 people may perform in cultural events, with 100 adults and 100 children permitted to be in the audience. Funerals are exempt from the gathering limit and may have up to 100 people attend, though masks are mandatory.¹⁸¹ As officials gradually lift domestic restrictions, they have instituted more stringent requirements for incoming travellers. Until May 1, all international arrivals must be tested as soon as they arrive, then quarantine for five days, and finally be tested again. Arrivals will still be able to present a certificate indicating that they have acquired and then recovered from COVID-19 in the past three months to avoid the quarantine period.¹⁸² The Icelandic government is waiting on a decision from Pfizer on whether the company will approve a study that would see the entire population of the country vaccinated in an effort to measure its effect on herd immunity.¹⁸³

Norway

The epidemiological situation in Norway worsened over the holidays, though it appears to have stabilized somewhat over the past week.¹⁸⁴ As a result, authorities announced that the recommendation against all private indoor gatherings will be lifted on January 20. While not a legal restriction, officials said that private indoor gatherings should now be limited to five people and that private outdoor gatherings can have up to 20 people. Public indoor gatherings with fixed seating can have up to 200 people; the limit is 600 if the event is outdoors.¹⁸⁵ The government extended its recommendation against non-essential travel until March 1.¹⁸⁶ Norway will begin testing all arrivals at the border and will issue fines to those who refuse to comply. The tests are in addition to previous requirements, including a negative test result from no more than three days prior to departure, registration with local authorities, and a week-long quarantine.¹⁸⁷ Due to a rising infection rate, local officials in Bergen may re-introduce strict restrictions that were in place in the city in November.¹⁸⁸

Sweden

The number of new cases in Sweden appears to have stabilized somewhat over the past few weeks.¹⁸⁹ However, the number of hospitalizations has reached a record high and the total death toll has been rapidly increasing.¹⁹⁰ The Swedish government extended its entry ban on travellers from Denmark and the UK until January 31.¹⁹¹ The ban on the sale of alcohol in restaurants and bars after 8 pm has been extended until January 24. The health minister said that nearly all long-term care home residents and staff have been vaccinated.¹⁹² The national teachers union has called for greater clarity on the rules for distance learning since individual schools are meant to decide whether they can operate in person or not.¹⁹³

ASIA/PACIFIC

Japan

Japan reported no less than 5,000 new cases of COVID-19 per day since the start of January. As of January 17, almost 1,000 COVID-19 patients in the country are in serious condition. The country's health ministry has decided to expand antigen testing to asymptomatic people at medical institutions and care homes to help identify virus carriers early.¹⁹⁴ The ministry is also working to link quarantine registration and the national epidemiological information system to enable more effective tracking of foreign nationals who test positive for COVID-19.¹⁹⁵ Seven more prefectures joined Tokyo and its three neighboring prefectures last week in the state of emergency. Under the state of emergency, which will be effective until February 7, eating and drinking establishments are asked to close by 8 pm; businesses are asked to help reduce commuting by 70%; and people are urged to refrain from nonessential outings, especially after 8 pm.¹⁹⁶ Starting January 14, the government suspended entry for foreigners -- although those with residence status will be allowed to enter. Japanese nationals and foreigners with resident status are required to self-isolate for 14 days.¹⁹⁷ Negative COVID-19 test results certified within 72 hours of departure have been required since January 13.

South Korea

South Korea has reported no less than 500 new cases of COVID-19 per day since the beginning of January, falling from around 1,000 cases per day in December 2020. The government has extended its current social distancing scheme (Level 2.5 for the Seoul Metropolitan Region and Level 2 for the rest of the country) from January 18 to January 31, while relaxing some business restrictions: restaurants and cafes can resume dine-in services until 9 pm; gyms, cram schools and karaoke establishments can reopen subject to a closing time of 9 pm and strict density requirements; and churches are allowed to meet in person but for Sunday services only. The government has also designated February 1 to 14 as a special antiviral period.¹⁹⁸ The special advisory against overseas travel has been extended until February 15.¹⁹⁹ Starting January 15, a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of departure is required from foreigners entering South Korea. Travellers will also be subject to additional testing during their self-isolation. The ban on flights from Britain is in effect until January 21.²⁰⁰

New Zealand

No active cases of COVID-19 remain in New Zealand. Businesses and activities go on as normal without outstanding restrictions. Starting January 18, the submission of a negative COVID-19 test result before entering New Zealand will be gradually expanded to all travellers except those from Australia, Antarctica and several Pacific nations. Travellers will also be tested during their first day upon arrival.²⁰¹ Starting January 21, people from the Cook Islands will be able to enter New Zealand without the need to quarantine.²⁰² As early as April, 1,000 foreign students will be allowed to enter the country to complete their studies.²⁰³

Australia

Few locally acquired cases of COVID-19 were recorded in Australia over the past week despite sporadic outbreaks. Interstate border controls are still in place for New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria due to recently recorded local outbreaks there. Meanwhile, Victoria has adopted a new system that requires permits from all interstate travellers and allows travel from “green zones” and “orange zones” only.²⁰⁴ The international arrival regime is also changing: the number of arrivals into New South Wales, Queensland and Western Australia will be halved, while the Northern Territory will admit more returning travellers.²⁰⁵

Turkey

On January 12, Turkey reported 9,809 new cases of COVID-19. Turkey has been implementing curfews on both weeknights and weekends since December as part of its efforts to curb the spread of the virus.²⁰⁶ On January 14, following the approval of China’s Sinovac vaccine for emergency use, Turkey began administering vaccinations against COVID-19 -- starting with more than one million health care workers. Vaccines will be dispatched to the country’s 81 provinces for the massive vaccination drive.²⁰⁷

Israel

The epidemiological situation in Israel is highly concerning despite a fast-moving vaccination campaign. The number of daily new cases has been hovering around 9,000 since the middle of last week; the test positive rate is 7%. As of January 17, over 2.1 million Israelis -- 23% of the population -- have received their first shot. Second-dose vaccination has also started.²⁰⁸ A “green passport” program is being worked out so that people will be exempt from quarantine and subject to eased restrictions one week after their second dose.²⁰⁹ A stricter lockdown, which shuts all schools and non-essential businesses, is expected to be extended beyond its planned expiry on January 21. The government decided on January 17 to order arrivals from the United Arab Emirates and Brazil to quarantine in government-managed hotels; the same measures already applied to arrivals from South Africa and Zambia.²¹⁰ To cope with the highly contagious British variant, health officials are now considering requiring isolation for anyone who spent five or ten minutes with a virus carrier.²¹¹

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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).

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Links

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