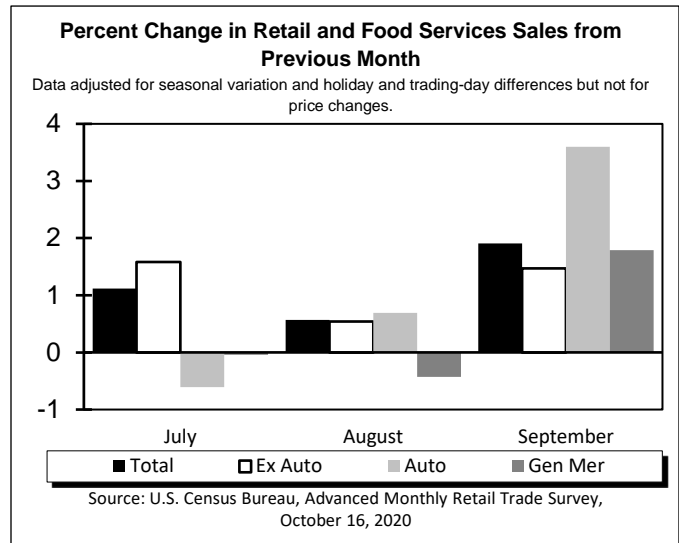# ADVANCE MONTHLY SALES FOR RETAIL AND FOOD SERVICES, SEPTEMBER 2020

Release Number: CB20-159

Statement Regarding COVID-19 Impact: The Census Bureau continues to monitor response and data quality and has determined that estimates in this release meet publication standards. For more information, see COVID-19 FAQs.

October 16, 2020 — The U.S. Census Bureau announced the following advance estimates of U.S. retail and food services sales for September 2020:

ADVANCE MONTHLY SALES		
September 2020	**$549.3 billion**	**1.9%**
August 2020 (revised)	**$539.0 billion**	**0.6%**

Next release: November 17, 2020

* The 90 percent confidence interval includes zero. There is insufficient statistical evidence to conclude that the actual change is different from zero. Data adjusted for seasonal variation and holiday and trading-day differences but not for price changes. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Advanced Monthly Retail Trade Survey, October 16, 2020.

Percent Change in Retail and Food Services Sales from Previous Month
Data adjusted for seasonal variation and holiday and trading-day differences but not for price changes.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Advanced Monthly Retail Trade Survey, October 16, 2020

Advance Estimates of U.S. Retail and Food Services

Advance estimates of U.S. retail and food services sales for September 2020, adjusted for seasonal variation and holiday and trading-day differences, but not for price changes, were $549.3 billion, an increase of 1.9 percent (± 0.5 percent) from the previous month, and 5.4 percent (± 0.7 percent) above September 2019. Total sales for the July 2020 through September 2020 period were up 3.6 percent (± 0.5 percent) from the same period a year ago. The July 2020 to August 2020 percent change was unrevised at up 0.6 percent (± 0.2 percent).

Retail trade sales were up 1.9 percent (± 0.5 percent) from August 2020, and 8.2 percent (± 0.7 percent) above last year. Nonstore retailers were up 23.8 percent (± 1.6 percent) from September 2019, while building material and garden equipment and supplies dealers were up 19.1 percent (± 2.1 percent) from last year.

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General Information

The October 2020 Advance Monthly Retail report is scheduled for release on November 17, 2020 at 8:30 a.m. EST. View the full schedule in the Economic Briefing Room: <www.census.gov/economic-indicators/>. The full text and tables of this release can be found at <www.census.gov/retail/>.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

The advance estimates are based on a subsample of the Census Bureau's full retail and food services sample. A stratified random sampling method is used to select approximately 5,500 retail and food services firms whose sales are then weighted and benchmarked to represent the complete universe of over three million retail and food services firms.

Survey Description

The U.S. Census Bureau conducts the Advance Monthly Retail Trade and Food Services Survey to provide an early estimate of monthly sales by kind of business for retail and food service firms located in the United States. Each month, questionnaires are mailed to a probability sample of approximately 5,500 employer firms selected from the larger Monthly Retail Trade Survey. Advance sales estimates are computed using a link relative estimator. For each detailed industry, we compute a ratio of current-to-previous month weighted sales using data from units for which we have obtained usable responses for both the current and previous month. For each detailed industry, the advance total sales estimates for the current month is computed by multiplying this ratio by the preliminary sales estimate for the previous month (derived from the larger MRTS) at the appropriate industry level. Total estimates for broader industries are computed as the sum of the detailed industry estimates. The link relative estimate is used because imputation is not performed for most nonrespondents in MARTS. For a limited number of nonresponding companies that have influential effects on the estimates, sales may be estimated based on historical performance of that company. The monthly estimates are benchmarked to the annual survey estimates from the Annual Retail Trade Survey once available. The estimates are adjusted for seasonal variation and holiday and trading day differences. Additional information on MARTS and MRTS can be found on the Census Bureau website at: <www.census.gov/retail>.

Reliability of Estimates

Because the estimates presented in this report are based on a sample survey, they contain sampling error and nonsampling error.

Sampling error is the difference between the estimate and the result that would be obtained from a complete enumeration of the sampling frame conducted under the same survey conditions. This error occurs because only a subset of the entire sampling frame is measured in a sample survey. Standard errors

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and coefficients of variation (CV), as given in Table 3 of this report, are estimated measures of sampling variation.

The margin of sampling error, as used on page 1, gives a range about the estimate which is a 90 percent confidence interval. If, for example, the percent change estimate is +1.2 percent and its estimated standard error is 0.9 percent, then the margin of sampling error is ±1.753 x 0.9 percent or ±1.6 percent, and the 90 percent confidence interval is –0.4 percent to +2.8 percent. If the interval contains 0, then one does not have sufficient evidence to conclude at the 90 percent confidence level that the change is different from zero and therefore the change is not statistically significant. Estimated changes shown in the text are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. For a monthly total, the median estimated coefficient of variation is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value ±1.753 x CV x (the estimated monthly total). The Census Bureau recommends that individuals using estimates in this report incorporate this information into their analyses, as sampling error could affect the conclusions drawn from the estimates.

Nonsampling error encompasses all other factors that contribute to the total error of a sample survey estimate. This type of error can occur because of nonresponse, insufficient coverage of the universe of retail businesses, mistakes in the recording and coding of data, and other errors of collection, response, coverage, or processing. Although nonsampling error is not measured directly, the Census Bureau employs quality control procedures throughout the process to minimize this type of error.

Weather Information

For information on the impact of weather events on the compilation of this report, please see the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on our website at:
<www.census.gov/retail/marts_weather_faqs.html>

RESOURCES

API

The Census Bureau's application programming interface lets developers create custom apps to reach new users and makes key demographic, socio-economic and housing statistics more accessible than ever before. <www.census.gov/developers/>

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FRED Mobile App

Receive the latest updates on the nation's key economic indicators by downloading the FRED App <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/fred-mobile/> for both Apple and Android devices. FRED, the signature database of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, now incorporates the Census Bureau's 13 economic indicators.

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* The 90 percent confidence interval includes zero. There is insufficient statistical evidence to conclude that the actual change is different from zero.

Table 1. Estimated Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services, by Kind of Business

(Total sales estimates are shown in millions of dollars and are based on data from the Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey, Monthly Retail Trade Survey, and administrative records.)

NAICS[1] code	Kind of Business	Not Adjusted						Adjusted[2]				
		9 Month Total		2020			2019		2020			2019	
		2020	% Chg. 2019	Sep.[3] (a)	Aug. (p)	Jul. (r)	Sep.	Aug.	Sep.[3] (a)	Aug. (p)	Jul. (r)	Sep. (r)	Aug. (r)
	Retail & food services, total	4,528,768	-0.8	531,172	546,720	552,045	496,074	545,247	549,256	538,979	535,923	521,335	524,477
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts) ...	3,614,124	-0.6	417,576	430,042	434,976	396,537	430,588	434,453	428,170	425,872	417,800	418,817
	Total (excl. gasoline stations)	4,214,169	0.6	494,796	508,749	513,906	454,138	500,204	513,347	503,591	500,837	479,896	482,886
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts & gasoline stations)	3,299,525	1.2	381,200	392,071	396,837	354,601	385,545	398,544	392,782	390,786	376,361	377,226
	Retail	4,070,864	2.0	477,022	490,780	497,941	433,299	477,537	493,661	484,510	483,699	456,351	459,868
	GAFO[4]	(*)	(*)	(*)	108,565	105,637	100,089	113,908	(*)	106,004	106,230	108,998	109,069
441	**Motor vehicle & parts dealers**	914,644	-1.6	113,596	116,678	117,069	99,537	114,659	114,803	110,809	110,051	103,535	105,660
4411, 4412	Auto & other motor veh. dealers .	841,660	-1.9	104,985	107,745	107,972	91,783	106,073	106,260	102,128	101,477	95,607	97,583
44111	New car dealers	(*)	(*)	(*)	85,776	84,406	75,986	87,792	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4413	Auto parts, acc. & tire stores...........	(*)	(*)	(*)	8,933	9,097	7,754	8,586	(*)	8,681	8,574	7,928	8,077
442	**Furniture & home furn. stores**	78,442	-8.8	10,574	10,521	10,315	9,839	10,345	10,407	10,355	10,143	9,948	9,852
4421	Furniture stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	5,561	5,680	5,363	5,452	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4422	Home furnishings stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	4,960	4,635	4,476	4,893	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
443	**Electronics & appliance stores**	56,957	-15.8	7,169	7,659	7,308	7,638	8,038	7,651	7,776	7,742	8,178	8,087
444	**Building material & garden eq. & supplies dealers**..................................	327,895	12.8	38,204	37,785	40,522	30,948	33,434	37,825	37,588	36,696	31,771	32,247
4441	Building mat. & sup. dealers	(*)	(*)	(*)	33,613	35,842	27,570	29,887	(*)	32,825	31,973	27,820	28,302
445	**Food & beverage stores**.........................	634,937	12.1	68,785	71,379	74,060	61,668	66,165	70,794	70,780	71,751	64,091	64,592
4451	Grocery stores	568,112	11.9	61,009	63,287	65,617	55,217	59,028	62,702	62,660	63,768	57,220	57,701
4453	Beer, wine & liquor stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	6,116	6,423	4,680	5,270	(*)	6,128	5,997	5,005	5,024
446	**Health & personal care stores**	266,986	0.7	30,954	30,258	30,764	28,706	29,973	31,425	30,907	31,075	29,840	29,794
44611	Pharmacies & drug stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	25,745	26,334	23,630	24,710	(*)	26,190	26,546	24,718	24,685
447	**Gasoline stations**	314,599	-16.4	36,376	37,971	38,139	41,936	45,043	35,909	35,388	35,086	41,439	41,591
448	**Clothing & clothing accessories stores**	125,556	-32.6	17,130	17,898	16,973	19,464	23,743	19,478	17,554	17,306	22,251	22,278
44811	Men's clothing stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	322	364	662	617	(*)	352	410	668	657
44812	Women's clothing stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,442	2,439	3,080	3,325	(*)	2,554	2,525	3,396	3,376
44814	Family clothing stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	7,506	6,857	8,219	10,067	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)	(NA)
4482	Shoe stores	(*)	(*)	(*)	2,572	2,497	2,762	4,280	(*)	2,024	2,383	3,219	3,272
451	**Sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument, & book stores**	57,351	1.1	7,425	7,954	7,761	6,276	7,504	7,710	7,291	7,871	6,741	6,688
452	**General merchandise stores**.................	525,493	2.8	56,764	62,209	61,200	54,515	61,460	62,055	60,964	61,229	59,471	59,733
4521	Department stores	76,246	-17.8	8,958	9,637	9,265	9,762	11,550	10,328	9,413	9,626	11,141	11,311
4529	Other general merch. stores....	(*)	(*)	(*)	52,572	51,935	44,753	49,910	(*)	51,551	51,603	48,330	48,422
45291	Warehouse clubs & supercenters................................	(*)	(*)	(*)	45,026	44,187	38,367	43,098	(*)	43,715	43,793	41,478	41,520
45299	All oth. gen. merch. stores...........	(*)	(*)	(*)	7,546	7,748	6,386	6,812	(*)	7,836	7,810	6,852	6,902
453	**Miscellaneous store retailers**	95,276	-2.8	11,611	11,904	11,984	11,011	11,998	11,823	11,700	11,548	11,417	11,459
454	**Nonstore retailers**	672,728	20.5	78,434	78,564	81,846	61,761	65,175	83,781	83,398	83,201	67,669	67,887
4541	Elect. shopping & m/o houses	(*)	(*)	(*)	71,875	74,858	54,922	58,181	(*)	75,978	75,767	60,090	60,229
722	**Food services & drinking places**	457,904	-20.1	54,150	55,940	54,104	62,775	67,710	55,595	54,469	52,224	64,984	64,609

(*) Advance estimates are not available for this kind of business.   (NA) Not available   (a) Advance estimate   (p) Preliminary estimate   (r) Revised estimate

(S) Estimate does not meet publication standards because of high sampling variability (coefficient of variation is greater than 30%), poor response quality (total quantity response rate is less than 50%), or other concerns about the estimate's quality.

(1) For a full description of the NAICS codes used in this table, see http://www.census.gov/eos/www/naics

(2) Estimates are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variation and for holiday and trading day differences, but not for price changes. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available unadjusted estimates as input to the X-13ARIMA-SEATS program. The factors derived from the program are used in calculating all seasonally adjusted estimates shown in this table. Year-to-date seasonally adjusted sales estimates are not tabulated. Adjustment factors and explanatory material can be found on the Internet at http://www.census.gov/retail

(3) Advance estimates are based on early reports obtained from a small sample of firms selected from the larger Monthly Retail Trade Survey (MRTS) sample. All other estimates are from the MRTS sample.

(4) GAFO represents firms which specialize in department store types of merchandise and is comprised of furniture & home furnishings (442), electronics & appliances (443), clothing & accessories (448), sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument, and book (451), general merchandise (452), office supply, stationery, and gift stores (4532).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey, October 16, 2020. Table 3 provides estimated measures of sampling variability. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at <www.census.gov/retail/how_surveys_are_collected.html>.

Table 2. Estimated Change in Monthly Sales for Retail and Food Services, by Kind of Business

(Estimates are shown as percents and are based on data from the Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey, Monthly Retail Trade Survey, and administrative records.)

NAICS code	Kind of Business	Percent Change[1]					
		Sep. 2020 Advance from --		Aug. 2020 Preliminary from --		Jul. 2020 through Sep. 2020 from --	
		Aug. 2020 (p)	Sep. 2019 (r)	Jul. 2020 (r)	Aug. 2019 (r)	Apr. 2020 through Jun. 2020	Jul. 2019 through Sep. 2019
	Retail & food services, total	**1.9**	**5.4**	**0.6**	**2.8**	**13.5**	**3.6**
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts)	1.5	4.0	0.5	2.2	12.0	2.6
	Total (excl. gasoline stations)	1.9	7.0	0.5	4.3	13.1	5.2
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts & gasoline stations)	1.5	5.9	0.5	4.1	11.4	4.6
	Retail ………………………………	1.9	8.2	0.2	5.4	11.5	6.4
441	**Motor vehicle & parts dealers**	**3.6**	**10.9**	**0.7**	**4.9**	**19.6**	**7.5**
4411, 4412	Auto & other motor veh. dealers ...	4.0	11.1	0.6	4.7	20.6	7.4
442	**Furniture & home furn. stores**	**0.5**	**4.6**	**2.1**	**5.1**	**46.4**	**4.1**
443	**Electronics & appliance stores**	**-1.6**	**-6.4**	**0.4**	**-3.8**	**55.2**	**-5.4**
444	**Building material & garden eq. & supplies dealers**.....................................	**0.6**	**19.1**	**2.4**	**16.6**	**4.6**	**17.2**
445	**Food & beverage stores**...........................	**0.0**	**10.5**	**-1.4**	**9.6**	**-0.9**	**10.4**
4451	Grocery stores	0.1	9.6	-1.7	8.6	-1.5	9.6
446	**Health & personal care stores**	**1.7**	**5.3**	**-0.5**	**3.7**	**10.5**	**4.4**
447	**Gasoline stations**	**1.5**	**-13.3**	**0.9**	**-14.9**	**19.8**	**-15.0**
448	**Clothing & clothing accessories stores**	**11.0**	**-12.5**	**1.4**	**-21.2**	**91.9**	**-18.8**
451	**Sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument, & book stores**	**5.7**	**14.4**	**-7.4**	**9.0**	**23.6**	**13.6**
452	**General merchandise stores**....................	**1.8**	**4.3**	**-0.4**	**2.1**	**4.2**	**2.8**
4521	Department stores	9.7	-7.3	-2.2	-16.8	22.1	-13.3
453	**Miscellaneous store retailers**	**1.1**	**3.6**	**1.3**	**2.1**	**26.3**	**2.8**
454	**Nonstore retailers**	**0.5**	**23.8**	**0.2**	**22.8**	**1.2**	**23.4**
722	**Food services & drinking places**	**2.1**	**-14.4**	**4.3**	**-15.7**	**35.7**	**-16.5**

(p) Preliminary estimate   (r) Revised estimate

(1) Estimates shown in this table are derived from adjusted estimates provided in Table 1 of this report.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey, October 16, 2020. Table 3 provides estimated measures of sampling variability.
      Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at
        <www.census.gov/retail/how_surveys_are_collected.html>.

Table 3. Estimated Measures of Sampling Variability and Revision to Advance Estimates September 2020

(Estimates are shown as percents and are based on data from the Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey and Monthly Retail Trade Survey)

NAICS Code	Kind of Business	Median CV [1] for Current Mo. (%)	Median standard error [1] for Percent change			Revision for month-to-month change [2]	
			Previous Mo. to Current Mo.	Previous Qtr. to Current Qtr.	Current Mo. to same Mo. Last Yr.	Average revision	Median absolute revision
	Retail & food services, total	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts)	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2
	Total (excl. gasoline stations)	0.7	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.1
	Total (excl. motor vehicle & parts & gasoline stations)	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2
	Retail, total	0.6	0.3	0.2	0.4	0.4	0.3
441	**Motor vehicle & parts dealers**	1.5	1.1	0.5	1.2	0.8	0.5
4411, 4412	Auto & other motor veh. dealers	1.6	1.2	0.6	1.3	0.8	0.6
442	**Furniture & home furn. stores**	2.9	1.3	0.9	1.7	1.1	1.7
443	**Electronics & appliance stores**	1.5	0.9	0.6	1.1	0.5	1.0
444	**Building material & garden eq. & supplies dealers**	1.6	0.7	0.4	1.2	0.5	1.1
445	**Food & beverage stores**	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.3
4451	Grocery stores	0.8	0.2	0.2	0.7	0.1	0.2
446	**Health & personal care stores**	2.2	0.5	0.4	1.2	0.5	0.8
447	**Gasoline stations**	1.4	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.2	0.6
448	**Clothing & clothing accessories stores**	2.8	0.9	0.9	1.1	-1.3	1.5
451	**Sporting goods, hobby, musical instrument, & book stores**	2.7	1.0	1.2	2.5	-0.3	1.1
452	**General merchandise stores**	0.8	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.1
4521	Department stores	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-0.3	0.3
453	**Miscellaneous store retailers**	4.8	4.0	1.8	4.2	0.4	1.6
454	**Nonstore retailers**	1.6	0.5	0.4	0.9	-0.2	0.3
722	**Food services & drinking places**	3.4	1.3	0.8	2.1	0.0	1.0

(1) Estimated measures of sampling variability are based on estimates not adjusted for seasonal variation or holiday or trading day variation. Medians are based on estimates for the most recent 12 months.

(2) These columns provide measures of the difference between the advance-to-preliminary and preliminary-to-final estimates of month-to-month change for the same pair of months as measured by the Advance sample and MRTS sample. The average and median revisions are based on estimates for the most recent 12 months.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Advance Monthly Retail Trade Survey, October 16, 2020. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at <www.census.gov/retail/how_surveys_are_collected.html>.