




MONTHLY ADVANCE ECONOMIC INDICATORS REPORT, AUGUST 2020

Release Number: CB20-149

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](#).

September 29, 2020 — The U.S. Census Bureau announced the following international trade, wholesale inventories, and retail inventories advance statistics for August 2020:

	 ADVANCE INTERNATIONAL TRADE: GOODS DEFICIT	 ADVANCE WHOLESALE INVENTORIES	 ADVANCE RETAIL INVENTORIES
AUGUST 2020	\$82.9 Billion +3.5%°	\$637.0 Billion +0.5%	\$599.7 Billion +0.8%
JULY 2020	\$80.1 Billion	\$633.5 Billion (R)	\$594.7 Billion (R)
Next release: October 28, 2020.			
<p>* The 90 percent confidence interval includes zero. There is insufficient evidence to conclude that the actual change is different from zero. ° Statistical significance is not applicable or not measurable. Data adjusted for seasonality but not price changes. Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Advance Economic Indicators Report, September 29, 2020.</p>			

Advance International Trade in Goods

The international trade deficit was \$82.9 billion in August, up \$2.8 billion from \$80.1 billion in July. Exports of goods for August were \$118.3 billion, \$3.2 billion more than July exports. Imports of goods for August were \$201.3 billion, \$6.0 billion more than July imports.

Advance Wholesale Inventories

Wholesale inventories for August, adjusted for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were estimated at an end-of-month level of \$637.0 billion, up 0.5 percent (± 0.2 percent) from July 2020, and were down 5.0 percent (± 0.7 percent) from August 2019. The June 2020 to July 2020 percentage change was revised from down 0.3 percent (± 0.2 percent) to down 0.1 percent (± 0.2 percent)*.

Advance Retail Inventories

Retail inventories for August, adjusted for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were estimated at an end-of-month level of \$599.7 billion, up 0.8 percent (± 0.2 percent) from July 2020, and were down 10.1 percent (± 0.5 percent) from August 2019. The June 2020 to July 2020 percentage change was unrevised from the preliminary estimate of up 1.2 percent (± 0.2 percent).

Data Inquiries

International Trade Indicator Branch: 301-763-2311 eid.international.trade.data@census.gov

Retail Indicator Branch: 301-763-2713 eid.retail.indicator.branch@census.gov

Wholesale Indicator Branch: 301-763-6856 eid.wholesale.indicator.branch@census.gov

Media Inquiries

Public Information Office

301-763-3030

pio@census.gov

The September 2020 Advance report is scheduled for release on October 28, 2020. 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/econ/indicators/index.html>.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

International Trade in Goods

Goods (Census Basis)

Data for goods on a Census basis are compiled from the documents collected by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and reflect the movement of goods between foreign countries and the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and U.S. Foreign Trade Zones. They include government and non-government shipments of goods and exclude shipments between the United States and its territories and possessions; transactions with U.S. military, diplomatic, and consular installations abroad; U.S. goods returned to the United States by its Armed Forces; personal and household effects of travelers; and in-transit shipments. Data for U.S. exports to Canada are derived from import data compiled by Canada. For more information on the data exchange and substitution please refer to the FT-900. The General Imports value reflects the total arrival of merchandise from foreign countries that immediately enters consumption channels, warehouses, or Foreign Trade Zones.

For imports, the value reported is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection appraised value of merchandise—generally, the price paid for merchandise for export to the United States. Import duties, freight, insurance, and other charges incurred in bringing merchandise to the United States are excluded.

Exports are valued at the free alongside ship value of merchandise at the U.S. port of export, based on the transaction price including inland freight, insurance, and other charges incurred in placing the merchandise alongside the carrier at the U.S. port of exportation.

Additional information on coverage and valuation are available in the Guide to Foreign Trade Statistics, <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#coverage> and <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#valuation>, respectively.

Nonsampling Errors

Goods data are a complete enumeration of documents collected by the U.S. Customs and Border Protection and are not subject to sampling errors. This report presents current month statistics which reflect nearly complete coverage. Current month statistics reflecting complete coverage will be published in the upcoming U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services report (FT-900). Statistics for other months shown reflect complete coverage and appear in the most recently published FT-900. Quality assurance procedures are performed at every stage of collection, processing, and tabulation. However, the data are still subject to several types of nonsampling errors. Information on nonsampling errors and other quality issues are available in the Guide to Foreign Trade Statistics, <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html>.

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The U.S. Census Bureau recommends that data users incorporate this information into their analyses, as nonsampling errors could impact the conclusion drawn from the results. For a detailed discussion of errors affecting the goods data, see U.S. Merchandise Trade Statistics: A Quality Profile (October 2014), available at www.census.gov/foreign-trade/aip/quality_profile10032014.pdf or from the Economic Indicators Division, U.S. Census Bureau.

Adjustments for Seasonal and Trading-Day Variations

Goods data are presented on a seasonally adjusted and not seasonally adjusted basis. Seasonally adjusted (and/or trading day adjusted data) are produced using X-13ARIMA-SEATS software to develop monthly adjustment factors. Goods data are initially classified under the Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System (Harmonized System), which is an internationally accepted standard for the commodity classification of traded goods. Combining trade into approximately 140 export and 140 import end-use categories makes it possible to examine goods according to their principal uses. These categories are used as the basis for computing the seasonal and trading-day adjusted data. These adjusted data are then summed to the six end-use aggregates for publication.

For more information, visit the seasonal adjustment section of the Guide to Foreign Trade here:

www.census.gov/foreign-trade/guide/sec2.html#seasonal

Retail and Wholesale Inventories

National estimates of end-of-month inventories are based on data from the Monthly Retail Trade Survey and the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey. Additional information for each survey can be found at www.census.gov/retail and www.census.gov/wholesale. The advance estimates contained in this report are not incorporated into the full MRTS and MWTS time series.

The MRTS and MWTS samples selected to measure inventories consist of a stratified simple random sampling method of approximately 11,000 retail firms and 4,200 wholesale firms located in the United States. The retail and wholesale samples include firms of all sizes and are updated on a quarterly basis to account for new retail and wholesale firms, deaths, and other changes to the universe.

Data for nonresponding firms are imputed based on data for similar-sized firms classified in the same kind of business. For surveyed Retail companies, approximately 46.7 percent provided data for this reporting period resulting in a total quantity response rate of 55.7 percent. For surveyed Wholesale companies, approximately 54.7 percent provided data for this reporting period resulting in a total quantity response rate of 58.0 percent.

MRTS estimates cover companies with one or more establishments that sell merchandise and related services to final consumers. Nonemployers are represented in the retail estimates through benchmarking to prior annual survey estimates that include nonemployer sales based on administrative records.

MWTS estimates cover wholesale merchants who sell goods on their own account and include such businesses as wholesale merchants or jobbers, industrial distributors, exporters, and importers. Sales offices and branches maintained by manufacturing, refining, or mining firms for the purpose of marketing their products are not covered

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in this report. Also excluded is NAICS Industry Group 4251: Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers.

Reliability of Estimates

Because the retail and wholesale estimates 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 and coefficients of variation are estimated measures of sampling variation.

The margin of sampling error gives a range about the estimate which is a 90 percent confidence interval. If, for example, the percentage change estimate is +1.2 percent and its estimated standard error is 0.9 percent, then the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.753 \times 0.9$ 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 are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. For a monthly total, the estimated coefficient of variation is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated value $\pm 1.753 \times CV \times$ (the estimated monthly total).

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 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.

The U.S. Census Bureau recommends that individuals using retail and wholesale estimates incorporate this information into their analyses, as sampling error and nonsampling error could affect the conclusions drawn from the estimates.

Adjustments for Seasonal Variations

Concurrent seasonal adjustment is used to adjust the retail and wholesale inventories estimates for seasonal variations. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available unadjusted estimates as input to the X-13ARIMA-SEATS program. The factors derived from the program are applied to the retail and wholesale estimates of current and previous month inventories and for inventories estimates a year ago as well.

Data Availability

The Advance Economic Indicators Report is available at <www.census.gov/econ/indicators/index.html>. For archived versions of the Advance Economic Indicators Report please visit the Historical Data tab at the following: <census.gov/econ/indicators/historical_data.html>.

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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/>

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.

° Statistical significance is not applicable or not measurable for this survey.

(R) Revised from the last published Monthly Retail Trade Report and Monthly Wholesale Trade: Sales and Inventories Report

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Table 1. U.S. International Trade in Goods by Principal End-Use Category (1)

In millions of dollars. Details may not equal totals due to seasonal adjustment and rounding. (X) – Not applicable

	Goods - Census Basis (2)						
	Monthly				Percent change		
	August 2020 (a)	July 2020	June 2020	August 2019	August 2020/ July 2020	July 2020/ June 2020	August 2020/ August 2019
Seasonally Adjusted							
Balance	-82,939	-80,114	-70,954	-73,662	(X)	(X)	(X)
Exports	118,348	115,175	102,867	136,570	2.8	12.0	-13.3
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	11,180	10,185	9,954	11,557	9.8	2.3	-3.3
Industrial Supplies (3)	39,043	35,317	32,805	43,877	10.6	7.7	-11.0
Capital Goods	36,265	37,719	35,246	44,348	-3.9	7.0	-18.2
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	12,082	12,161	8,312	14,050	-0.7	46.3	-14.0
Consumer Goods	15,074	14,899	12,297	16,977	1.2	21.2	-11.2
Other Goods	4,705	4,894	4,253	5,762	-3.9	15.1	-18.3
Imports	201,288	195,289	173,821	210,232	3.1	12.4	-4.3
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	13,474	12,798	12,403	12,621	5.3	3.2	6.8
Industrial Supplies (3)	37,925	39,758	35,405	42,753	-4.6	12.3	-11.3
Capital Goods	54,610	53,845	49,776	56,962	1.4	8.2	-4.1
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	27,996	26,357	18,628	31,769	6.2	41.5	-11.9
Consumer Goods	57,777	54,004	50,454	56,410	7.0	7.0	2.4
Other Goods	9,506	8,528	7,155	9,717	11.5	19.2	-2.2
Not Seasonally Adjusted							
Balance	-85,306	-88,111	-74,653	-77,336	(X)	(X)	(X)
Exports	117,654	112,664	105,056	138,310	4.4	7.2	-14.9
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	10,668	9,796	9,378	11,228	8.9	4.5	-5.0
Industrial Supplies (3)	39,293	35,552	33,378	44,826	10.5	6.5	-12.3
Capital Goods	36,045	37,549	36,287	45,020	-4.0	3.5	-19.9
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	12,713	11,039	8,726	15,017	15.2	26.5	-15.3
Consumer Goods	14,230	13,838	12,988	16,371	2.8	6.5	-13.1
Other Goods	4,705	4,889	4,298	5,848	-3.8	13.8	-19.5
Imports	202,959	200,774	179,709	215,647	1.1	11.7	-5.9
Foods, Feeds, & Beverages	12,909	12,704	12,641	12,240	1.6	0.5	5.5
Industrial Supplies (3)	38,472	41,838	37,139	44,074	-8.0	12.7	-12.7
Capital Goods	54,587	55,920	52,921	57,972	-2.4	5.7	-5.8
Automotive Vehicles, etc.	28,513	25,405	19,249	32,726	12.2	32.0	-12.9
Consumer Goods	59,613	56,136	50,375	59,309	6.2	11.4	0.5
Other Goods	8,866	8,771	7,385	9,325	1.1	18.8	-4.9

(a) Advance statistics

(1) For a listing of the detail included in each end-use category, see <www.census.gov/foreign-trade/reference/codes/enduse/exeumstr.txt>.

(2) Data are presented on a Census basis. The information needed to convert to a balance of payment basis is not available.

(3) Includes petroleum and petroleum products.

NOTES:

* Current month statistics reflect nearly complete coverage; current month statistics reflecting complete coverage will be published in the upcoming U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services report (FT-900). Statistics for other months shown reflect complete coverage and appear in the most recently published FT-900.

* For information on data sources, nonsampling errors, and definitions, see the explanatory notes in this release or at <www.census.gov/econ/indicators/advance_report.pdf>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau; Advance Economic Indicators Report, September 29, 2020.

Table 2. Levels and Percent Changes for Inventories

Inventories estimates are shown in millions of dollars. Estimates are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey and the Monthly Retail Trade Survey.

	Inventories					
	Monthly			Percent change		
	August 2020 (a)	July 2020 (r)	August 2019 (r)	August 2020/ July 2020	July 2020/ June 2020	August 2020/ August 2019
Adjusted¹						
Merchant wholesale ² trade, total	636,957	633,477	670,170	0.5	-0.1	-5.0
Durable goods	382,342	379,354	409,528	0.8	-0.6	-6.6
Nondurable goods	254,615	254,123	260,642	0.2	0.7	-2.3
Retail trade, total	599,748	594,704	667,177	0.8	1.2	-10.1
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	420,011	416,064	429,202	0.9	0.6	-2.1
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	179,737	178,640	237,975	0.6	2.6	-24.5
Not Adjusted						
Merchant wholesale ² trade, total	627,397	627,272	660,413	0.0	0.2	-5.0
Durable goods	383,374	382,639	410,886	0.2	0.4	-6.7
Nondurable goods	244,023	244,633	249,527	-0.2	-0.1	-2.2
Retail trade, total	589,120	580,578	654,655	1.5	0.2	-10.0
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	414,519	406,121	423,881	2.1	0.2	-2.2
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	174,601	174,457	230,774	0.1	-0.1	-24.3

(a) Advance estimate

(r) Revised estimate

See footnotes and notes at the end of Table 3.

Table 3. Estimated Measures of Sampling Variability

Estimates are shown as percents and are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey and the Monthly Retail Trade Survey.

	Inventories					
	Monthly			Standard Error of		
	Coefficient of Variation			Percent Change		
	August 2020 (a)	July 2020 (r)	August 2019 (r)	August 2020/ July 2020	July 2020/ June 2020	August 2020/ August 2019
Merchant wholesale ² trade, total	1.8	1.8	1.7	0.1	0.1	0.4
Durable goods	2.6	2.6	2.4	0.1	0.1	0.5
Nondurable goods	1.3	1.3	1.5	0.2	0.2	0.7
Retail trade, total	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.1	0.1	0.3
Total (excl. motor veh. & parts)	0.9	0.9	0.7	0.1	0.1	0.4
Motor vehicle & parts dealers	1.4	1.3	1.1	0.4	0.4	0.6

(a) Advance estimate

(r) Revised estimate

(1) Estimates are concurrently adjusted for seasonal variation, but not for price changes. Concurrent seasonal adjustment uses all available not adjusted 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.

(2) The 2012 North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) defines merchant wholesalers as including manufacturers' sales branches and offices. However, the estimates included in this release exclude manufacturers' sales branches and offices. Note that this is not a change in coverage from prior releases and is consistent with the description used in the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey data products.

NOTES:

Estimated measures of sampling variability are based on estimates not adjusted for seasonal variation. Additional information on confidentiality protection, sampling error, nonsampling error, sample design, and definitions may be found at www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.html for wholesale and at www.census.gov/retail/mrts/how_surveys_are_collected.html for retail.