



By the Numbers: The Second Wave of COVID-19 Law Enforcement in Canada

Over the fall and winter Canada experienced new waves of COVID-19 infections. Throughout the second wave, governments across the country have continued to focus on high fines and punitive enforcement as a way to stem rising COVID-19 infections – a policy choice that we argue risks exacerbating the public health crisis by undermining effective and evidence-based public health measures. The turn to law enforcement risks further disproportionately harming those communities – including Black people and members of other racialized communities, Indigenous persons, those experiencing homelessness, mental health challenges, and addiction – that are already subject to disproportionate and harmful policing practices.

We were able to obtain comprehensive data documenting the number of tickets issued for alleged violations of COVID-19 related laws in five jurisdictions: British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

British Columbia

- British Columbia took a public health approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic during wave 1 but has since adopted a more punitive stance.
- In [June 2020 we estimated that](#), based on publicly available reports at the time, BC had issued approximately 22 COVID-related fines and charges during the first few months of the pandemic.
- Between August and March 2021, the province reported handing out 1,584 fines.
- The total cost of fines given out in British Columbia since late August 2021 has surpassed \$1,000,000.

Manitoba

- Manitoba adopted a highly punitive approach to the second wave of the pandemic.
- Manitoba, similar to British Columbia, gave very few fines during wave 1; in [June 2020 we estimated that](#), based on publicly available reports at the time, Manitoba had issued about 30 COVID-related fines and charges between April 1 and June 15, 2020.
- Between September 2020 and February 2021 (March 2021 data not available), Manitoba issued 904 tickets.
- The per capita ticketing rate pooling all fines from October 2020 to February 2021 was 0.69 tickets per 1,000 people – the highest per capita ticketing rate of all jurisdictions studied during that time period.
- Most of these fines have gone to individuals, at a cost of \$298-\$1,296. At least 57 fines have been given to businesses since November 2020, at a cost of \$5,000 each.
- Manitoba did not begin releasing information about the nature and cost of fines until the week of November 23-29 2020. Based on the available information, however, Manitoba issued well over \$1,000,000 in fines during wave 2 of the pandemic.ⁱ

Ontario

- Ontario was one of three punitive jurisdictions that we highlighted in our June 2020 report. The total number of fines Ontario issued in wave 2 has surpassed the number given in wave 1.
- Between March 2020 and August 2020 the province levied a total of 2,562 fines.
- From September 2020 to March 2021, the province reported a total of 3,942 fines, reaching peak enforcement at 1,368 fines in a single month in January 2021.
- The per capita ticketing rate pooling all fines from October 2020 to February 2021 was 0.22 tickets per 1,000 people.
- Although exact figures are not available (Ontario currently only reports the total amount of *paid* fines), we estimate that since the beginning of the pandemic Ontario has issued over \$5.7 million in COVID-19 related fines.ⁱⁱ

Quebec

- Quebec remains one of the most punitive provinces in the country when it comes to fines for COVID-related behaviours, certainly in number but also likely in the total cost of fines as well.
- Between April 2020 and August 2020 (wave 1), the province reported giving out 3,756 fines, valued at \$5,507,255.
- Between September 2020 and March 2021 (wave 2), the province reported giving out 7,445 fines, totaling \$12,283,745 in fines. Ticketing over this time period has increased exponentially: the province reported giving out 26 fines in October, 94 fines in November, 141 fines in December, 1,010 fines in January, 2,865 fines in February 2021, and 3,309 fines in March 2021.
- The trend towards increasingly punitive measures has continued past the wave 2 period we analyzed: in April, 2021, Quebec law enforcement officers gave a total of 5,060 fines, setting a new monthly record.
- Over \$16 million in fines were issued in Quebec between April 2020 and March 2021. Including the most recently available April 2021 enforcement data pushes the total amount of fines issued in Quebec since the beginning of the pandemic to over \$24 million.

Nova Scotia

- In our [June 2020 report](#), which focused on the first few months of the pandemic, we found that Nova Scotia was the highest per capita ticket issuer.
- Law enforcement in Nova Scotia is continuing to give out fines for COVID-related behaviours, but at a much lower magnitude in wave 2 than in wave 1.
- Of the total 912 fines given across Nova Scotia between March 2020 and February 2021 (March 2021 data not available), 76% (690) were given out during wave 1 (March 2020 – August 2020). In fact, most of these fines (439, 48%) were given out in a single month, during the province’s April 2020 “ticketing blitz”. The remaining 24% (222) were given out between September 2020 – February 2021.
- In total, Nova Scotia has levied over \$880,000 in COVID-related fines: \$667,977.50 in fines between March 2020 and August 2020, and \$218,517.50 in fines between September 2020 and February 2021.

Wave 2 October, 2020 – February, 2021 provincial enforcement rates per 1,000

Province	Population	Total Fines	Rate per 1,000
British Columbia	4,648,055	~1,300	~0.28
Manitoba	1,278,365	893	0.69
Ontario	13,448,494	3,020	0.22
Québec	8,164,361	4,136	0.51
Nova Scotia	923,598	195	0.21

Notes: population data obtained from 2016 census. Total fines represent pooled enforcement data for October, 2020 through to the end of February, 2021. The total fines and rate per 1,000 for British Columbia has been estimated using available data. Due to inconsistencies in how governments have (dis)aggregated their data prior to release, we were unable to include September 2020 or March 2021 data in these calculations. All data obtained from official government sources. No official government data were available for Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, or the territories.

Methodology

This data was published as part of a May 2021 report by the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and the Policing the Pandemic Mapping Project, “COVID-19 and Law Enforcement in Canada: The Second Wave”. Three primary approaches were used to collect the data:

- *News articles and press releases collected using Google Alerts, a web crawling and notification service, set to a range of COVID-19/enforcement related keywords;*
- *Manual web searches of governments’ and police services’ COVID-19 web portals; and*
- *Requesting data directly from various government agencies or from media outlets.*

These sources are unlikely to capture every incident or enforcement action taken by police and bylaw officers in Canada. For more details, please see the full report, available at www.ccla.org and www.policingthepandemic.ca.

ⁱ Calculating the total cost of all fines given between November 23 2020 and February 28 2021 puts the total dollar figure at \$1,011,740, a number which would be notably higher if charges from prior months/weeks were included.

ⁱⁱ This number was calculated by multiplying the total number of tickets issued by 880 – the minimum amount an individual would be fined in Ontario (\$750 + the victim surcharge). As there are a number of circumstances under which the fine associated with a charge could be much larger, this should be read as a conservative estimate.