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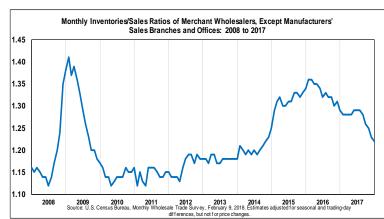
MONTHLY WHOLESALE TRADE: SALES AND INVENTORIES, DECEMBER 2017

Release Number: CB18-23

February 9, 2018 — The U.S. Census Bureau announced the following new wholesale trade statistics for

December 2017:





Sales

December 2017 sales of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations and trading-day differences but not for price changes, were \$500.2 billion, up 1.2 percent (± 0.7 percent) from the revised November level and were up 9.1 percent (± 1.1 percent) from the December 2016 level. The October 2017 to November 2017 percent change was revised from the preliminary estimate of up 1.5 percent (± 0.5 percent) to up 1.9 percent (± 0.7 percent).

Inventories

Total inventories of merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, after adjustment for seasonal variations but not for price changes, were \$612.1 billion at the end of December, up 0.4 percent $(\pm 0.4 \text{ percent})^*$ from the revised November level. Total inventories were up 3.4 percent $(\pm 0.7 \text{ percent})$ from the revised December 2016 level. The November 2017 to December 2017 percent change was revised from the advance estimate of up 0.2 percent $(\pm 0.4 \text{ percent})^*$ to up 0.4 percent $(\pm 0.4 \text{ percent})^*$.

Inventories/Sales Ratio

The December inventories/sales ratio for merchant wholesalers, except manufacturers' sales branches and offices, based on seasonally adjusted data, was 1.22. The December 2016 ratio was 1.29.

General Information

The January 2018 Monthly Wholesale Trade Report is scheduled for release on March 9, 2018. View the full schedule in the Economic Briefing Room: www.census.gov/economic-indicators/>.

Data Inquiries

Economic Indicators Division, Wholesale Indicator Branch 301-763-6856 William Abriatis / Nicole Davis eid.wholesale.indicator.branch@census.gov

Media Inquiries
Public Information Office
301-763-3030
pio@census.gov



For additional survey information, including customizable time series estimates by industry, visit <www.census.gov/wholesale/>.

EXPLANATORY NOTES

Reliability of the 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 and coefficients of variation, as given in Table 2 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 can be used to construct a 90-percent confidence interval. If, for example, the percent change estimate is ± 1.2 percent and its estimated standard error is 0.8 percent, then the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.753 \times 0.8$ percent or ± 1.4 percent, and the 90 percent confidence interval is 1.2 ± 1.4 or ± 1.4 or ± 1.4 or ± 1.4 or ± 1.4 percent. If the interval contains 0, then one does not have sufficient statistical evidence to conclude at the 90 percent confidence level that the actual change is different from zero. Estimated changes shown in the text are statistically significant unless otherwise noted. For a monthly total, the estimated coefficient of variation is given. The resulting confidence interval is the estimated monthly total $\pm 1.753 \times CV \times (\text{the estimated monthly total})$. 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 wholesale businesses, mistakes in the recording and coding of data, model error, 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.

Description of the Survey

The Census Bureau conducts the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey to provide national estimates of monthly sales, end-of-month inventories, and inventories-to-sales ratios by kind of business for wholesale firms located in the United States. Specifically, the MWTS covers 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 in this report. Also excluded is NAICS Industry Group 4251: Wholesale Electronic Markets and Agents and Brokers.

The MWTS sample was selected using a stratified, one-stage design with strata defined by kind of business (e.g., Automotive, Furniture, Lumber, etc.) and annual sales size. The sample includes firms of all sizes and is

Data Inquiries

Economic Indicators Division, Wholesale Indicator Branch 301-763-6856 William Abriatis / Nicole Davis eid.wholesale.indicator.branch@census.gov

Media Inquiries
Public Information Office
301-763-3030
pio@census.gov



updated on a quarterly basis to account for new wholesale firms, deaths, and other changes to the wholesale universe. Each month, questionnaires are mailed to employer firms selected in a probability sample of approximately 4,200. For surveyed companies, approximately 61.2 percent provided data for this reporting period, resulting in a total quantity response rate of 65.2 percent for sales and 60.9 percent for inventories.

Monthly sales and inventories estimates are obtained by summing weighted data (either reported or imputed). The monthly estimates are benchmarked to annual survey estimates and are adjusted for seasonal variation and trading-day differences. Individuals who use estimates in this report to create new estimates should cite the Census Bureau as the source of only the original estimates. Additional information on the MWTS can be found on the Census Bureau website at: www.census.gov/wholesale/>.

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

Data Inquiries

Economic Indicators Division, Wholesale Indicator Branch 301-763-6856 William Abriatis / Nicole Davis eid.wholesale.indicator.branch@census.gov



Table 1. Estimates of Monthly Sales, Inventories, and Inventories/Sales Ratios of Merchant Wholesalers, Except **Manufacturers' Sales Branches and Offices**

[Total sales and inventories estimates are shown in millions of dollars. Estimates are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.]

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4242 Drugs 57,882 58,194 57,002 -0.5 -0.4 1.5 63,595 60,813 62,591 4.6 4.2 1.6 673,613 643,202 4243 Apparel 11,106 14,609 11,479 -24.0 -9.9 -3.2 24,844 24,974 25,873 -0.5 -6.1 -4.0 154,696 162,601 4244 Groceries 52,084 53,269 51,604 -2.2 -4.0 0.9 36,272 36,677 36,283 -1.1 -3.0 0.0 641,781 625,818 4245 Farm products 18,242 19,758 18,739 -7.7 -2.0 -2.7 32,872 31,939 29,91 2.9 207,242 204,320 4246 Chemicals 9,971 10,374 9,212 -3.9 -4.5 8.2 12,294 11,912 11,897 3.2 -0.4 3.3 123,528 114,472 4248 Alcohol 13,649 12,690 13,8	424	.Nondurable	254,196	255,955	241,145	-0.7	-1.7	5.4	245,622	241,661	241,614	1.6	2.4	1.7	2,943	,544 2	,745,304
4243Apparel 11,106 14,609 11,479 -24.0 -9.9 -3.2 24,844 24,974 25,873 -0.5 -6.1 -4.0 154,696 162,601 4244Groceries 52,084 53,269 51,604 -2.2 -4.0 0.9 36,272 36,677 36,283 -1.1 -3.0 0.0 641,781 625,818 4245Farm products 18,242 19,758 18,739 -7.7 -2.0 -2.7 32,872 31,939 29,913 2.9 16.2 9.9 207,242 204,320 4246Chemicals 9,971 10,374 9,212 -3.9 -4.5 8.2 12,294 11,912 11,897 3.2 -0.4 3.3 123,528 114,472Petroleum 63,652 58,396 51,851 9.0 2.7 22.8 21,514 21,758 22,927 -1.1 3.8 -6.2 643,044 504,842 4248Alcohol 13,649 12,690 13,832 7.6 4.3 -1.3 14,571 15,811 14,157 -7.8 -0.6 2.9 142,413 139,215 4249Misc. Nondur. 19,964 20,709 19,643 -3.6 -3.8 1.6 30,818 29,039 29,716 6.1 2.8 3.7 260,868 255,100				-				_								-	
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	Footnotes		19,964	20,709	19,043	-3.6	-3.8	1.6	30,818	29,039	29,716	b.1	2.8	3./	200	,000	233,100

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey, February 9, 2018.

^p Preliminary estimate.

r Revised estimate.

 $^{^{1} \} For \ a \ full \ description \ of \ the \ NAICS \ codes \ used \ in \ this \ table, see \ the \ 2007 \ NAICS \ manual \ or \ < www.census.gov/eos/www/naics>.$

² Except where indicated, sales and inventories estimates are adjusted for seasonal variation. Estimates of sales are also adjusted for trading-day differences and moving holidays. See Table 3 for the combined adjustment factors. Adjusted sales-to-date estimates are not tabulated.

³ No significant seasonal pattern for this NAICS code was detected in the latest annual review of the seasonal adjustment for inventories. Consequently, the "Adjusted" inventories estimates are equal to the "Not Adjusted" estimates.

⁴ Adjusted and not adjusted inventories for aggregate NAICS levels 42, 423, and 424 are revised from the Advance Economic Indicators Report. Data adjusted for seasonality but not price changes. Explanations of confidence intervals and sampling variability can be found on our website at $<\!www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.html>.$

Table 2. Estimated Measures of Sampling Variability of Monthly Wholesale Sales and Inventory Estimates

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

<u>[23emace</u>	Kind of Business		nt of variation				dard error f		Coeffic variation	Standard error for percent change		
NAICS code		Preliminar	y estimates	Final estimates			of two ve months	current m	month to nonth last ar	Sales to date		Current year sales to date to
		Sales	lnv.	Sales	lnv.	Sales	Inv.	Sales	Inv.	Current year	Previous year	previous year sales to date
42	U.S. Total	1.1	1.6	1.0	1.5	0.4	0.2	0.6	0.4	1.1	1.1	0.5
423	.Durable	1.5	1.8	1.4	1.6	0.5	0.3	1.1	0.6	1.5	1.4	0.5
4231	Automotive	3.4	6.1	4.0	4.9	2.1	1.0	2.2	1.6	3.9	3.6	1.1
4232	Furniture	6.1	7.0	8.0	7.0	3.0	0.7	2.3	0.9	5.9	6.9	2.9
4233	Lumber	4.8	5.0	4.8	5.2	1.1	0.7	1.3	1.7	5.0	5.1	1.1
4234	Prof. equip.	4.0	4.0	3.6	4.0	1.9	0.4	1.6	1.3	3.8	3.4	1.5
42343	Comp. equip.	4.2	5.4	4.1	5.4	1.3	0.5	2.5	1.8	4.4	4.7	1.0
4235	Metals	5.5	7.5	4.7	7.8	1.9	0.7	3.0	2.4	4.8	4.9	1.5
4236	Electrical	2.2	3.7	2.3	3.5	0.8	0.4	1.3	1.7	2.3	2.5	1.6
4237	Hardware	4.0	4.0	3.6	4.0	1.3	0.2	2.2	1.0	3.4	3.0	1.5
4238	Machinery	4.5	3.8	4.1	3.9	2.1	0.5	3.7	2.0	3.0	2.6	1.8
4239	Misc. Durable	7.1	5.7	7.0	5.6	1.5	0.6	3.0	2.1	5.7	5.1	2.2
424	.Nondurable	1.7	2.0	1.6	2.1	0.4	0.3	0.8	0.7	1.7	1.7	0.8
4241	Paper	5.0	5.7	5.0	5.5	1.0	0.6	2.0	1.6	4.8	5.1	1.2
4242	Drugs	2.0	4.7	1.9	5.5	0.3	0.7	0.8	1.0	2.3	3.3	1.5
4243	Apparel	9.5	7.1	8.6	7.0	1.7	0.4	3.3	1.6	7.5	7.0	1.6
4244	Groceries	4.4	5.9	4.1	5.9	1.3	1.1	2.2	2.0	4.1	3.5	1.8
4245	Farm products	4.3	7.3	3.9	7.6	2.9	1.0	3.4	2.0	3.6	2.3	2.0
4246	Chemicals	3.3	5.6	3.3	5.4	0.8	0.4	2.0	1.8	3.3	3.8	2.0
4247	Petroleum	5.0	5.1	5.4	5.1	0.5	0.3	1.2	1.4	5.3	5.4	1.6
4248	Alcohol	5.1	6.3	5.4	6.3	0.9	0.4	1.3	1.1	5.3	4.9	0.8
4249	Misc. Nondur.	3.1	6.8	3.4	7.1	1.2	0.6	1.4	2.2	3.1	3.1	1.5
Note:												

Note:

Estimated measures of sampling variability are based on estimates not adjusted for seasonal variation, trading-day differences, or moving holidays. 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>.

Data adjusted for seasonality but not price changes. Explanations of confidence intervals and sampling variability can be found on our website at <www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey, February 9, 2018.

Table 3. Combined Adjustment Factors for Monthly Wholesale Sales and Inventory Estimates

[Combined adjustment factors are computed using the Census Bureau's X-13 ARIMA-SEATS program and are based on data from the Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey.]

NAICS	Kind of	Sales							Inventories						
code	Business	2018	2017				2016	2018	2017				2016		
		Jan.	Dec.r	Nov.r	Oct.	Sep.	Dec.r	Jan.	Dec.r	Nov.r	Oct.	Sep.	Dec.r		
42	U.S. Total ²	0.961	0.987	1.004	1.047	0.995	1.016	1.010	1.005	1.011	1.008	0.995	1.005		
423	.Durable	0.949	1.000	1.008	1.054	1.016	1.032	0.993	0.984	1.002	1.004	1.006	0.984		
4231	Automotive	0.942	1.022	0.997	1.041	0.963	1.033	1.002	0.989	1.027	0.997	0.985	0.986		
4232	Furniture	0.951	0.981	1.106	1.109	0.995	1.010	1.000	0.988	0.998	1.032	1.038	0.989		
4233	Lumber	0.881	0.817	0.954	1.071	1.011	0.852	0.977	0.940	0.943	0.968	0.987	0.940		
4234	Prof. equip.	0.921	1.082	1.000	1.034	1.056	1.129	1.007	0.985	1.012	1.020	1.011	0.986		
42343	Comp. equip.	0.876	1.118	1.003	1.058	1.093	1.165	0.997	0.991	1.012	1.020	1.027	0.993		
4235	Metals	1.008	0.887	0.956	1.038	0.999	0.916	0.996	0.996	0.987	0.989	1.003	0.995		
4236	Electrical	0.954	1.014	1.104	1.106	1.062	1.039	0.985	0.988	1.006	1.025	1.028	0.989		
4237	Hardware	0.938	0.873	0.962	1.039	1.003	0.897	0.981	0.980	0.980	0.989	1.003	0.979		
4238	Machinery	0.946	1.033	0.915	1.020	0.983	1.070	0.990	0.980	0.999	0.991	0.999	0.981		
4239	Misc. Durable	0.968	0.931	1.040	1.053	1.021	0.986	0.999	0.984	1.000	1.040	1.034	0.985		
424	.Nondurable	0.972	0.975	1.002	1.039	0.976	1.001	1.035	1.038	1.024	1.013	0.984	1.037		
4241	Paper	0.998	0.945	0.979	1.053	1.000	0.978	1.021	1.002	0.996	0.998	0.988	1.000		
4242	Drugs	1.010	0.999	1.005	1.026	0.984	1.037	0.997	1.059	1.012	0.988	1.020	1.058		
4243	Apparel	0.910	0.840	1.107	1.231	1.122	0.864	1.003	0.960	0.958	1.016	1.067	0.960		
4244	Groceries	0.973	0.961	0.994	1.024	0.996	0.988	1.002	1.015	1.032	1.042	1.017	1.016		
4245	Farm products	1.083	1.043	1.147	1.170	0.857	1.092	1.272	1.240	1.231	1.110	0.778	1.245		
4246	Chemicals ³	1.040	0.902	0.963	1.012	0.985	0.930	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000	1.000		
4247	Petroleum	0.992	1.005	0.952	1.016	0.973	1.009	0.984	1.014	0.991	0.968	0.977	1.003		
4248	Alcohol	0.793	1.127	1.060	1.021	0.968	1.181	0.965	0.930	1.027	1.032	1.004	0.930		
4249	Misc. Nondur.	0.892	0.886	0.936	0.962	0.877	0.919	1.066	1.027	0.979	0.962	0.946	1.027		

Footnotes:

Note:

The seasonal adjustment factors shown are estimates derived from a model that uses sample survey data as input. Therefore, these estimates may contain sampling error and nonsampling error. Additional information on the general form of the model and the X-13 ARIMA-SEATS program may be found at <www.census.gov/srd/www/x13as/>.

Data adjusted for seasonality but not price changes. Explanations of confidence intervals and sampling variability can be found on our website at <www.census.gov/wholesale/www/how_surveys_are_collected/monthly_methodology.html>.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Monthly Wholesale Trade Survey, February 9, 2018.

r Revised factors

¹ Combined factors for sales include the effects of seasonal variation, trading day differences, and moving holidays. Combined factors for inventories include only the effects of seasonal variation.

² Adjusted sales and inventories estimates for detailed kind-of-business levels in Table 1 are computed by dividing each "Not Adjusted" estimate by the combined adjustment factor for the corresponding kind of business and month. Adjusted estimates for broad kind-of-business levels are obtained by summing adjusted estimates at the appropriate detailed levels. Combined factors shown for broad kind-of-business levels may be used to approximate adjusted estimates at these levels, but the resulting estimates may differ slightly from the published estimates.

³ No significant seasonal pattern for this NAICS code was detected in the latest annual review of the seasonal adjustment for inventories. Therefore, the combined adjustment factors for inventories are set to one for this NAICS code.