



Epidemiology COVID-19 Response Corps - States Reopening and Closing Policy Map

About

As the pandemic has progressed over the past several months, our team was interested in comparing state-level policies on industry closures and reopenings, as well as the presence or absence of a mask mandate for public spaces. Specifically, we paid attention to restaurants, bars, places of worship, movie theatres, gyms, non-essential retail and personal care facilities. Given the variability in COVID-19 response across states, the first visual enables audiences to play through an animated map that compares state actions across time for specific industries. The second allows users to view details of all policies at once for each state. This dashboard will be updated regularly to reflect changes in state policy related to industry restrictions.

Methodology

In the initial exploration of these policies, our team used data compiled by Raifman et al. in their [COVID-19 US state policy database](#). For dates that required further investigation, we used dates from official state websites and documents such as executive orders, health orders, press releases, and other mandates. We noted the dates these respective policies went into effect on a week to week basis. It should be noted that there were also county-level mandates that contributed to the variation in states but our focus was on state/governor mandated orders whether it applied to an entire state immediately or to certain counties initially.

Initial Closures

There were clear state directives to close certain businesses, and for other sectors, gatherings were either cancelled or limited to a certain number of people. For the most part, restaurants, gyms, bars, movie theaters, personal care facilities, non-essential retail and bars closed completely while limits were applied to gatherings such as places of worship. To standardize our approach as much as possible, we classified businesses/industries as “closed” if states placed substantial restrictions that would not occur on a normal basis.

Openings

In terms of re-openings, most states provided clear official orders that detailed when and how each of these businesses could resume operations, either at full capacity or with loosened restrictions. Industries were labelled as “open” if no limits, restrictions and closures occurred at the time of initial closings, or if states loosened restrictions or ended them completely as part of a re-opening phase. It is important to note that in some cases, state officials allowed certain counties to open before others. For the purposes of this project, as long as the state allowed any counties to loosen restrictions, the industry was considered "open" as that is the point where states “began to loosen restrictions” for the respective industry. See Limitations for more details.



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Second Closures

As cases increased across the country, some states began to re-close or limit certain business operations. These state directives applied to either the whole state or to certain counties. Industries were noted as “closed” if they had been mandated to re-close or to work under new limits, whether the restriction applied to the entire state or only to certain counties. This was in order to reflect a re-tightening of restrictions.

Limitations

Firstly, just because a policy was in effect does not mean that they were adhered to. For example, even though certain businesses were allowed to resume operations, business owners may have chosen to remain closed for a longer period of time. Similarly, although states may have a mask mandate for public spaces, it is unknown how many people actually follow that directive.

Furthermore, the standard for classification that we followed does not fully capture the variability at the county level. While our focus remained on state mandates, it is important to note that some counties had stricter restrictions and policies in place. This should not be confused with stricter restrictions given to counties by the state government. Variations existed in many states but may have been more consequential in certain states that are worthy of mention:

California: The dates used to note initial reopenings of businesses are the dates when counties that met certain criteria were allowed to resume operations, even if this meant not all counties could do so.

Florida: Initial reopenings of businesses were at the state-level for the first phase of reopening but did not apply to Broward County, Palm Beach County, and Miami-Dade County.

New York: The dates used to note initial reopenings of businesses are the dates when counties that met certain criteria were allowed to resume operations, even if this meant not all counties could do so. Particularly, state-policy for New York city did not always align with mandates for the entire state.

Pennsylvania: The dates used to note initial reopenings of businesses are the dates when counties that met certain criteria were allowed to resume operations, even if this meant not all counties could do so.

Washington: The dates used to note initial reopenings of businesses are the dates when counties that met certain criteria were allowed to resume operations, even if this meant not all counties could do so. Though the reopening plan paused on July 28th as the trends in the communities were concerning.

Oregon: Oregon is maintaining a phased approach so that counties apply to move to the next phase. Hence, different counties will be in different phases at certain points in time.