

# SUMMARY OF STATE-SPECIFIC GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN THE US 2020/2021

## MONTANA

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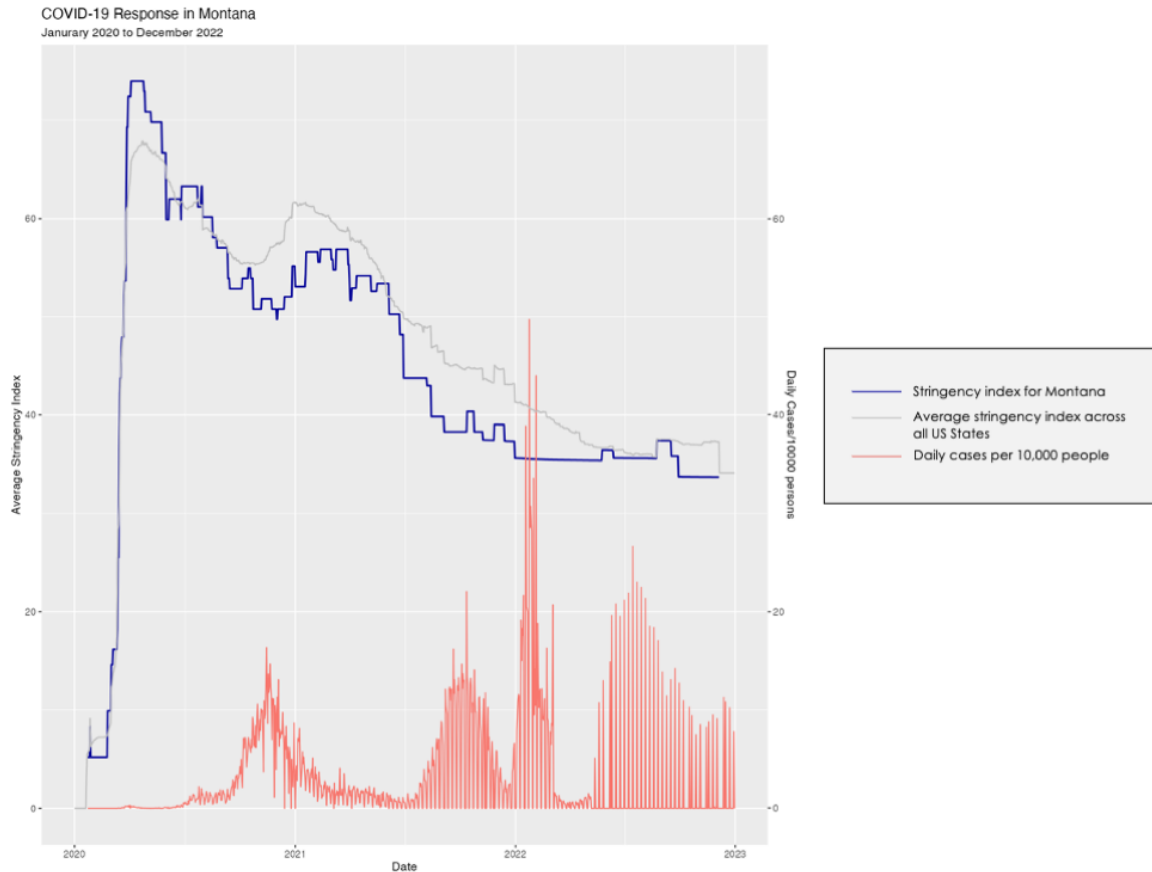
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## Table of Contents

Montana Summary and Graphic .....	3
Closure and Containment .....	4
Economic Response .....	7
Public Health Response.....	8
Vaccine Policies.....	11

# Montana

## Summary of Government Response to COVID-19



**COVID-19 Response in Montana:** Using the OxCGRT Stringency Index for Montana (blue) and the average OxCGRT Stringency Index across all US states, the above shows the overall government response to COVID-19 in Montana in comparison to the average US state response from January 2020 to December 2022. This also displays the number of daily cases per 10,000 people in Montana (red).

### Summary

Montana first responded on March 5, 2020, preceding its first case on March 13, 2020, and death on July 10, 2020. The first policy enacted was represented as the H1 indicator in OxCGRT data, in the form of public information about COVID-19 accessible to Montana citizens.

## Closure and Containment

*The indicators for closure and containment are measured on an ordinal scale and encompass government responses that required or recommended temporary closures of institutions, limitations on travel, and restrictions of gatherings or events. The measurement of these indicators included a binary flag that indicated the geographic scope of the government responses coded. Differentiated policies, or policies that were specifically directed at those vaccinated or unvaccinated, are indicated when flagged as 'Vaccinated' or 'Non-Vaccinated'.*

### C1: School closures

*C1 records closings of schools and universities and is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommend closing or all schools open with alterations resulting in significant differences compared to non-Covid-19 operations), 2 (require closing only some levels or categories, e.g., just high school, or just public schools), or 3 (require closing all levels).*

First school closure policies became active on March 15, 2020, in the form of public school closures. School closures escalated from only public school closures to also public universities and colleges operating under online-only classes on March 23, 2020, and were extended until May 6, 2020. During the summer months of 2020, the governor announced that all schools would have the option of returning to in-classroom teaching delivery at the discretion of local school boards. For the 2020-2021 school year, policies allowing in-person attendance with social distancing were active from August 2020 until June 2021, when localized school closing was the strictest policy after COVID-19 surged in November 2020 and January 2021. For the 2021-2022 school year, no vaccination requirements or related differentiated policies were announced. In the fall of 2021, Montana saw temporary COVID-19-related closures as Livingstone County schools required time for contact tracing of employees.

### C2: Workplace closures

*C2 records closings of workplaces and is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommend closing or recommend work from home or all businesses open with alterations resulting in significant differences compared to non-Covid-19 operations), 2 (require closing or work from home for some sectors or categories of workers), or 3 (require closing or work from home for all-but-essential workplaces, e.g., grocery stores, doctors).*

First business closure policies were active on March 16, 2020, in the form of closures of certain businesses including restaurants, alcoholic beverage service businesses, and casinos. On March 28, 2020, all businesses and operations across the state, except minimum basic operations, were required to cease all in-person operations. This continued until the de-

escalation on April 27, 2020, when businesses except for gyms, hot tubs, and pools were allowed to open with strict physical distancing and reduced capacity protocols, though telework and alternative work schedules were strongly encouraged. On June 1, 2020, all businesses were allowed to resume in-person operations under physical distancing. By June 30, 2021, no further measures or policies for workplace closing were in place.

### **C3: Cancel public events**

*C3 records cancelling public events and is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommend cancelling), or 2 (require cancelling).*

First public event cancellation policies were active on March 28, 2020, in the form of prohibitions of all public and private gatherings of any number of people occurring outside a household or living unit. This continued until June 1, 2020, when events with up to 50 people were allowed, and individuals could consult with their local health departments on a safe plan if they were requesting an event with over 50 people. By June 30, 2021, all public events and gatherings were able to take place without capacity limits.

### **C4: Restrictions on gatherings**

*C4 records limits on gathering and is measured as 0 (no restrictions), 1 (restrictions on very large gatherings where the limit is above 1000 people), 2 (restrictions on gatherings between 101-1000 people), 3 (restrictions on gatherings between 11-100 people), or 4 (restrictions on gatherings of 10 people or less).*

The first restriction on gathering was active on March 15, 2020, and restricted gatherings of more than 50 people. This continued until March 24, 2020, when gatherings of more than 10 people outside of a home or place of residence were prohibited. Gathering restrictions were relaxed to up to 50 people on June 1, 2020, and were removed on February 12, 2021, though some counties such as Cascade County continued limiting gatherings to over 50 people. By June 30, 2021, there was no active restriction on gatherings in the state.

### **C5: Public transport closures**

*C5 records the closing of public transport and is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommend closing or significantly reduce volume/route/means of transport available), or 2 (require closing or prohibit most citizens from using it).*

The first public transport closure policies were active on March 16, 2020, in the form of fixed route service suspension under Helena Public Transit, which was localized and not state-wide. This continued until the change in policy on August 31, 2020, when all bus routes were reinstated with modified hours, stops, and ridership capacity limits. Since September 11, 2020, there have been no restrictions in Helena Public transit or elsewhere in the state.

### **C6: Stay-at-home requirements**

*C6 records orders to "shelter-in-place" and otherwise confine to the home and is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommend not leaving house), 2 (require not leaving house with exceptions for daily exercise, grocery shopping, and 'essential' trips), or 3 (require not leaving house with minimal exceptions, e.g., allowed to leave once a week, or only one person can leave at a time, etc).*

The first stay-at-home order was active on March 28, 2020, and required that all residents of Montana stay home and may leave their residence only for essential activities or to operate essential businesses. This continued until expired on April 24, 2020, for the state, though some tribes extended their stay-at-home orders until March 1, 2021.

### **C7: Restrictions on internal movement**

*C7 records restrictions on internal movement between states and is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommend not to travel between states), or 2 (internal movement restrictions in place).*

The first date of domestic travel restrictions was on March 28, 2020, when it was announced that all travel must be limited to essential travel or travel for essential activities. This was relaxed on April 26, 2020, though there continued to be recommendations against non-essential travel. By June 1, 2020, there were no longer recommendations in place to minimize non-essential travel.

### **C8: International travel controls**

*C8 records restrictions on international travel for foreign travellers (not citizens) and is measured as 0 (no restrictions), 1 (screening arrivals), 2 (quarantine arrivals from some or all regions), 3 (ban arrivals from some regions), or 4 (ban on all regions or total border closure).*

The first international travel control specific to Montana was in place by March 30, 2020 and stipulated that any person coming to Montana from another state or country for a non-work-related purpose must immediately self-quarantine for 14 days. This was discontinued on June 1, 2020.

## Economic Response

*The indicators for economic policies measured the policies that provided economic support from the state government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic indicators recorded at the subnational level in the US were E1 and E2, which are measured on an ordinal scale without a flag indicating the geographic scope.*

### E1: Income support

*E1 records if the government is providing direct cash payments to people who lose their jobs or cannot work and is measured as 0 (no income support), 1 (government is replacing less than 50% of lost salary or if a flat sum, that is less than 50% median salary), or 2 (government is replacing 50% or more of lost salary or if a flat sum, that is greater than 50% median salary).*

The first state-level income support policy was enacted on March 17, 2020 and allowed for unemployment benefits for workers laid off due to COVID-19 as well as waiving the typical one-week waiting period before receiving benefits. On August 20, 2020, the Lost Wage Assistance grant was approved, allowing the Department of Labor & Industry to provide an additional \$400 per week in assistance payment to those receiving unemployment benefits due to COVID-19-related impacts. FEMA disaster relief funds covered \$300 of the new weekly payment, and the other \$100 was covered by Montana's allocation of the federal CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund. This income support policy expired on September 5, 2020.

### E2: Debt/contract relief

*E2 records if the government is freezing financial obligations for households (e.g., stopping loan repayments, preventing services like water from stopping, or banning evictions) and is measured as 0 (no debt/contract relief), 1 (narrow relief, specific to one kind of contract), or 2 (broad debt/contract relief).*

The first state-level debt/contract relief policy was enacted on March 30, 2020, and provided detailed measures to limit foreclosures, evictions, and disconnections from service in the state. In addition, a policy was enforced on April 13, 2020, which provided rent assistance to low-income Montanans who had suffered substantial financial hardship because of COVID-19. The directive limited foreclosures, evictions, and disconnections from service ended on May 25, 2020, while the rent assistance program continued until January 22, 2021.

## Public Health Responses

*The public health response indicators recorded health system responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The indicators recorded at the subnational level in the US were H1, H2, H3, H6, H7, and H8. The geographic scope of these policies was marked by an ordinal flag for indicators H1, H6, and H8. Differentiated policies, or policies that were specifically directed at those vaccinated or unvaccinated, are indicated when flagged as 'Vaccinated' or 'Non-Vaccinated' for indicators H6 and H8.*

### H1: Public information campaigns

*H1 records the presence of public info campaigns and is measured as 0 (no Covid-19 public information campaign), 1 (public officials urging caution about Covid-19), or 2 (coordinated public information campaign, e.g., across traditional and social media).*

The first public information for the state of Montana was available on March 5, 2020. The Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services shared the information on its Facebook page. Governor Bullock's Twitter page, the Montana government website, and the Department of Public Health and Human Services also had more information available.

Before March 5, 2020, one county had targeted policies from the Gallatin County Emergency Management department's Twitter page on February 25, 2020.

### H2: Testing policy

*H2 records government policy on who has access to testing and is measured as 0 (no testing policy), 1 (only those who both have symptoms AND meet specific criteria, e.g., key workers, admitted to hospital, encountered a known case, returned from overseas), 2 (testing of anyone showing Covid-19 symptoms), or 3 (open public testing, e.g., "drive through" testing available to asymptomatic people).*

On February 10, 2020, when the first reported case was under investigation, Montana's Communicable Disease Control Bureau Chief said that individuals travelling from China to the United States would be screened, tested, and monitored for two weeks.

On March 23, 2020, the Governor announced that the state would cover the price of the test. This was done to ensure that anyone symptomatic had the option of testing for the virus.

On June 6, 2020, Montana expanded state-wide testing for COVID-19 to provide testing to Montanans who were asymptomatic.

On January 1, 2021, Montana prioritised testing for symptomatic people, frontline workers, and residents of congregated settings. Low-priority testing was conducted but only as resources allowed.



### **H3: Contact tracing**

*H3 records government policy on contact tracing after a positive diagnosis and is measured as 0 (no contact tracing), 1 (limited contact tracing; not done for all cases), or 2 (comprehensive contact tracing; done for all identified cases).*

Contact tracing became available on March 13, 2020, when the first four positive COVID-19 cases were confirmed. Local public health staff were investigating possible contacts and following counselling protocols.

On March 19, 2020, public health nurses began tracing close contacts and provided instructions for isolating at home for two weeks and monitoring for symptoms. These nurses continued to check in throughout the quarantine period.

On October 23, 2020, it was discovered that some close contacts of confirmed COVID-19 cases were not called or traced. The Bozeman Daily Chronicles reported the difficulty of contact tracing due to the increased number of COVID-19 cases.

On February 12, 2021, contact tracing returned to a more comprehensive level as the number of COVID-19 cases reduced.

After June 6, 2021, there were no indications of state-wide contact tracing; however, the University of Montana and the Department of Public Health and Human Services developed a program for individuals interested in helping with contact tracing efforts. Additionally, several counties, such as Gallatin County, Park County, etc., were conducting contact tracing in their jurisdiction.

### **H6: Facial Coverings**

*H6 records policies on the use of facial coverings outside the home and is measured as 0 (no policy), 1 (recommended mask wearing), 2 (required in some specified shared/public spaces outside the home with other people present, or some situations when social distancing not possible), 3 (required in all shared/public spaces outside the home with other people present or all situations when social distancing not possible), or 4 (required outside the home at all times regardless of location or presence of other people).*

After June 26, 2020, several counties, such as Big Horn County, Missoula County, etc., required residents to wear face masks in all public spaces.

On July 15, 2020, the Governor directed all businesses, government offices, and other indoor spaces to require mask usage. The directive only applied to counties with four or more confirmed cases.

As concerns for small businesses grew, after May 7, 2021, Governor Gianforte signed HB 121 and 230 into law which required public health officials to propose mandates to elected officials before their enactment and enforcement. Therefore, mask usage became required in some public places.

After May 17, 2021, mask usage was only recommended state-wide. On August 8, 2021, the Crow Reservation implemented a mask mandate. On September 20, 2021, the University of Montana required wearing face masks in public and open areas. On December 21, 2021, it was discovered that certain school districts, such as Billings and Missoula, had mask mandates.

On June 13, 2022, facial covering was strongly recommended in crowded settings and some public locations.

### **H7: Vaccination policy**

*H7 records policies for vaccine delivery for different groups 0 (no availability), 1 (availability for ONE of following: key workers/clinically vulnerable groups that are non elderly/ elderly groups), 2 (availability for TWO of following: key workers/clinically vulnerable groups that are non elderly/elderly groups), 3 (availability for ALL of following: key workers/clinically vulnerable groups that are non-elderly/elderly groups), 4 (availability for all three plus partial additional availability for select broad groups/ages), or 5 (universal availability).*

On December 14, 2020, the first batch of vaccines arrived and was administered to frontline healthcare workers, staff, and residents of long-term care facilities. On January 18, 2021, counties moved from Phase 1a to Phase 1b. Vaccines were given to people aged 75 years old and older or 16 to 69 years old with high-risk medical conditions, essential frontline workers, people in congregate care and correctional facilities, and American Indians and other people of colour with a high risk of contracting the virus. After April 1, 2021, vaccines were available to all people.

On April 13, 2021, the administration of Johnson & Johnson vaccines was paused to evaluate safety concerns. Moderna and Pfizer continued to be offered. All vaccines were government-funded.

### **H8: Protection of elderly people**

*H8 records policies for protecting elderly people (as defined locally) in Long Term Care Facilities and/or the community and home setting. This is measured as 0 (no measures), 1 (recommended isolation, hygiene, and visitor restriction measures in LTCFs and/or elderly people to stay-at-home), 2 (narrow restrictions for isolation, hygiene in LTCFs, some limitations on external visitors and/or restrictions protecting elderly people at home), or 3 (extensive restrictions for isolation and hygiene in LTCFs, all non-essential external visitors prohibited, and/or all elderly people required to stay-at-home and not leave the home with minimal exceptions, and receive no external visitors).*

On March 13, 2020, Kalispell Regional Healthcare banned visitors from visiting the Skilled Nursing Centre. Other nursing homes, such as The Springs at Whitefish, St. John's United, and the Aspen Meadows Health & Rehabilitation Centre, limited visitors to essential visitors. They had to be screened before entry.

On March 15, 2020, Governor Bullock enacted a state-wide order which suspended visits for all visitors and non-essential healthcare providers. Essential visitors had to be screened prior to entry.

On June 25, 2020, the governor issued a directive that allowed visitors as long as they were screened before entry and safety measures were taken seriously. After June 26, 2020, Gallatin County and Yellowstone County took a more cautious approach and prohibited visitors.

On July 13, 2020, the governor updated his guidance that required visitors at nursing facilities to adhere to strict screening, social distancing, sanitation, and other control protocols. These facilities must conduct a single baseline COVID-19 test of all residents and staff and devise a plan for weekly re-testing of all staff. Additionally, several counties still had the indefinite visitor ban in place. On August 27, 2020, Gallatin County updated its policy to align with the state. On September 14, 2020, Yellowstone County updated its policy in agreement with the state. On October 15, 2020, Missoula County enacted a visitor ban. On November 6, 2020, Gallatin County resumed the visitor ban. On March 5, 2021, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) website disclosed that in Montana, visits could occur if two criteria were met: 1) there wasn't an active outbreak at the facility in the last two weeks, and 2) the county had low levels of community spread. Visitors were expected to wear masks, practice social distancing, and be screened upon arrival.

On June 24, 2021, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) website disclosed that in Montana, visitors could schedule outdoor or indoor visits; however, there could be some restrictions. Visitors were expected to wear masks, practice social distancing, and be screened upon arrival. On March 6, 2022, the COVID-19 website for Montana referred to the Administration for Community Living website that strongly recommended hygienic measures, social distancing, and at-home testing to protect the elderly population.

## **Vaccine Policies**

*The vaccine indicators record vaccination policies regarding the distribution of vaccines and vaccine mandates. This is recorded as V1-V4 and includes a state's prioritisation list, eligible groups, cost of vaccination to the individual, and the presence of a vaccine mandate. These indicators do not include a flag for geographic scope.*

### **V1: Vaccine Prioritisation**

*V1 records the ranked position for different groups within a state's prioritisation plan when vaccines resources were too scarce for universal availability. Groups are ranked on an ordinal scale, the number represents the rank of prioritisation, and equal-ranked categories share the same number.*

The groups initially prioritised were healthcare workers at hospitals and residents and staff of long-term care facilities in the plan first published on December 7, 2020.

This plan was further specified on December 24, 2020 to include in Phase 1B persons aged 75+, individuals in congregate care and correctional facilities, Native Americans and people of color who may be at elevated risk of COVID-19 complications, frontline essential workers, first responders, education and childcare workers, critical infrastructure federal employees, food & agriculture workers, manufacturing workers, corrections workers, US Postal Service, public transit workers, grocery store workers, child and adult protective service workers, inspectors of congregate care facilities or like settings, and critical infrastructure energy and IT workers. At that time, phase 1C prioritized persons aged 65+, persons aged 16-64 with high-risk medical conditions, and other essential workers.

On January 5, 2020, the prioritization plan was updated, wherein Phase 1B recipient included persons aged 70+, Native Americans and people of color who may be at elevated risk of COVID-19, persons aged 16-69 with high-risk medical conditions, while all other remaining Montanans aged 16 or older fell under Phase 2.

On March 2, 2021, there was the creation of a Phase 1B+, including persons aged 60+ and those with certain medical conditions not included in the original Phase 1B.

Vaccine availability shifted from prioritised to universal for those aged 16+ on April 1, 2021, with additional eligibility for those age 12-15 in May 2021 and those age 5-11 in November 2021.

## **V2: Vaccine Availability**

*V2 records when categories of people – regardless of their position in a prioritised rollout plan – receive vaccines. This is measured as 0 (vaccines are not being made available to this category) or 1 (vaccines are being made available to this category).*

Vaccine administration began on December 17, 2020, with hospital healthcare workers. The expansion of availability then included long term care facility residents and staff on December 28, 2020; persons aged 70+, persons aged 16-69 with a high-risk medical condition, and Native Americans and people of color who may be at elevated risk of COVID-19 on January 19, 2021; and persons aged 60+, persons aged 16-59 with additional qualifying medical conditions on March 8, 2021. On April 1, 2021, vaccine availability expanded to ages 16 and older. On May 14, 2021, vaccine availability expanded to ages 12 and older. On November 5, 2021, vaccine availability expanded to ages 5 and older.

### **V3: Vaccine Financial Support**

All vaccines were government-funded at the federal-level across the US.

### **V4: Mandatory Vaccination**

*V4 measures the existence of a requirement to be vaccinated and is measured as 0 (no requirement to be vaccinated) or 1 (requirement to be vaccinated).*

No state-specific vaccine mandates were announced in Montana.