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

SOUTH CAROLINA

March 2023

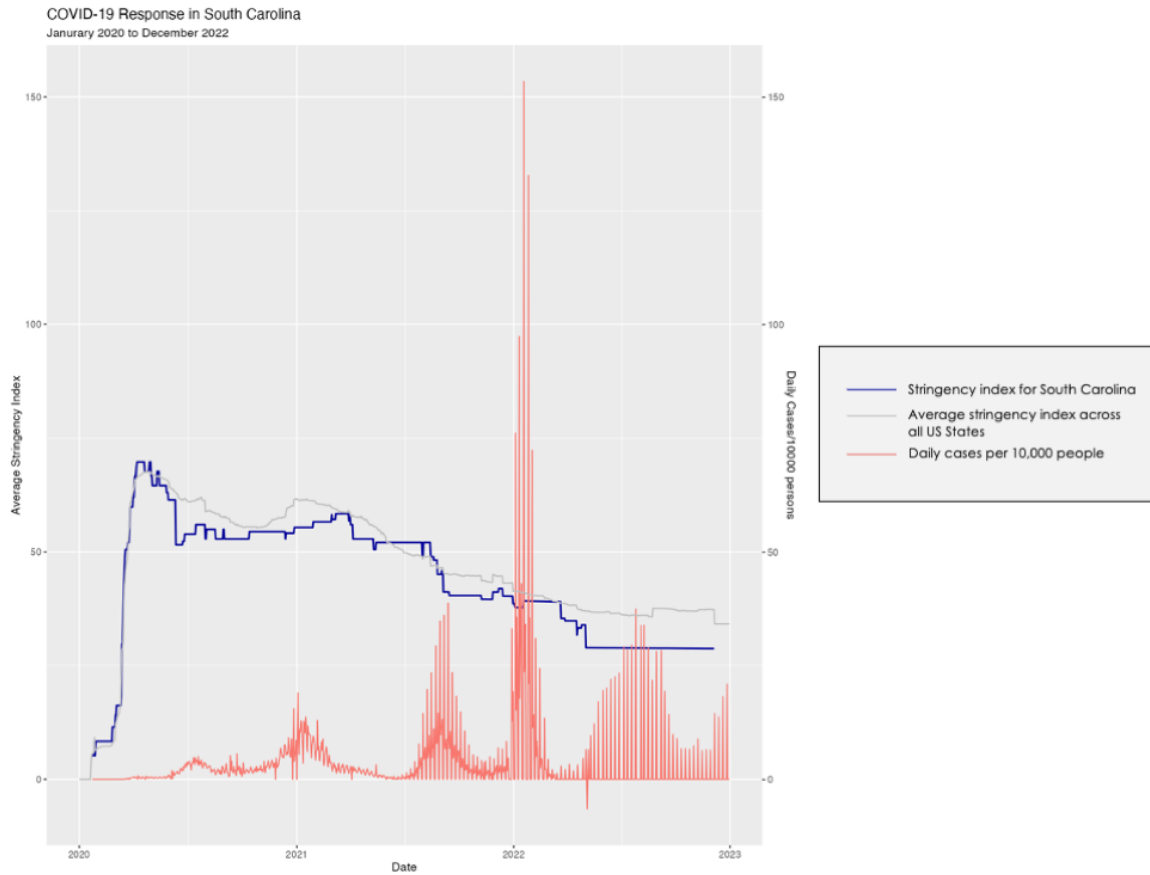Rebeca Nieves*, Morgan O'Brien*, and Jordan Shipley*; Kaitlyn Green,Sandhya Laping.

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COVID-19 Response in South Carolina
Janurary 2020 to December 2022

COVID-19 Response in South Carolina: Using the OxCGRT Stringency Index for South Carolina (blue) and the average OxCGRT Stringency Index across all US states, the above shows the overall government response to COVID-19 in South Carolina 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 South Carolina (red).

Summary

The State of South Carolina first responded on January 29, 2020, preceding its first case on March 7, 2020, and death on March 16, 2020. The first policy/policies enacted were public information campaigns (represented as H1 indicator in OxCGRT data).

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 16, 2020, in the form of public schools and universities being instructed to close for 14 days. On March 28, 2020, the school closures were extended for another 15 days. On April 12, 2020, the school closures were further extended. On April 27, 2020, it was announced that schools would remain closed until the end of the academic year.

On June 11, 2020, the governor issued an executive order directing the continued closure of public schools. On June 22, 2020, the Superintendent of Education released a plan for reopening. On July 11, 2020, the governor issued an executive order prolonging the school closures for another 15 days. On July 15, 2020, the governor announced that schools must provide options for virtual instruction. On July 26, 2020, the governor extended school closures until August 10, 2020.

On August 2, 2020, the governor issued an executive order rescinding previous school closures. Some local school districts remained closed. Some schools began to resume in-person instruction on August 17, 2020. By September 15, 2020, most schools were operating on a hybrid basis. By March 2, 2021, all schools had returned to hybrid or in-person instruction.

For the 2021-2022 school year, University of South Carolina announced that vaccinated students would not have to wear masks. The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control announced that schools should not inquire about individuals' vaccination status. Beginning January 18, 2022, vaccinated individuals were not required to quarantine if exposed.

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 18, 2020, in the form of restaurants being required to suspend dine-in service. On April 1, 2020, non-essential businesses were required to close. On April 6, 2020, retail businesses were required to close. This continued until April 20, 2020, when retail businesses were allowed to open.

On May 4, 2020, the governor lifted restrictions on outdoor dining. On May 11, 2020, restaurants were allowed to provide limited indoor dining. On May 18, 2020, more nonessential businesses were allowed to reopen, including recreational and athletic facilities and close-contact service providers. On May 22, 2020, the governor authorised the reopening of most nonessential businesses. On June 11, 2020, remaining businesses were allowed to reopen. On November 25, 2020, Governor McMaster issued an executive order requiring all reopening businesses to abide by CDC COVID-19 prevention guidelines and regularly screen employees. On June 7, 2021, all closure requirements were allowed to expire; however, the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control continued to recommend masks and social distancing.

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 15, 2020, in the form of restriction of gatherings exceeding 100 people. On March 18, 2020, the governor prohibited all public gatherings hosted on any premises owned by the State of South Carolina and public gatherings on any premises of more than fifty people. This continued until the executive order on June 11, 2020, when events were allowed to open with social distancing and masks. On October 2, 2020, events of more than 250 people or 50% of the venue's capacity, whichever is less, were prohibited.

On March 5, 2021, the prohibition of gatherings of 250 or more people was changed to a recommendation of cancellation or postponement. On May 11, 2021, all recommendations for cancellation or postponement were rescinded.

On May 11, 2021, the City of Charleston urged all citizens to restrict gatherings to ten or less. On May 15, 2021, this recommendation expired.

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).

First restriction on gathering was active on March 15, 2020, and restricted gatherings of 100 or more people. This continued until replaced on March 23, 2020, with a restriction on gatherings of more than three people. On May 27, 2020, this restriction was loosened to only include gatherings of 50 or more people. All gathering restrictions were lifted on June 11, 2020.

On April 1, 2020, the City of Charleston prohibited all gatherings of more than ten people. There was no further information on when it ended.

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).

First public transport closure policies were active on March 19, 2020, in the form of the City of Columbia running public transport on a restricted schedule and urging only essential workers to use public transport. On May 30, 2020, operations returned to normal.

On March 23, 2020, the City of Charleston began running public transportation on a modified schedule. Most services had returned to normal operations by May 30, 2020.

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 26, 2020 and required that residents of the City of Charleston not leave their homes except to conduct essential business. On April 7, 2020, the governor ordered all South Carolina residents to stay-at-home except to conduct essential business. On May 3, 2020, this requirement was changed to a recommendation. On February 6, 2021, stay-at-home recommendations were removed.

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).

On January 18, 2022, the SC DHEC recommended avoiding travel unless fully vaccinated.

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).

On January 18, 2022, the SC DHEC recommended avoiding travel unless fully vaccinated.

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).

On April 24, 2020, the South Carolina Department of Employment and Workforce began accepting claims for assistance from those ineligible for regular unemployment assistance. On October 2, 2020, Governor McMaster extended assistance to furloughed employees. On February 19, 2021, South Carolina began offering financial assistance to citizens struggling with rent or mortgage payments. Income support stopped on March 11, 2021.

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).

On March 17, 2020, the State of South Carolina imposed an eviction moratorium. On May 7, 2020, the South Carolina Public Service Commission allowed utility companies to offer deferred payment plans. On May 15, 2020, the state-wide eviction moratorium expired.

Several individual utility companies suspended service disconnections; however, there was no state-wide policy.

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 came on January 29, 2020, as an assurance to the public that the state government was monitoring the situation. On February 26, 2020, the South Carolina health department launched a coordinated information campaign via Twitter, in addition to a dedicated website.

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).

Tests were first available on March 4, 2020, for symptomatic individuals. On May 18, 2020, the state government announced they intended to make testing available to all regardless of symptom status. On August 30, 2020, SC DHEC began encouraging routine testing for those whose job might cause exposure.

On January 3, 2022, the state government began encouraging citizens to refrain from testing if not symptomatic or known to have been exposed.

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).

On March 6, 2020, the state government announced that they had begun contact tracing. On May 11, 2020, the SC DHEC announced that they had expanded their contact tracing staff to 400, in addition to contracting out 1400 tracing employees. On March 22, 2022, the DHEC began prioritising case investigations that would yield the most public health benefit.

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).

On June 23, 2020, the first mask policy was active, and it required/recommended that Greenville residents wear masks inside grocery stores and pharmacies. On August 3, 2020, Governor McMaster issued an order requiring masks in all government buildings. On May 11, 2021, Governor McMaster issued an order banning mask mandates. Multiple counties attempted to issue mask mandates in defiance of this order, but they were all struck down.

In the absence of a state-wide masking policy, individual counties and cities issued their own mask ordinances.

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, front-line healthcare workers in South Carolina began receiving vaccinations. Also eligible were residents and staff of long-term care facilities. Healthcare workers generally received Pfizer, whereas

long-term care residents and staff generally received Moderna. On January 8, 2021, SC DHEC recommended that hospitals vaccinate admitted patients 65 and older. On January 13, 2021, South Carolina residents aged 70 and up became eligible to receive the vaccine. On March 31, 2021, the vaccine became available to all South Carolina residents aged 16 and up. On May 14, 2021, the vaccine became available to all residents aged 12 and up. On August 13, 2021, SC DHEC began recommending booster shots. On November 2, the vaccine became available to all residents aged 5 and up.

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).

The first policy to protect elderly persons was active on March 13, 2020 and restricted all visitation to nursing homes and assisted living facilities, with the exception of end-of-life situations. This was loosened to allow closed window visitation on June 29, 2020. On September 1, 2020, SC DHEC began allowing outdoor visitation. On November 18, 2020, SC DHEC began requiring elder care facilities to allow visitation with certain restrictions, including the presence of a COVID-19 case in the staff or residents in the last 14 days or a county positivity rate of 10+%.

Beginning September 1, 2020, SC DHEC required facilities to allow visitation unless the resident was unvaccinated.

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 in the plan first published December 7, 2020. This plan was further altered on December 14, 2020, to include residents and staff of long-term care facilities. South Carolina updated their prioritisation on January 8, 2021, to include at-risk people aged 65 and up.

Vaccine availability shifted from prioritised to universal on March 31, 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 14, 2020 with healthcare workers. The expansion of availability then included residents and staff of elder care facilities on December 28, 2020. On January 8, 2021, vaccines became available to at-risk people aged 65 and up. On March 2, 2021, the vaccine became available to educators. On March 8, 2021, the vaccine became available to at-risk people aged 16 and up, clinically vulnerable people, people in crowded/communal living conditions, disabled people, factory workers, frontline retail workers, "high contact" professions, police and first responders, and pregnant people. On March 31, 2021, vaccines became universally available.

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).

Vaccines were never mandated in South Carolina.