

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

## VIRGINIA

March 2023

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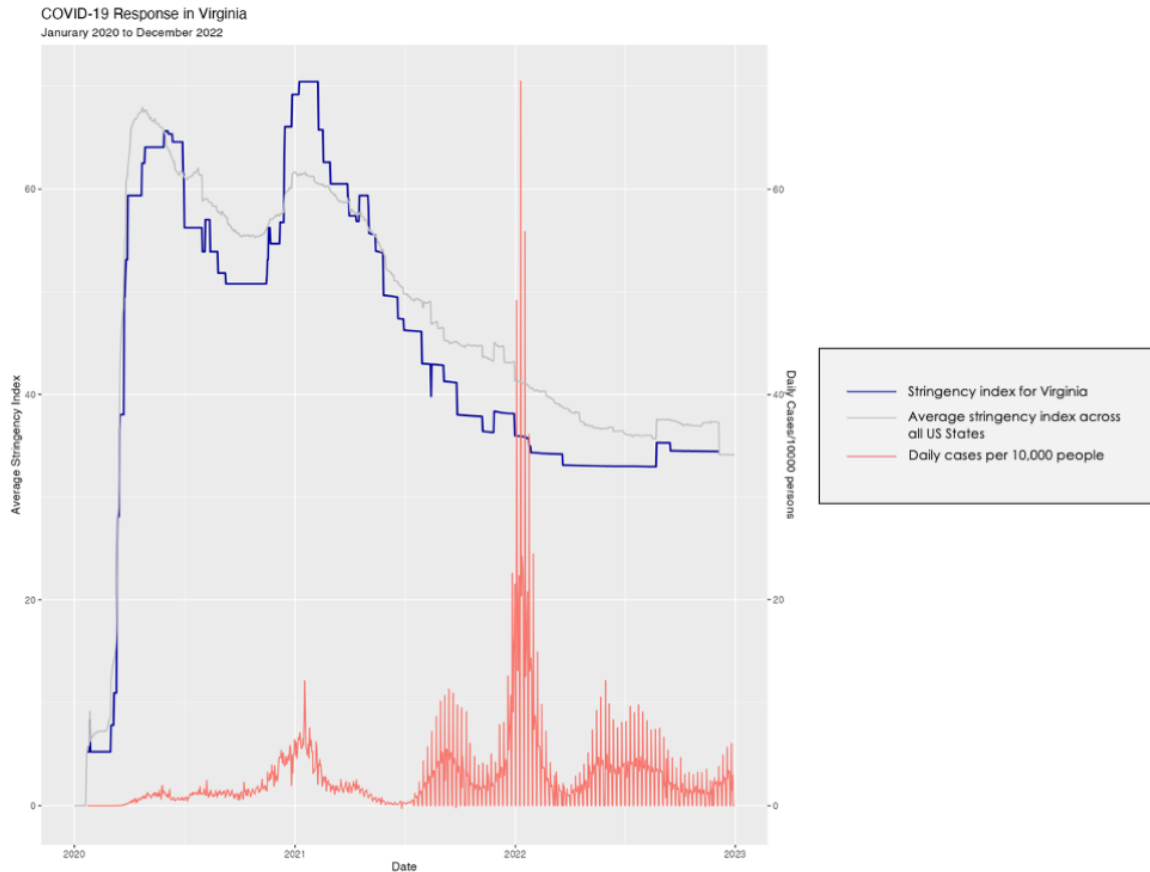
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# Virginia

## Summary of Government Response to COVID-19



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

### Summary

The State of Virginia first responded on March 7, 2020, preceding its first case on March 8, 2020 and death on March 14, 2020. The first policy enacted was a public information campaign (represented as H1 indicators in OxCGRT data) warning residents to take precautions against COVID-19.

## 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 a state-wide closure of all K-12 schools from March 16, 2020 until March 27, 2020. The governor extended K-12 school closures through the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year on March 24, 2020. School closures escalated on March 30, 2020 with Virginia Executive Order 55 requiring the closure of all higher education institutions and universities. During the summer months in 2020, schools remained closed as an extension of the required closures through the 2019-2020 school year.

For the 2020-2021 school year, several of Virginia's largest universities began opening partially and in full in August 2020. K-12 schools followed phased opening policies which allowed the individual school district to choose either in-person or hybrid learning. In late November and through December 2020 and January 2021, many schools opted for fully online learning. On January 14, 2021, Virginia updated its guidance on school reopening, adopting a less cautious approach, and encouraging schools to at least provide an in-person option to students, however this was not mandatory. One school district continued to remain 100% online through the end of the 2020-2021 school year and through the summer of 2021. By the end of the 2020-2021 school year, most Virginia school districts had returned to fully in-person learning.

### 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 the Amended Order of the Governor and State Health Commissioner Declaration of Public Health Emergency that mandated all restaurants, fitness centers, and theaters reduce maximum capacity to 10 people. This continued until the governor passed Executive Order 53 on March 24, 2020, which required the closure of all recreational and entertainment businesses as well as restaurants, dining establishments, food courts, breweries, microbreweries, distilleries, wineries, tasting rooms, and farmers markets. Any other businesses could remain open at 10-person capacity. Many businesses, except for recreational and entertainment businesses, were allowed to reopen on May 15, 2020, per Executive Order 61 under strict requirements from the Virginia Department of Health.

The governor amended Executive Order 61 on May 29, 2020, to include racetracks as a business allowed to open for racing events. The last of the entertainment businesses were permitted to open under specific health guidance on July 1, 2020, with the signing of Executive Order 67. The governor followed this up on July 31, 2020, with Executive Order 68 which set 50% capacity restrictions on restaurants and required all restaurants to be closed no later than midnight. Executive Order 68 was once again updated on November 16, 2020, with more restrictions on physical distancing, face covering, and enhanced cleaning. The amendment of Executive Order 72 passed on March 1, 2021, lifted the curfew on restaurants and allowed summer camps to open starting May 1, 2021. On May 28, 2021, the governor lifted social distancing and capacity restrictions through Executive Order 79.

### **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 12, 2020, following the declaration of the State of Emergency specially scheduled state conferences and large events for a minimum of 30 days. The governor also encouraged localities and non-profits to limit large public events. On March 24, 2020, Executive Order 55 was passed which prohibited public gatherings of greater than 10 people.

This continued until Executive Order 65 on June 5, 2020, when events were allowed to occur with capacities below 50 people. The city of Richmond and the Northern Virginia region were excluded from this executive order and public events were still prohibited. The capacity of public events was once again increased from 50 to 250 people on July 1, 2020, per Executive Order 67.

An updated Executive Order 67 went into effect on November 16, 2020, which limited public gatherings to 25 people due to increasing rates of

COVID-19 in Virginia. This effectively prevented public events. Executive Order 72 further limited public gatherings to a maximum of 10 people on December 14, 2020. The governor amended Executive Order 72 on February 17, 2021, relaxing restrictions on public events. This allowed events like racing events and recreational sports to start again. Starting April 1, 2021, outdoor entertainment venues may operate at 30% capacity, while indoor entertainment venues can have a maximum of 500 people. The governor increased allowed capacity at all indoor and outdoor events to 50% on May 15, 2021. This remained in effect until May 28, 2021, when Executive Order 79 lifted all capacity restrictions.

#### **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 24, 2022. Under Governor Ralph Northam's Executive Order 53, all public and private gatherings of more than 10 individuals were prohibited. By June 5, in accordance with Phase 2 re-opening, the restrictions on gathering were relaxed, limiting the gatherings to no more than 50 people. Exception applied in Richmond and the Northern Virginia region, and these two regions didn't enter the Phase 2 re-opening until a week later. Governor Northam further revised the gathering restrictions on July 1, 2020, transitioning the state into Phase 3 re-opening and allowing all public and private in-person gatherings up to 250 individuals.

However, by the end of July 2020, Virginia was forced to rollback its recent relaxation due to an increase in Covid-19 cases, hospitalizations, and ICU admissions. The rollback put the limit on gatherings to 50 people in the Eastern region. Once again, on November 15, 2020, Governor Northam had to respond to the even steeper increase in Covid-19 cases by limiting social gatherings to no more than 25 people across the state. The governor dialled up his previous policies on December 14, 2020 by reintroducing the more restrictive measure on social gatherings of no more than 10 individuals per gathering. This latest order was represented by a 4G coding in the dataset, which continued until March 2021.

On April 1, 2021, the governor began to remove restrictions on social gathering slowly. By May 28, 2021, Governor's Executive Order 79 essentially lifted all restrictions on social gatherings. From then on, neither the governor nor the state of Virginia has issued any new policy on gatherings until July 2022.

## **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 transportation guidance was issued by the Virginia Department of Health on March 19, 2020. It warned the public that public transportation was considered a high-risk area for Covid-19 transmission and cautioned them to avoid using public transportation when ill. Virginia, however, never implements any closure policy on public transport.

## **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).*

On March 15, 2020, Executive Order 55 the State Government announced that all individuals in Virginia shall remain at their place of residence with some exceptions (such as obtaining food and seeking medical services). With Executive Order 61 on May 15, 2020, Governor Northam announced the easing of temporary restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic. People may leave the house with strict social distancing guidelines. On December 14, 2020 Executive Order (EO-72) shall remain in full force and effect until 11:59 p.m., January 31, 2021 – this was extended several times. The curfew, which Governor Northam called a "modified stay-at-home order," will require residents to stay home between midnight and 5 a.m. Exceptions will be made for people traveling for work or seeking medical attention and certain food items. All individuals in Virginia should remain at their place of residence between the hours of 12:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. Individuals may leave their residences for purposes of obtaining food, seeking medical services, and more.

As of March 1, 2021, the modified stay-at-home order was lifted. However, staying home to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is still strongly recommended, though not required. By July 2021, there were no apparent stay-at-home requirements or recommendations to restrict travel in Virginia.

## **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).*

Following the declaration of the State of Emergency on March 12, 2020, the State Government announced the cessation of all official travel outside of Virginia by state employees, with increased flexibility for inter-state commuters and essential personnel. In Executive Order 61 on May 15, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam ordered that the cessation of all official travel outside of Virginia by state employees should be extended, with increased flexibility for inter-state commuters and essential personnel. On the same EO, Governor Ralph Northam announced the easing of temporary restrictions due to COVID-19 pandemic. People may leave the house with strict social distancing guidelines. Consistent with CDC guidance, Virginia has no restrictions as of August 13, 2020.

## **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).*

There were no implemented travel restrictions for international travellers.

## **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 March 17, 2020, Governor Ralph Northam ordered the Commissioner of the Virginia Employment Commission to expand the protection of workers in quarantine and reconsider work search requirements to those workers. While the governor didn't specify the end date of these limited benefits, the state's income support policy was considered expired on November 21, 2020. On this date, the Extended Benefits (EB) Program was allowed to lapse and the coding was changed from 1F to 0. Since then, there is no change in income support policy.

## **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 16, 2020, the Supreme Court of Virginia declared a judicial emergency which suspended the proceeding of all new eviction cases until April 6, 2020. On April 22, 2020, the General Assembly of Virginia enacted bill H340, which widened the Covid-19 relief efforts. This law provided protection for homeowners from foreclosures until 90 days after the expiration of the state of emergency as well as tenants from eviction for 60 days if they were able to provide written evidence to the court. These policies were coded 2 until a significant reduction in contract relief on June 29, 2020. On this day, the moratorium on eviction expired and evictions would be reviewed on case-per-case basis. This signalled a narrowing protection for tenants and justified the reduction in coding to a 1.

Despite these changes, some safeguards from eviction, such as CDC's moratorium on eviction and 60-day eviction postponement, remained in place at least through August 26, 2021 and the end of September 2021, respectively. Virginia also continued to assist tenants through its Rental Relief Program until July 31, 2022.

In regards to utilities, the first relief came into effect on March 16, 2020 when the State Corporation Commission put a moratorium on utilities for 60 days. Then, as winter approaching, the General Assembly of Virginia passed the Commonwealth of Virginia Budget on November 18, 2020, effectively prohibiting residential utility disconnections without waiving any due amounts accumulated during and before the moratorium. On August 31, 2021, the moratorium expired, and utility companies could cut off their services to non-paying customers.

## 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 March 7, 2020, when public health officials warned residents to take precautions against COVID-19, although the risk of infection is low. On 27 March 2020, two health districts, Cumberland Plateau and Lenowisco, launched a coordinated public information campaign by opening new COVID-19 call centers, which marked the switch from 1G to 2T. This lasted until 27 April 2020, when Virginia Department of Health launched a new COVID-19 informational website that provides the latest COVID-19 data, including but not limited to symptom checker or recommendations. The day after that, the "COVID-19 Virginia Resources" app was introduced, which shifted the code from 2T to 2G. From 10 October 2021 to 04 Jan 2022, given the better situation, there is a shift back to 1G, when the Virginia's Department of Health website continued to publish up-to-date, relevant, comprehensive information on the pandemic. On 04 Jan 2022, due to the surge in new cases, the Virginia Department of Health had a robust public information campaign and coordinated efforts, thus going from 1G to 2G.

### 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).*

The test was first available on March 31 2020 for people with admissions from the Department of Health's New River Health District, when the Montgomery County Public Health Task Force created a drive-thru testing site at Blacksburg High School. On June 5th, the Pittsylvania-Danville Health District and the Western Tidewater Health District held the first open public testing events, this later spread to other health districts. Although there was fluctuation in the number of test sites across districts, the test has been maintained public and recommended for specific people.

### **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).*

The first contact tracing was recorded in March 8 2020, when the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Fairfax County Health Department (FCHD) initiated the process following the the second presumptive case of COVID-19 had appeared in Virginia. Then the contact tracing process became more comprehensive when Virginia's coronavirus notification app, called Covidwise, was launched on August 5 2020. Since then, contact tracing was no longer mandatory.

### **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 March 12, 2020, the first mask policy was active, with the Executive Order 61, Governor Northam announced Face Coverings Waiver. This was changed on May 29, when mask usage became mandatory. This was outlined in the following manner: "all patrons in the Commonwealth aged ten and over shall when entering, exiting, travelling through, and spending time inside the settings listed below cover their mouth and nose with a face covering".

### **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).*

Starting December 15, 2020, the first vaccinations started being administered in Virginia, applicable to Healthcare Workers and Long-Term Care Residents, thus coded as 2G. From January 8, 2021, the vaccine was more widely available (2G from 3G), extended to “Frontline Essential Workers, Persons Aged 65 years and Older, People Living in Correctional Facilities, Homeless Shelters and Migrant Labor Camps, and Persons Aged 16-64 years with a high-risk medical condition or disability that increases their risk of severe illness from COVID-19”. Since April 18, 2021, all Virginians above the age 16 can receive Covid vaccines, thus switched from 3G to 5G.

### **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 recommended guidance for LCTFs on hygiene, PPE, and finding alternatives to in-person visits. On December 7, the code was changed from 1G to 2G when the Virginia Department of Health released guidance for LCTFs for the influenza season. "Daily screening is conducted of all residents, staff, volunteers, and visitors for signs and symptoms of respiratory infection. No one with any signs or symptoms is allowed to enter the facility." Since April 13, all measures of protection have been turned to “recommended”, thus coded as 1G.

## 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 vaccine 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.*

In the initial vaccine rollout plan on October 26, 2020, the following groups were prioritized:

- Frontline/essential workers (subcategories not specified)
- At risk people among the ages of 16 through 80+ years of age
- 'High contact' professions and groups (i.e.: taxi drivers and security guards)
- On December 4, 2020, this expanded to include the following in addition to those previously outlined:
  - Healthcare workers and/carers (excluding home staff)

On January 9, 2021, the following groups were prioritized in addition to those previously outlined:

- Airport/Border/Airline Staff
- Those living in crowded/communal living conditions (i.e.: dormitories for migrant workers, temporary accommodation)
- Educators
- Factory workers
- Residents in an elderly care home
- Staff working in an elderly care homes

On January 15, 2021, the following groups were prioritized in addition to those previously outlined:

- Clinically vulnerable/chronic illness/significant underlying health condition (excluding elderly and disabled)
- The general public among those who were 65 through 80+ years of age
- Police/First responders
- Religious/Spiritual Leaders

On March 19, 2021, the following groups were prioritized in addition to those previously outlined:

- Frontline retail workers

By April 18, 2021, the state of Virginia would officially move on to Phase 2 – universal coverage. This meant that everyone aged 16 and older who lives or works in the state was eligible for vaccination.

## **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 15, 2020, with 3 groups. The expansion of availability then included 17 groups on January 9, 2021, 25 groups on January 15, 2021, and then 27 groups on March 19, 2021. Since May 13, 2021 until present date, vaccine availability has been extended to a total 47 groups.

Vaccine distribution began on December 15, 2020. The following groups were eligible for vaccination:

- Healthcare workers/carers (excluding care home staff)
- Residents in an elderly care home
- Staff working in an elderly care homes

By January 9, 2021, the following groups were considered eligible:

- Airport/Border/Airline Staff
- Crowded/communal living conditions (dormitories for migrant workers, temporary accommodation)
- Educators
- Factory workers
- Frontline/essential workers (when subcategories not specified)
- General population among 75 through 80+ years of age
- Police/First responders

By January 15, 2021, the following groups were considered eligible:

- Airport/Border/Airline Staff
- At risk people among the ages of 16 through 64 years of age
- Clinically vulnerable/chronic illness/significant underlying health condition (excluding elderly and disabled)
- Religious/Spiritual Leaders

- By March 19, 2021, the following groups were considered eligible:

- 'High contact' professions and groups (i.e.: taxi drivers and security guards)
- Frontline retail workers

By April 5, 2021, many counties were moving onto Phase 2 of the vaccination rollout plan – universal availability. The official start date of Phase 2 was April 18, 2021.

## **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).*

Starting September 1, 2021, state employees were required to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination or show proof of negative tests.