



# Getting America Back To Work

---

A Landscape Analysis  
June 10, 2020



1025 F Street NW | 9th Floor | Washington, DC 20004  
3 Columbus Circle | New York City, New York 10019  
P 202.337.0808 | [info@gpg.com](mailto:info@gpg.com) | [www.gpg.com](http://www.gpg.com)



# Fraying America

---

Over 110,000 Americans have died from COVID-19, unemployment has reached a record high, and Black Lives Matter protests are rippling across the country in every state.

The United States has begun Summer 2020 as a fractured nation while the majority of states remove restrictions to allow Americans to return to work.

The country is now trying to respond to two significant crises, how it navigates the coming months will define its future.



# A Twin Crisis

As COVID restrictions ease, most Americans are now living in partially reopened states and are beginning to return to work where their jobs still exist.

In New York City, the biggest urban center of the epidemic, businesses are reopening under strict new-normal conditions requiring face masks and social distancing.

New case numbers, expected to rapidly increase as states reopened prematurely, whilst still high are trending downwards.

Unemployment has reached levels higher than the Great Depression, with over 40 million Americans out of work and one-quarter of all citizens filing for unemployment benefits.

The twin impacts of COVID-19, mortality and economic disadvantage, are disproportionality effecting communities of color.

For the first time in months the nation is focused on an issue larger and more systemic than COVID-19.

The murder of George Floyd has brought to the fore the persistent issues of racial inequality.

Black Lives Matter protests against historical, systemic racism and police brutality are entering their third week and spreading globally.

Businesses large and small, already battling COVID-19, are facing economic uncertainty and navigating complex issues of race in America with their employees and customers.

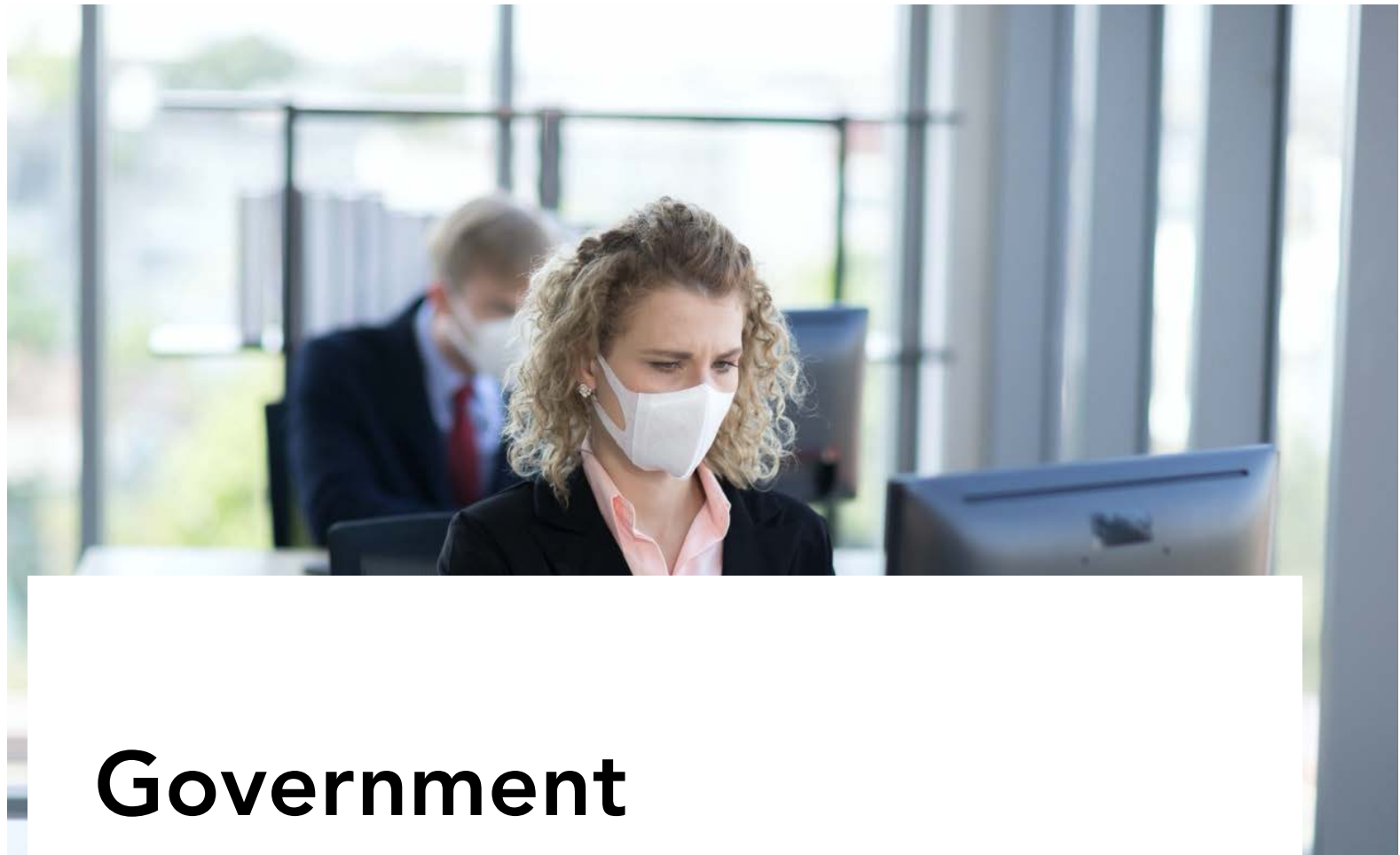
Public figures and companies – from Michael Jordan, Taylor Swift, Nike to Netflix – are all publicly supporting Black Lives Matter, some for the first time.

At the same time, the possibility of a second COVID-19 wave looms heavy. Coupled with bitter arguments on the conduct of the coming election, the U.S. faces an unpredictable and tumultuous summer.

In a time requiring national unity and response, the U.S. is increasingly divided by longstanding racial, economic, and political fissures.

Companies and citizens alike must traverse this rocky period with awareness and care, and with an eye towards history.





# Government

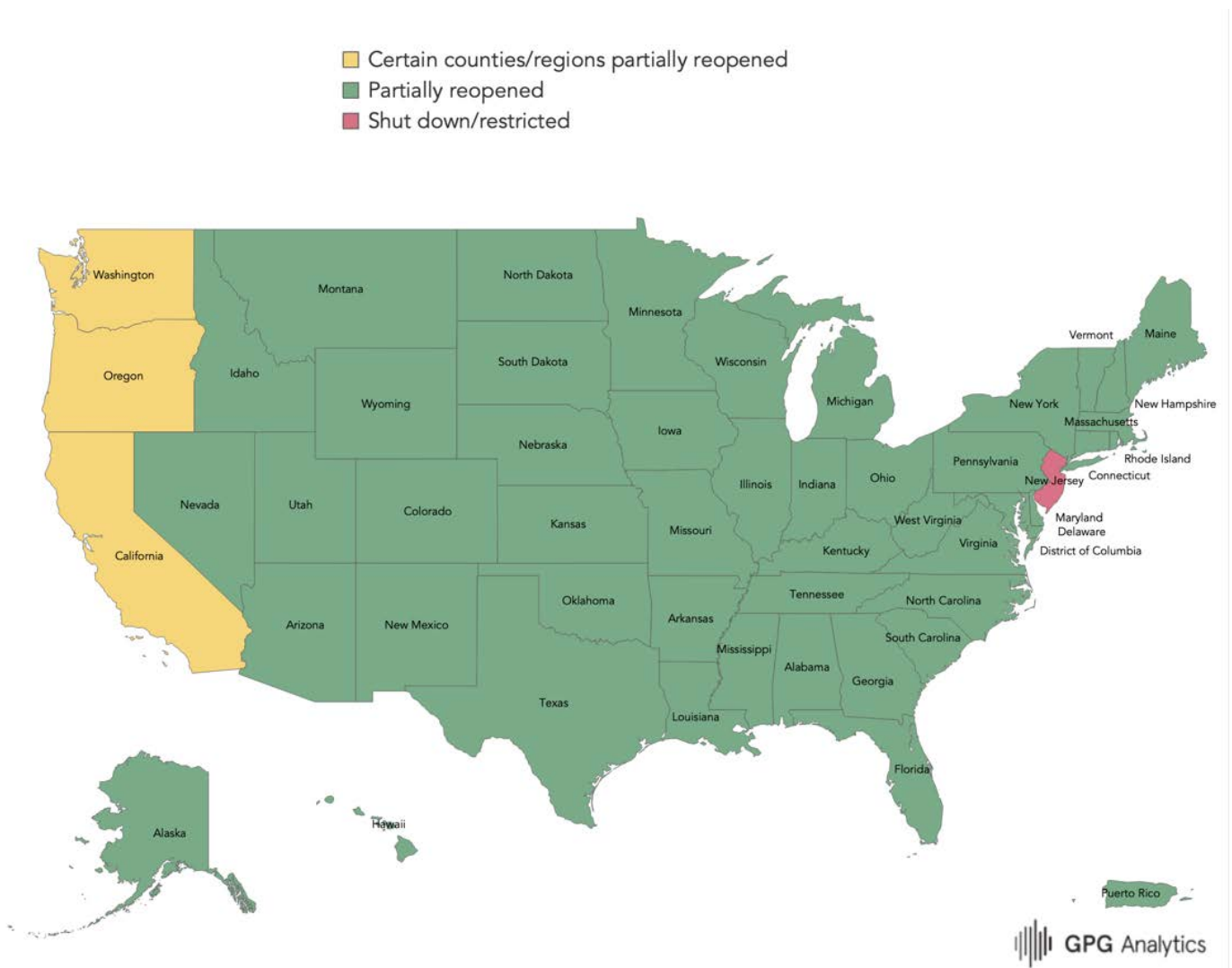
---

States and counties across the country continue to lift lockdown restrictions, with almost all states at least partially reopened in some capacity.

GPG has reviewed and analyzed the work practices of eight federal agencies and departments to see how they are managing their own workforce and gradually returning to work.

# State of the States

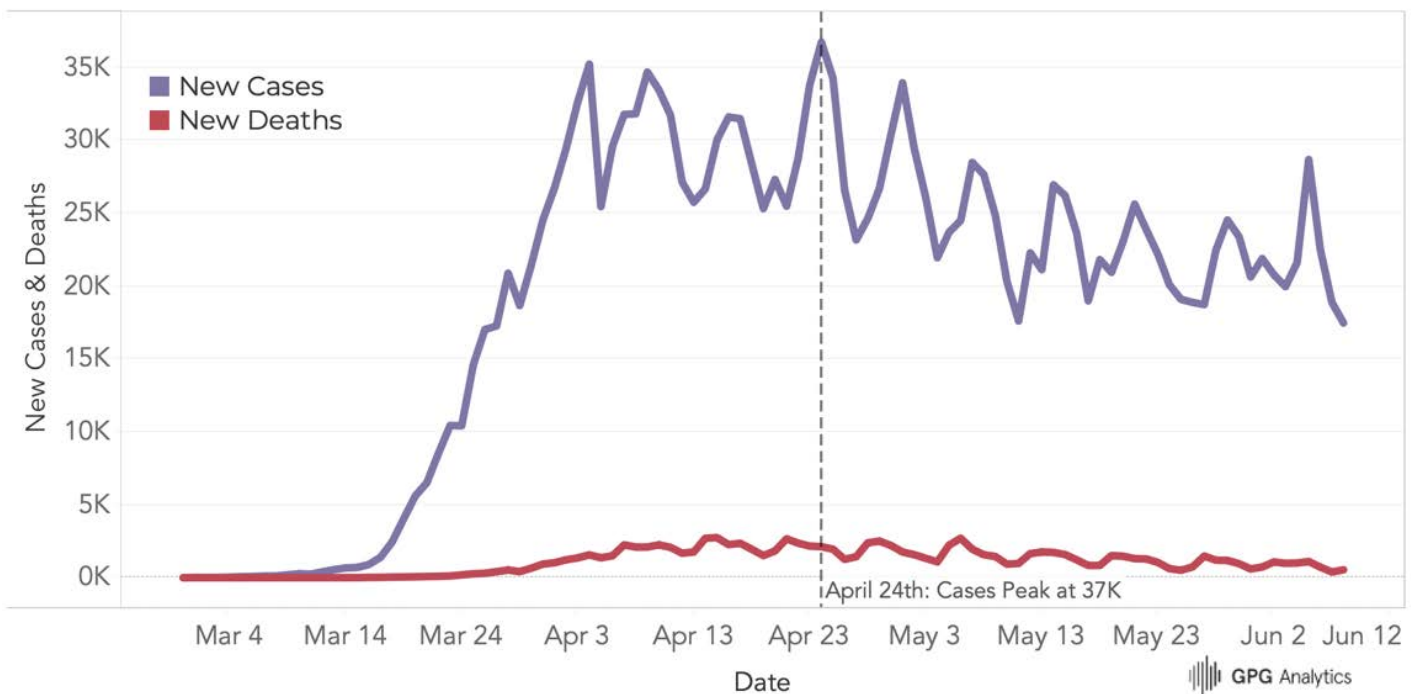
Most of America is now partially open...



# State of the States

...as the growth of new cases declines but remains high.

### COVID-19 CASES AND DEATHS BY DAY



# Federal Government Agencies

Without any cohesion across the federal government, some agencies have been accused of returning to work prematurely while others have faced criticism for failing to release any guidance whatsoever.

## Department of Defense

- The five-phase reopening [plan](#) has transitions tied to local conditions, not specific dates.
- It intends to expand testing for COVID-19 antibodies throughout the force, initially prioritizing “critical tier one units,” such as those who embark on nuclear submarines or serve in quick-reaction forces.
- Leadership is considering reducing quarantine timelines for those who might have been exposed to the coronavirus from 14 to 10 days.

## Department of Energy

- DOE employees started returning under a four-phase [plan](#) that allows for high-risk workers, or those who provide care to vulnerable individuals, to continue to work remotely.
- Face masks will be encouraged but not required. Common areas such as cafeterias and gyms will continue to be closed until phase three, and meetings will continue to be held virtually.

## Department of State

- State began reopening in early June, allowing managers to bring back up to 40% of their team. The undersecretary for management indicated that only non-vulnerable employees who cannot telework or require access to classified systems should return.
- The three-phase, conditions-based return [plan](#) envisions 80% of staff returning this month. By the final phase, masks, teleworking, and temperature checks would not be required, and travel could “cautiously” resume.

## Department of Interior

- National Parks will reopen based on local conditions.

## Department of Transportation

- Guidance has not been issued to employees; any updates have been communicated by building maintenance and cleaning crews.

## Environmental Protection Agency

- [EPA office](#) reopening will begin with a seven-day closure for cleaning and to render the virus inactive. Boston and Dallas offices began that process last week, but an increase in COVID cases in those areas has delayed further reopening.
- The agency will designate a contact tracing point of contact for each program and regional office. That person will have direct access to EPA's senior leadership and understand that all information must be kept strictly confidential.

## Internal Revenue Service

- 11,000 staff have returned and were provided hand sanitizer, masks, and gloves.
- The IRS is offering incentive pay of 10 percent to 25 percent to workers to return, largely to perform work that cannot be done remotely, either for practical or taxpayer privacy reasons.

## Securities and Exchange Commission

- Mandatory telework will remain in effect until at least July 15 for most of the agency's 4,000-plus employees—perhaps the most far-reaching and cautious federal policy announced thus far.

# A Hill Divided – Incentive or Subsidy?

---

**Congressional Republicans are asserting that conditions are adequate for Members and staff to return, which has led the Senate to join their House colleagues back on Capitol Hill.**

**Now back in the office themselves, GOP legislators are considering offering cash incentives for unemployed Americans returning to work.**

Senator Rob Portman (R-OH) has proposed providing a temporary \$450-a-week bonus for unemployed individuals returning to work in addition to their wages. It would last through July 31, the same date on which the extra \$600 weekly unemployment benefit expires. This measure would help states save money by potentially reducing their expenditures on unemployment benefits.

Senate Democrats are offering an alternative that relies on a wage subsidy to keep people on payrolls. A plan led by Senators Mark Warner (D-VA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), and Doug Jones (D-AL) would cover 100% of wages and benefits, up to \$90,000. Some Democrats say they might consider ending the \$600 in extra jobless benefits if Republicans rallied behind a wage subsidy.





# Private Sector

---

This week, GPG asked two questions. First, how are childcare facilities, schools, and universities planning their return? Resumption plans from the education sector are critical to both future generations of Americans and working parents resuming in-person work.

Second, who is driving the 'Back to Work' conversation on Twitter? GPG's proprietary Network Influencer Tool identifies key players.

# Spotlight: Education

## International & Higher Education Highlights

- [Several colleges and universities](#), including Saint Louis University, the University of Virginia, and the University of North Carolina, are amending their term calendars to start earlier in August and end in November ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday to avoid a potential second wave of the pandemic.
- Reopening will likely be a dynamic situation, as evidenced by [500 recently reopened schools](#) in South Korea that switched back to remote learning in an effort to contain a resurgence of the virus.

**Working parents will not be able to sustainably resume in-person work operations until K-12 schools and childcare facilities reopen, but how and when our academic institutions return to in-person operations remain major questions.**

**[CDC guidelines for school reopenings, released in mid-May, focus on in-person social distancing](#), such as “desks at least six feet apart and facing the same direction, lunch in classrooms, staggered arrival times, cloth masks for staff, and daily temperature screenings for everyone.”**

- The [Wall Street Journal](#) examined how schools were making plans within those guidelines, including considering hybrid remote-in-person models, year-round calendars, and specific safety concerns leveled by the American Federation of Teachers.
- Anita Cicero and Dr. Tara Kirk Sell of Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security published [an op-ed](#) in The Hill arguing that more scientific research into COVID-19 was needed before making the decision to reopen schools.

**Even as school systems make plans, other workforce and budgetary issues loom.**

- A [USA TODAY/Ipsos poll](#) found that “1 in 5 teachers say they are unlikely to go back to school if their classrooms reopen in the fall.”
- Due to [state and local budget shortfalls across the country](#), the education sector is anticipated to experience catastrophic budget and staff cuts.
- A [leaked version](#) of California’s draft guidelines for reopening schools was criticized as logistically and financially infeasible.

# Online Influencers

Heavy hitters on social media have entered the 'Back to Work' arena. GPG's proprietary Network Influencer Tool has identified who is driving and influencing this conversation. Though reopening is a global conversation, our analysis of Twitter conversation from May 20 through May 27 shows that most of the influential accounts driving this conversation are posting content on the reopening of the U.S. economy.

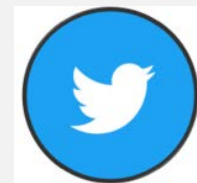
**Twitter's** official handle, with its 58 million followers, topped the charts in terms of reach when a number of users [mentioned](#) it in their [tweets](#) quoting an MIT technical review [article](#) claiming nearly half of the Twitter accounts discussing 'Reopening America' may be bots.

**The Associated Press** can move information from one side of Twitter to another with ease. Their tweets and retweets on [Montenegro's reopening](#), [resuming skiing in Colorado](#), [reopening of houses of worship](#), and the dilemmas facing [gyms seeking to reopen](#) address information that is picked up and shared across the entire network.

**Morgan Fairchild** is the most well-connected account in this conversation network. Her engagement with tweets on the reopening of [schools](#), [theme parks](#), and [small businesses](#) make her an effective bridge connecting diverse groups within this network.

**Ed Yong**, a science writer at *The Atlantic*, published an [article](#) on the coronavirus coursing through different parts of the U.S. in different ways, making the crisis harder to predict, control, and understand. His [tweets](#) promoting this article drove the highest engagement in the entire network.

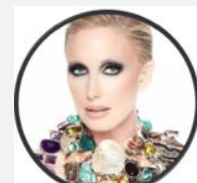
**Global News**, a Canadian news network, ranked the highest in terms of participation, pumping out the most information in the network by sharing content on topics such as newly reopened [Krispy Kreme doughnuts](#), [haircut envies](#), [phased reopening plans](#), and the [importance of testing](#).



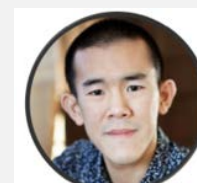
Highest Reach  
@Twitter



Effective Sharer  
@ap



Most Connected  
@morgfair



Top Engagement  
@edyong



Top Participation  
@globalnews



# Public Health

---

As states have reopened over the past weeks, many unanswered questions remain about the virus and its spread.

Are Americans following social distancing guidelines? Is the slowed growth of cases due to longer lockdowns of urban centers? Does warmer summer weather slow the spread? Or is the U.S. being lulled into a more deadly second wave?



# The Unanswered Questions

---

As states, and with them, their businesses, restaurants, universities, and schools, prepare to reopen, more questions than answers remain about the course the coronavirus will take and how we'll continue to reduce its spread. Scientific understanding of the coronavirus – including how it spreads, how it progresses in infected individuals, and how to treat it – evolves almost daily.

Here are some of the biggest unanswered questions – and areas where we expect to see scientists focusing their research efforts in the weeks and months to come.

**Will warm weather slow the spread of the virus?** It's a hopeful possibility: the seasonal flu weakens each summer. Will the novel coronavirus behave similarly? The evidence currently tells us no. A [working paper](#) authored by scientists at 6 universities worldwide suggests that while summer weather may slow the spread of the virus in some of the hottest parts of the world, it is unlikely to meaningfully reduce infections.

**Are we anywhere near achieving herd immunity?** In the absence of a vaccine, achieving herd immunity – the point at which a large enough portion of a population is immune to an infectious disease that it stops spreading – will ultimately be one of the few ways to stop the spread of the virus. Researchers have struggled to even estimate how many people may have been infected, given the limitations of early testing and tracing efforts. But [preliminary studies](#) suggest that even cities that were hit hardest by the first wave of COVID-19 outbreaks are far from

achieving herd immunity. In New York City, it is estimated that around 20% of the city's residents have been infected. In Sweden, which took a more relaxed approach to containing the virus, only an estimated 7% of individuals have antibodies.

**How can we avoid future "superspreading" events?** One of the biggest mysteries about the novel coronavirus is what makes an individual a so-called "[superspreader](#)". According to recent studies by the [London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine](#), [Tel Aviv University](#), and the [Institute for Disease Modeling](#) in Washington, approximately 10% of cases have caused approximately 80% of new infections. Why some individuals shed more virus than others is an open scientific question – a person's genetics, immune system, and behavior all may play a role. Preventing superspreading events will be key as reopening continues – expect to see more research emerge on this topic.