

Reliable & Objective Statistics to Inform Our COVID-19 Discussions

Government statistics deliver a reliable, objective starting point for showing how the COVID-19 global pandemic affects our economy, healthcare system and society. Each of the nation's 13 principal federal statistical agencies deliver critical data each day. Here are some benchmark statistics that can provide context for journalists, policymakers, and anyone who wants objective, professionally gathered information.

The American Statistical Association – through its Count on Stats public outreach initiative – is a valuable resource to enhance public awareness of the importance, reliability and trustworthiness of government data and the nation's data infrastructure.

Bureau of Economic Analysis

- The GDP [shrank by 4.8 percent](#) in the first quarter of 2020. It's the steepest decline since the GDP contracted 8.4 percent in Q4 2008 during the Great Recession. The current decline was, in part, due to rapid changes in demand and consumer consumption following the numerous March COVID-19 shelter-in-place orders.
- The [largest quarterly GDP plunge](#) (10%) happened during the eight-month long 'Recession of 1958' also known as 'The Eisenhower Recession.'
- Consumer spending [accounted for 70%](#) of the 2019 GDP.

Bureau of Labor Statistics

- The BLS [COVID-19 Resource Page](#) explains the pandemic's impact on various surveys, including unemployment statistics and the consumer price index.
- Business reporters will learn how to make sense of the local jobs picture using Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) data during a free [June 4th webinar](#) from the Society for Advancing Business, Editing and Writing and American Statistical Association.
- According to *The Employment Situation*, the April [unemployment rate](#) rose by 10.3 percentage points to 14.7%, which is the highest since the Great Depression. April's numbers reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, including major job losses across all industries.
- This is the highest rate and largest month-over-month increase since BLS started tracking the unemployment rate in 1948.
- The last time the national unemployment rate was at or above 10% was [October 2009](#) following The Great Recession. Before that, September 1982 to June 1983 was the last time the unemployment rate went above 10% – peaking at 10.8%.
- The number of unemployed people rose by [15.9 million](#) to 23.1 million in April.
- The [20.5 million jobs lost](#) in April is the largest month-over-month decline since the Great Depression and the lowest employment level since February 2011.
- The [top five industries](#) most impacted include:
 - Leisure & Hospitality -7.7 million jobs (-5.5 million for food services)
 - Education & Health Services -2.5 million jobs
 - Professional & Business Services -2.1 million jobs

- Retail trade -2.1 million jobs
- Manufacturing -1.3 million jobs
- Nearly two-thirds of U.S. cities saw [higher year-over-year unemployment rates](#) in March.
- There have been [10 recessions](#) between 1948 and 2011.
- 73% of private industry employees had [paid sick leave benefits](#) in March 2019. Workers in management, business and finance are more likely to have paid sick (94%) than service industry workers (58%) and laborers in construction, extraction, farming, fishing and forestry (56%).

National Center for Health Statistics

- NCHS updates [COVID-19 deaths](#) daily, but this count is incomplete due to a current lag time of 1-2 weeks in states reporting mortality data. The NCHS mortality surveillance data is part of the CDC's new weekly COVID-19 activity report, [COVIDView](#).
- In 2018, flu and pneumonia ranked as the [8th leading cause of death](#).
- 14.2% of people in families had [problems paying medical bills](#) in 2018.

Bureau of Justice Statistics

- In 2017, there were [2.25 million people](#) incarcerated in the United States; The U.S. prison population was 1.5 million prisoners at the end of 2017, and the population of jail inmates in the U.S. was 745,000 at the middle of 2017.
- An average of approximately [1.3 million nonfatal domestic violence cases](#) happened annually from 2006-2015. An annual average of about 582,000 domestic cases, or 44%, went unreported.
- In 2012, half of state and federal prisoners, and local jail inmates [reported ever having a chronic condition](#), including asthma, high blood pressure, and heart-related problems.

Bureau of Transportation Statistics

- BTS implemented new dashboards for [weekly](#) and [monthly](#) transportation statistics.
- In 2019, U.S. airlines collected [\\$8.6 billion](#) in baggage fees (\$5.8 billion) and ticket changes/cancellations (\$2.8 billion).
- Complaints about airline service [quadrupled in March](#) (5,064) compared to the 1,132 filed in March 2019. Refunds, reservations and ticketing were the top three complaint categories.
- The 38.7 million U.S. airline passengers in March 2020 represents a [51% reduction](#) compared to March 2019.
- The airlines carried slightly more passengers in March than in [September 2001](#).
- The [51% decline](#) in U.S. airlines passengers in March followed 29 consecutive months of increases from the same month of the previous year, dating back to October 2017.
- In 2019, airline carriers earned nearly [\\$13 billion in net income](#), and more than \$113 billion in net income over the past decade.

Census Bureau

- The 2010 Census [response rate](#) was 74%.

- The Census Bureau is tracking nationwide 2020 Census [self-response rates](#) and all the way down to the township level.
- The Census Bureau is publishing weekly results from its [Household Pulse Survey](#) that provides critical COVID-19 impact data on employment status, spending, food security, housing, education disruptions, and health.
- Weekly insights are also available from a similar survey on how [small businesses have been affected](#) by COVID-19.

National Center for Education Statistics

- In 2017, nearly one-third of K-12 teachers [were at least 50 years old](#).
- In 2017, [14 percent of children](#) ages 3 to 18 didn't have home internet access.
- In 2019, there were an estimated [3.7 million teachers instructing 56.6 million students](#) in public and private schools.
- In 2018, there were approximately [100,000 public elementary and secondary schools](#) in approximately 18,000 school districts.
- In 2016, about 1.7 million students (ages 5-17) were estimated to be [homeschooled](#), which is about 3.3 percent of all K-12 students.
- In fall 2017, there were 3.1 million undergrad and post-grad students who [exclusively enrolled in distance education courses](#).

Energy Information Administration

- In 2020, U.S. carbon dioxide emissions are [predicted to drop by 11%](#), which would be the largest decline in not only percentage but also absolute terms since EIA started tracking in 1949. EIA attributes much of the drop in CO₂ emissions from travel restrictions and economic slowdown estimates as a way to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.
- EIA updates consumer gasoline demand [weekly](#).

Economic Research Service

- [The ERS COVID-19 Resource Page](#) includes the latest economic outlook for cotton, beef, dairy and other commodities.
- In 2018, 29.7 million children received [free or reduced-price school lunches](#), and 14.69 million students received free or reduced-price school breakfasts each day. With widespread school closures across the country, some school districts have set up meal programs to ensure those kids can still get fed.
- In 2018, American consumers, businesses and government entities [spent \\$1.7 trillion on food](#). Food away-from-home spending accounted for 54.4% of total food expenditures. Many states have enforced restrictions on restaurants and bars, including prohibiting dine-in service while allowing take-out and delivery.
- In 2018, roughly [40 million Americans per month](#) received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Office of Research, Evaluation and Statistics

- As of April 2020, there are around 69.6 million people receiving [Social Security and/or Supplemental Security Income](#). Around 72% of those recipients (50 million) are 65 years or older.

Statistics of Income Division

- The IRS provides [weekly updates](#) for the 2020 filing season, which has been extended to July 15 due to the coronavirus.
- In 2019, more than [92 million people](#) received their tax refunds through direct deposit.

National Agricultural Statistics Service

- Farmers are [predicted to plant](#) 97 million acres of corn (+8% from 2019), 83.5 million acres of soybeans (+10% from 2019) and 44.7 million acres of wheat (-1% from 2019).
- The forecasted wheat prediction is the lowest amount since records began in 1919.

National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics

- Science and engineering-related jobs [make up around 5%](#) (7 million) of U.S. jobs.
- In 2017, healthcare-related jobs accounted for 20 percent of the 17 million skilled technical workforce.

For more government data that tracks the COVID-19 impact, check out the [Coronavirus Hub and Map](#) from the non-profit, nonpartisan civic initiative, USAFacts.

Objective government statistics are important elements of constructive dialogue and evidence-based policymaking. They provide a reliable and free snapshot of important aspects of our society—on topics ranging from health and safety, to the economy, to education. Its resources provide key information for geographical regions ranging from national to neighborhoods, and for time periods ranging from monthly to multi-year periods.

Government statistics are the gold standard of data because of the scientific rigor with which the data are collected, analyzed and shared. Help [Count on Stats](#) ensure public trust in government statistics is robust, and that the agencies have the resources they need to do their job effectively and efficiently.

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