



COVID-19 STATE PREPAREDNESS HANDBOOK

5 ACTIONS State Leaders Can Take Now to be Ready for Surges of COVID-19



Executive Summary

Four months have passed since COVID-19 brought daily lives to a halt around the world, and learning from the early months of this pandemic will help equip us for future waves.

As we open up smartly and safely, people are expecting their leaders to carefully monitor and prepare for a resurgence of the virus and to use targeted approaches to containment, in the hopes of preventing the need for large scale, blanket lockdowns. We now know much more about COVID-19 than even a few months ago, including the fact that the virus' toll is most significant in communities which have faced [racial injustices and historical inequities](#) in our health care system. Any successful pandemic response must focus first and foremost on the people and communities that have faced longstanding barriers to accessing care.

With smart preparation now, a subsequent wave of COVID-19 does not need to look like the first few months, with widespread lockdowns and a scramble to build health system capacity, leaving people confused and worried that the health care system might not be there for them when they need it.

THESE FIVE ACTIONS build on the actions that states should already be taking to [reopen safely](#), and assume that states use accepted public health measures like testing and contact tracing to pursue a new normal. As our nation's wellbeing and economic success is intertwined with this ongoing public health challenge, state leaders have a pivotal role to play in crafting solutions that meet all people's needs.

The following guidance can help state leaders as they plan for future COVID surges.



→ **ACTION #1 Listen to the Needs of Different Communities**

The best response will always come from listening first to the needs of people and understanding the challenges people have experienced since the pandemic began.

→ **ACTION #2 Communicate Clearly With People and Use Data to Guide Quick Decision Making**

State leaders should take steps to make sure they are well-positioned to act quickly, using the best information and data to inform their decisions.

- **Establish clear decision making channels** among state officials.
- **Create an early warning system with effective monitoring and clear benchmarks** for action to be able to quickly identify areas when and where the virus resurges with the goal of keeping any shutdowns as targeted and limited as possible.
- **Use tools to track and stop the spread**, including testing and contact tracing.
- **Share direct, timely, and accurate information** about what people can expect, even if the answers are not always clear or the news is not good

→ **ACTION #3 Focus on Protecting People and Places That Face the Highest Risks**

State leaders should be acting now to better protect settings that are high risk for COVID transmission and to plan for disruptions that could occur elsewhere if closures need to be reinstated.

- **Address disparities** using a comprehensive approach, understanding the experiences of vulnerable and at-risk populations, especially communities of color.
- **Protect and fortify sites at a high risk for transmission**, such as nursing homes and long-term care facilities and jails and prisons.
- **Plan for disruptions to key services** to ensure the services and programs that children depend on, such as mental health services and access to health foods, are available.
- **Create a system of isolation and quarantine centers** for those in need and at high-risk.
- **Ensure safe workplaces for front-line health care workers and essential workers** in order to protect those that risk exposure to themselves and their family for their community.

→ **ACTION #4 Build Health System Capacity to Meet People's Needs**

State leaders should take steps to build a well-resourced and prepared health care system and support the health care workforce with the resources necessary to take care of people.

- **Establish systems to be able to quickly ramp up the availability and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE).**
- **Strengthen mental health safety net for the health care workforce.**
- **Plan a targeted approach to delaying non-essential care and procedures** if and when delays are needed, in hopes of avoiding blanket delays to all non-essential care and procedures.
- **Prepare to handle simultaneous surges** by planning for external events that could impact efforts, such as the seasonal flu and natural disasters.

→ **ACTION #5 Build Collaborative Approaches**

State leaders should collaborate and partner with external stakeholders—both public and private—who are involved in COVID response and mitigation.