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COVID-19 Island Insights Series

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Guam

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The COVID-19 Island Insights Series is an initiative spearheaded by the Strathclyde Centre for Environmental Law & Governance (SCELG) and the Institute of Island Studies (IIS) at the University of Prince Edward Island in collaboration with Island Innovation. The initiative brings together critical assessments of how specific islands around the world have performed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which their recovery plans can promote resilience and sustainability in the long term.

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Guam is an organized unincorporated territory of the United States of America.

Population - 159,358¹ (2010 U.S. Census)

168,485 (July 2020 est.)²

Ethnicity - Chamorro 37.3%, Filipino 26.3%, white 7.1%, Chuukese 7%, Korean 2.2%, another Pacific Islander 2%, other Asian 2%, Chinese 1.6%, Palauan 1.6%, Japanese 1.5%, Pohnpeian 1.4%, mixed 9.4%, other 0.6% (2010 est.)³

Size - 544 sq. km⁴

COVID-19 data and timeline

Number of cases - 6452⁵ or 3.83%⁶

Number of fatalities -103⁷ or .06%⁸

Schools closed on 16 March 2020; public school classes were cancelled 06 April 2020 for the term. Schools attempted to reopen in late August, but were forced to resort to remote learning due to the high number of infections.

Travel restrictions: Travelers should avoid all travel to Guam⁹ (Center for Disease Control guidance and not a rule). Mandatory quarantine (14 days) at a Government of Guam (GovGuam) Quarantine facility for all incoming passengers, with the exception of essential healthcare professionals that possess a valid negative COVID-19 test result and pre-approval letter from the GovGuam Department of Public Health and Social Services (DPHSS)¹⁰.

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¹ <https://2020census.gov/en/conducting-the-count/island-areas/guam.html>

² https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_gq.html

³ https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_gq.html

⁴ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gq.html>

⁵ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n-vrUG-zEzs7rjcxXBFEBIMmeUQykuyO9/view>

⁶ Percentage calculated using the July 2020 population projection

⁷ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n-vrUG-zEzs7rjcxXBFEBIMmeUQykuyO9/view>

⁸ Percentage calculated using the July 2020 population projection

⁹ <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/notices/covid-4/coronavirus-guam>

¹⁰ <https://dphss.guam.gov/quarantine/>

COVID-19 on Guam

As of 20 November 2020, Guam documented 6,452 total cases of COVID-19 and 103 fatalities.^{11,12} A total of 81,034 tests have been administered.¹³ The majority of positive test cases reside in Northern Guam.¹⁴ Contact tracing indicates that COVID-19 is predominantly transmitted via household (1,571); community (858); workplace (969); and some through healthcare (72).¹⁵ Guam Memorial Hospital, the island's main hospital, understaffed and in need of major renovations, exceeded capacity in late October and placed overflow patients outside.¹⁶

A state of emergency was declared on 14 March 2020 via Executive Order 2020-03.¹⁷ Guam confirmed its first three COVID-19 cases on 15 March 2020¹⁸ triggering the first lockdown. On 16 March 2020, public schools closed and by 06 April 2020, classes were cancelled for the remainder of the school year.¹⁹ Private schools continued via distance learning. Gatherings of ≥ 50 people were prohibited, and

a mandatory 14-day quarantine²⁰ was imposed on arrivals from affected COVID-19 areas.²¹ Completely shutting down the island, specifically closing the airport and banning all inbound flights, was not feasible because the Governor has no authority over U.S. Federal Aviation Administration facilities. As a territory²² of the United States, Guam cannot control immigration; the island must abide by U.S. law. Additional rules and regulations were passed on 26 November 2020, residents may be fined up to \$1,000 and businesses may be fined up to \$10,000 for failing to follow DPHSS Guidance Memoranda and Directives on COVID-19.²³

In April 2020, the Governor and her Guam Recovery Panel of Advisors implemented a four-step "Pandemic Condition of Readiness" (PCOR) system; and established the COVID-19 Area Risk (CAR) Score, which consists of three factors: case doubling time²⁴, test positivity rate²⁵, and new cases per 100K people.²⁶ An ideal CAR score is 5.0. As of 29 November

¹¹ These figures do not reflect the 1,156 infections and one death from the USS Theodore Roosevelt, which docked in Guam; these are counted separately (<https://www.pncguam.com/covid-19-outbreak-hits-uss-theodore-roosevelt-anew/>). The handling of the USS Theodore Roosevelt COVID-19 outbreak was an international incident and led to the firing of Captain Brett Crozier for a leaked letter vehemently requesting US intervention, and the subsequent resignation of Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly (<https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2020/05/19/carrier-theodore-roosevelt-sidelined-in-guam-by-coronavirus-heads-back-to-sea-this-week/>). Approximately 3,000 of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt's sailors were housed in empty Guam hotels for a 14-day quarantine, with the permission by the Governor of Guam, despite some residents' fear of further transmission into the local community (https://www.postguam.com/news/local/navy-3-000-sailors-will-be-housed-in-guam-hotels/article_f18a44fc-759f-11ea-bc17-9b28e21c7b29.html).

¹² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n-vrUG-zEzs7rjcxXBFEBIMmeUQykuyO9/view>

¹³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n-vrUG-zEzs7rjcxXBFEBIMmeUQykuyO9/view>

¹⁴ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n-vrUG-zEzs7rjcxXBFEBIMmeUQykuyO9/view>

¹⁵ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n-vrUG-zEzs7rjcxXBFEBIMmeUQykuyO9/view>

¹⁶ <https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/single-post/2020/10/27/GMH-exceeds-capacity-patients-overflow-beds-set-up-at-curb-side>

¹⁷ <http://dphss.guam.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19-EO.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.guampdn.com/story/news/local/2020/03/15/governor-3-guam-confirmed-positive-covid-19/5053098002/>

¹⁹ <https://www.guampdn.com/story/news/2020/04/05/guam-department-education-superintendent-jon-fernandez-cancels-rest-school-year/2952618001/>

²⁰ The 14-day mandatory quarantine became Guam's primary tool to deter visitors and prevent additional cases from being imported into the island.

²¹ <https://www.guampdn.com/story/news/local/2020/03/15/governor-3-guam-confirmed-positive-covid-19/5053098002/>

²² Guam remains one of 17 colonies left in the world. A federal appeals court in July ruled that Guam's proposed political status plebiscite, which would have allowed native inhabitants to vote whether they preferred to remain as a U.S. territory, statehood, independence, or free association, illegally discriminates based on race, in violation of the Constitution, and thus, cannot be held.

²³ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/new-fines-for-breaking-social-gathering-and-other-public-health-directives-go-into-effect-on/article_e9bcac1c-2ec5-11eb-8887-e73806f20d4c.html

²⁴ Doubling time refers to how many days it takes for the number of infections to double.

²⁵ Positivity rate refers to the percentage of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 out of the total number of tests administered.

²⁶ <https://www.pncguam.com/covid-19-area-risk-car-scoring-system-developed-for-quarantine-and-testing-requirements/>



2020, Guam's CAR score was 6.7, an improvement from an early November CAR score of 33.4.^{27,28}

Guam transitioned from PCOR 1 (most severe restrictions) to PCOR 2 on 10 May 2020, allowing some businesses to operate with safety precautions in place, and then to PCOR 3 on July 20, marking the end of the first wave. In mid-August, a spike in cases returned the island back PCOR 1.²⁹ In response, Guam re-organized their pandemic strategy and launched "Strive for Five" to achieve a CAR Score of 5.0.³⁰ The five-prong approach included:

1. deployment of the Rapid Engagement Team to the most vulnerable subdivisions;
2. direct engagement with Federated States of Micronesia community leaders for outreach/education to the Chuukese community³¹;
3. a daily average of >600 tests;
4. tighter socialization restrictions; and
5. increased public awareness of death toll and hospital overflows.³²

To assist affected individuals, families, small businesses, and local governments, three aid packages were authorized by the U.S. Congress in 2019:

1. Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R. 6074)³³;
2. Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) (H.R. 6201)³⁴; and

²⁷ <https://ghs.guam.gov/jic-release-no-472-results-14-260-test-positive-covid-19-dphss-begin-daily-covid-19-community-mass>

²⁸ <https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/single-post/2020/11/11/Guam-reports-101-new-cases-CAR-score-jumps-to-334>

²⁹ This second PCOR1 was supposed to initially last for two weeks but has ultimately lasted until the present day (02 Dec 2020).

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gr9fXnGOKs>

³¹ In the recent spike of positive cases of COVID-19, Chuukese residents on Guam had higher rates of infection and mortality, which triggered a targeted approach to this specific community on Guam. Chuuk is one of the states in the Federated States of Micronesia,

³² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Gr9fXnGOKs>

3. Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or "CARES Act," (H.R. 748)^{35, 36}

The FFCRA provided additional Medicaid funding and lowered the local Medicaid match for territories. The CARES Act included \$3 billion for the U.S. territories and the District of Columbia, to be distributed proportionate to population. Of the \$3 billion, as much as \$153 million, was earmarked for education; and \$300 million was budgeted for nutrition assistance programs.

The CARES Act authorized direct one-time payments of \$1,200 (\$2,400 for couples) to all individuals (who filed 2017 taxes in the U.S. and its territories) earning less than \$75,000 (\$150,000 for couples). Families are eligible for an additional \$500/child. Wait times varied for these payments, due to GovGuam processing delays.

The Guam Department of Labor had to create a new Guam Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) Program to access the benefits of the CARES Act.³⁷ The CARES Act added an additional 13 weeks of unemployment benefits and up to 39 weeks for uninsured unemployment. Eligible individuals could claim an additional \$600 per week in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation³⁸. As of 22 August 2020, 30,000 workers on Guam have received their PUA benefits.³⁹ Investigations of 20,000 potentially fraudulent unemployment claims

³³ H.R. 6074 includes 8.3 billion USD in emergency funding for federal agencies to respond to the COVID-19 outbreak

³⁴ H.R. 6201 includes free COVID-19 testing, expanded food assistance, increased Medicaid allotments for territories, and additional protections for health care workers

³⁵ H.R. 748 includes two trillion USD in aid to schools, hospitals, laid-off workers, small businesses, and territory governments

³⁶ <https://sannicolos.house.gov/financial-relief-package-us-territories>

³⁷ <https://dol.guam.gov/pandemic-unemployment-assistance-pua-federal-pandemic-unemployment-compensation-fpuc/>

³⁸ The program expired in 30 July 2020.

³⁹ <https://dol.guam.gov/pandemic-unemployment-assistance-pua-federal-pandemic-unemployment-compensation-fpuc/>

(out of the 65,000 initial claims filed) are delaying payouts for legitimate claims.⁴⁰

These aid packages provided \$100 billion for hospitals and medical facilities to cover unreimbursed healthcare related expenses or lost revenues attributed to COVID-19, as well as \$950 million to support public health activities addressing COVID-19 via the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). This aid is meant to increase the domestic supply of essential Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) by allocating \$16 billion for the Strategic National Stockpile, \$4.3 billion for the CDC, and \$1 billion for health agencies. Despite this aid, Guam experienced a PPE shortage, leading to community organizations manufacturing and donating homemade PPE, particularly face masks.⁴¹

On Guam, the Paycheck Protection Program⁴² provided \$192 million to more than 2,200 small businesses.⁴³ For expenses not covered under the PPP, the SBA offered the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program (EIDL), a long-term financing option. As of 23 November 2020, the EIDL Program granted 1,322 Guam small businesses \$78.445 million worth of loans.⁴⁴ Some businesses on Guam are currently under investigation for allegedly defrauding or attempting to defraud these federal programs meant to assist small businesses survival.⁴⁵

Receiving COVID-19 federal aid was delayed due to the lack of infrastructure (i.e., the Government of Guam had to create, staff, and run a new, compliant local program); the mandatory remote-work situation for non-essential, government employees; and the fraudulent or incorrectly filed claims which have bogged down the fledgling systems.

Key socioeconomic pressures in Guam during COVID-19

As of 11 November 2020, Guam has experienced a higher percentage of cases and deaths per capita than many other Pacific Islands, with the possible exception of French Polynesia.⁴⁶ Compared to other U.S. States and territories, from 20 January 2020 – the present, Guam's positive infections rate is approximately 4,083 per 100,000 people.⁴⁷ With over 263,956 total deaths⁴⁸ in the U.S., the American government's national response to the COVID-19 pandemic may be perceived as abysmal.⁴⁹ Yong (2020) attributes this failure to the following: a slow, politicized, government response (despite ample warning time) that ignored scientific expertise; an underfunded federal department of public health; an inefficient, ill-prepared national health care system that marginalizes people of color; a lack of a social safety net, forcing lowly-paid essential employees to choose livelihood at the expense of health; and the conflagration of misinformation on social media platforms.⁵⁰

⁴⁰ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/labor-fraudulent-jobless-benefit-claims-top-20k/article_b92956e2-f638-11ea-aaf5-db436def751f.html

⁴¹ <https://ppeforguam.com/>

⁴² The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) through the Small Business Administration (SBA) includes 350 billion USD for zero-fee loans to employers who continued to pay employees during the pandemic. To address immediate cash flow concerns, the CARES Act included 10 billion USD for advances of up to 10,000 USD to small businesses and nonprofits that apply for an SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL).

⁴³ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/businesses-investigated-for-alleged-pandemic-aid-fraud/article_8f67c2be-2ec1-11eb-953d-97077a681f10.html

⁴⁴ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/businesses-investigated-for-alleged-pandemic-aid-fraud/article_8f67c2be-2ec1-11eb-953d-97077a681f10.html

⁴⁵ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/businesses-investigated-for-alleged-pandemic-aid-fraud/article_8f67c2be-2ec1-11eb-953d-97077a681f10.html

⁴⁶ <https://www.who.int/westernpacific/internal-publications-detail/covid-19-joint-external-situation-report-for-pacific-islands-30>

⁴⁷ https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_cas-esper100klast7days

⁴⁸ https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#cases_cas-esper100k

⁴⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/09/21/americans-give-the-u-s-low-marks-for-its-handling-of-covid-19-and-so-do-people-in-other-countries/>

⁵⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/09/coronavirus-american-failure/614191/>

Despite poor federal direction, Guam's Governor, a former nurse, convened a panel of health experts that advocated social distancing, masks, a 'safer-at-home' policy, and an early lockdown (with the exception of flights).

The mainstay of Guam's local economy, tourism, ground to a halt. Several businesses closed.⁵¹ A recent survey of Guam residents (n=570), indicates 54% of respondents reported a decline in income since the beginning of the pandemic (March) and 51% are experiencing an increase in household expenditures.⁵² Additionally, 75% of respondents are experiencing financial stress; 61% are living from paycheck to paycheck. Approximately 20% reported that they possess savings to last one month or less.⁵³

Post Covid-19 recovery on Guam: A different approach?

It is anticipated that Guam's economy will worsen in 2021 and recovery will not occur until 2022, at the earliest.⁵⁴ Economic recovery will depend on the availability of U.S. federal relief funding and the widespread distribution of effective COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2020 or mid-2021, for Guam and Guam's main tourist markets in Japan and Korea.⁵⁵ Some hotels have adapted and temporarily transformed into quarantine facilities focusing on military and local guests.

Decreasing the dependence on tourism, federal aid, and military spending; and, diversifying the economy are crucial. Because of Guam's geographically unique position in the Asia-Pacific

region, there are other economic opportunities to consider, such as becoming a regional commercial trade or telecommunications hub.

Post Covid-19 recovery and the Sustainable Development Goals

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of Guam's economic dependence on US aid and tourism. It is an impetus to move faster toward sustainability and the green economy. In September 2019, Executive Order 2019-23⁵⁶ established a Guam Green Growth (G3) Initiative Working Group, led by the University of Guam Center for Island Sustainability. G3 consists of government, academia, private sector, non-profit, and youth partners working together to transition Guam toward the green economy and a more equitable society by planning innovative, place-based, and practical solutions toward sustainability. Guam joined the Local 2030 Islands Network⁵⁷ as a founding member during the 74th United Nations General Assembly and Climate Week NYC 2019, signalling to the world, that Guam is ready to advance the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The G3 Working Group forged the G3 Action Framework which encompasses the SDGs and focuses on five categories: 1) Healthy and Prosperous Communities; 2) Educated, Capable, and Compassionate Island; 3) Sustainable Homes, Utilities, and Transportation; 4) Thriving Natural Resources; and 5) Sustainable Alliances.⁵⁸ It was formally adopted by GovGuam

⁵¹ <https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/single-post/2020/08/15/Chamber-Most-businesses-wont-survive-two-week-shutdown>

⁵² <https://www.pncguam.com/survey-details-economic-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁵³ <https://www.pncguam.com/survey-details-economic-impact-of-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁵⁴ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/banker-guam-economy-shattered/article_31a49d68-012c-11eb-ba0b-ff92f795c48b.html

⁵⁵ https://www.postguam.com/news/local/banker-guam-economy-shattered/article_31a49d68-012c-11eb-ba0b-ff92f795c48b.html

⁵⁶ https://nam04.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.uog.edu%2F_resources%2Ffiles%2Fnews-and-announcements%2F2019-2020%2FEO2019-23.pdf&data=02%7C01%7Csantosc8258%40triton.uog.edu%7Ce1c86fbbf749dd67f208d85de54b49%7C2a652fdf10c34e4f9e94369090abfd04%7C0%7C0%7C637362586697090124&sdata=MNVkF5G9NhhHZdxa6xll5D8xJnNi%2FWIHBpSITfijMKA%3D&reserved=0

⁵⁷ The network is co-chaired by the Hawai'i Green Growth Local 2030 Hub and the Global Island Partnership.

⁵⁸ <https://www.pncguam.com/guam-green-growth-working-group-to-launch-thursday/>

in September 2020.⁵⁹ With COVID-19 affecting Guam's economy, critical global supply chains, and the survival of the most vulnerable, G3 aims to help Guam build back stronger, more equitable, more resilient and hopefully less dependent on military spending, tourism, and imported food.

Useful Sources

- <http://dphss.guam.gov/covid-19/>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

⁵⁹ <https://www.pacificislandtimes.com/single-post/2020/09/24/Guam-adopts-10-year-action-plan-for-sustainable-future>

Published COVID-19 Island Insights

- #1. Malta. November 2020
- #2. Egadi Islands. November 2020
- #3. Grenada. November 2020
- #4. Trinidad and Tobago. November 2020
- #5. Shetland Islands. November 2020
- #6. Åland Islands. November 2020
- #7. Guam. December 2020



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