

# Virginia and Maryland ease COVID-19 restrictions

Dominic Gustavo  
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In Virginia, state authorities are pushing ahead with the reopening of the economy as part of the nationwide back-to-work drive, knowing that it will lead to a surge in COVID-19 infections and many preventable deaths.

On June 12, Virginia's Democratic governor, Ralph Northam, announced that northern Virginia and Richmond, the state capital, would enter Phase Two of the state's reopening plan. The rest of the state had begun Phase Two on June 5. Northern Virginia was held back from easing restrictions due to the greater impact of COVID-19 in that area.

In neighboring Maryland, Republican Governor Larry Hogan has lifted restrictions on nearly all businesses, including daycare centers, gyms, malls, school buildings, casinos, amusement parks and restaurants. Prince George's County, which borders Washington DC, continues to be the hardest-hit area in Maryland. It is due to enter Phase Two tomorrow.

Northam stated at a June 9 press briefing that Virginia's "health metrics are looking positive" and that positive tests were "trending downwards." Phase Two will lift restrictions on restaurants, gyms, sports and outdoor entertainment. Museums, zoos, aquariums, botanical gardens and outdoor concert, sporting and performing arts venues will be allowed to reopen as well.

Public schools are due to reopen in the fall. The reopening of the schools will follow the same three-part plan as that of the state as a whole. Northam said, "All Virginia schools will open for students next year, but the school experience will look very different ... These phases will allow in-person instruction, but slowly."

Phase Two of the reopening of public schools will allow for in-person teaching for pre-kindergarten through third grade, as well as for students with disabilities and students who are not fluent in English.

The state claims that social distancing will be observed, for example, by allowing only one child per seat on school buses. Student athletes will be permitted to resume practices so long as they keep 10 feet away from one another and disinfect shared equipment. These measures are clearly inadequate and reckless, since the novel coronavirus is spread mainly by airborne droplets.

New outbreaks continue to emerge in the state. CBS affiliate WTVR reported three separate outbreaks on June 13, with a total of 67 cases. These occurred mostly at long-term care facilities, where the impact of the virus has been most disastrous.

According to the Virginia Department of Health, there are 54,886 confirmed cases and 1,552 deaths in the state. While the number of new cases has been trending down since May 21, the reopening of the economy and schools will inevitably lead to a new spike in cases this summer.

The premature reopening of Virginia and Maryland demonstrates the indifference of the state authorities and both big business parties to the lives and health of working people. States that have reopened have reported sharp increases in new coronavirus cases. These include Arizona, Florida, Texas, Utah, North Carolina and California.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, between June 6 and June 9 there was a 36 percent increase in the average number of new cases in the United States.



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