COVID-19 Missouri Economy Indicators

Remote Work

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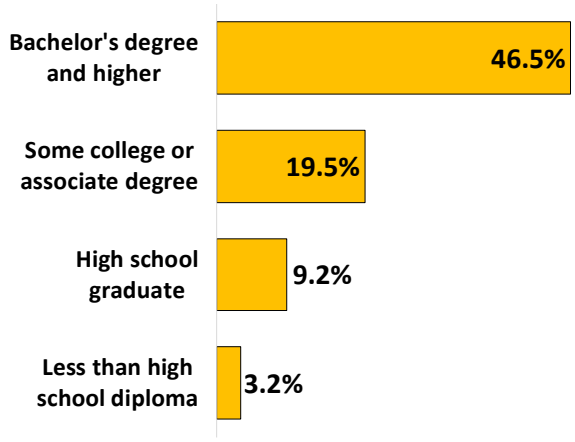
Since the novel coronavirus, or COVID-19, pandemic emerged as a global health concern, many efforts have focused on containing and treating the disease. As states and municipalities lift their stay-at-home orders, they now must manage how to reopen their economies. This Missouri Economy Indicators series will highlight data and resources that businesses and policymakers can use to navigate this evolving situation.

Remote work before COVID-19

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' (BLS) American Time Use Survey—conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic—found that 25% of U.S. wage and salary workers worked at home at least occasionally, and 15% had dedicated telework days.

Work-from-home opportunities varied by industry and type of worker. For instance, almost half (46.5%) of workers with at least a four-year degree sometimes worked at home. In contrast, only 9.2% of workers with a high school degree and 3.2% of those with less than a high school diploma had telework opportunities.

Percent of U.S. Workforce that Sometimes Worked at Home (2017-18)



Percent of Wage & Salary Workers (Age 25+)
Source: BLS American Time Use Survey

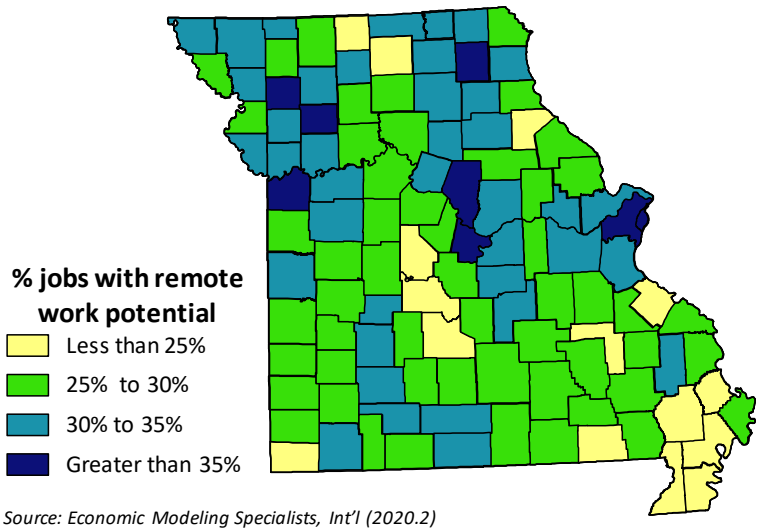
COVID-19 brought attention to remote work policies and opportunities.

The aforementioned BLS survey provides one baseline measure of work-from-home adoption and remote worker characteristics, but how COVID-19 will influence and change work practices going forward is uncertain. A recent Gallup poll showed a sharp increase in the number of employees working from home. In mid-March—around the time stay-at-home orders began—31% of employed adults worked from home due to COVID-19 concerns. This figure increased during subsequent weeks and leveled off at roughly 62% in mid-April. In short, the share of employed Americans working at home doubled when stay-at-home orders were enacted.

Given the recent need for social distancing, University of Chicago scholars Jonathan Dingel and Brent Neiman sought to determine how many jobs can be performed at home. Using O*Net data about work activities, Dingel and Neiman classified occupations according to whether they could be done remotely. They applied this classification to employment data and found that roughly 37% of all U.S. jobs could be performed at home. Note that this classification only considered whether a job could be done at home. It did not consider how effectively workers could perform their jobs remotely (e.g., secondary school teachers).

Dingel and Neiman also noted that remote work potential varied by region and industry. To better understand the implications of these findings for Missouri, a University of Missouri Extension analysis applied the classifications to Missouri occupational employment by county. Counties with relatively large shares of professional services often had the greatest proportion of jobs that could be done at home. Approximately 40% of jobs in Cole, Jackson and St. Louis counties and St. Louis City could be performed at home.

Share of jobs that can be done at home



Source: Economic Modeling Specialists, Int'l (2020.2)

Conversely, counties around the Lake of the Ozarks and in the Bootheel had relatively fewer jobs that could be done at home. Only 16% of Mercer County jobs could be done at home—the lowest share in the state. Moving forward, many workers will return to their offices and workplaces. The COVID-19 pandemic has likely accelerated adoption of remote work arrangements; however, this trend toward working from home will occur unevenly across the state.

More widespread remote working arrangements have several long-term implications.

- **Most people will not work from home**, but communities, employers and workers need to prepare for a shift toward more prevalent remote work.
- **Broadband requires further investment**, as slower internet speeds hinder remote work opportunities—particularly in more rural areas.
- **Workers need remote communications and management skills training.** The COVID-19 crisis has provided a crash course in using tools such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Both workers and managers will need to develop additional skills related to remote communication and technology in order to succeed with telework. Managers must also adjust as their employees increasingly work from home.

Additional Resources

- **Missouri Small Business Development Center COVID-19 Resource Page** has a small business guide to the CARES Act, video guides and other resources at *sbdc.missouri.edu/sbdc-covid-19-resources*
- **University of Missouri Extension** offers a *Master Remote Work Professional Certificate Course* to teach communities and workers how to more effectively take advantage of remote work opportunities.

This brief is the seventh in a series to explore economic indicators associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Future updates will be available at tinyurl.com/ExceedEconomyIndicators

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