The Shutdown

National and local economies came to a halt in April 2020 as businesses across the country were shut down in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus. Rhode Island experienced record-breaking employment in February 2020, but by March, the coronavirus had come to Rhode Island, thousands of workers were suddenly unemployed as the state experienced a recession level loss of 108,100 jobs in just two months.

Job Recovery

In May 2020, Rhode Island began the process of reopening the state’s economy. Reopening occurred in “Phases” with the state moving from one phase to the next based on pre-established criteria which monitored the spread of the virus. Between April 2020 and May 2022, the state has regained 97,100 jobs or 89.8 percent of the total lost. Not surprisingly, over 55 percent of the job gains occurred in the sectors that were most negatively impacted by the social distancing orders - Accommodations & Food Services (+29,100), Health Care & Social Assistance (+14,300) and Retail Trade (+10,000). The Accommodation & Food Services sector has recouped 89.8 percent of the 32,400 jobs it lost during the shutdown, accounting for 30.0 percent of the 97,100 total jobs recovered to date. Employment in this sector is still down 6.3 percent as 3,300 of the jobs lost have yet to be recovered.

Since the reopening began the Professional & Technical Services sector has added 5,800 jobs, reporting more jobs in May 2022 than it did prior to the pandemic. Overall, jobs in Rhode Island are down 11,000 compared to February 2020, a drop of 2.2 percent.

Across the Nation

Nationally, 95.8 percent of the jobs lost between March and April 2020 (pandemic shutdown) have been recovered. Through May 2022, fourteen states have fully recovered all jobs lost during the pandemic-related shutdown. Rhode Island’s 89.8 percent recovery rate is the 29th highest in the nation and the 3rd highest in New England. Regionally, Maine has recovered 94.8 percent of their lost jobs followed by, New Hampshire (92.9%), RI, Massachusetts (89.2), Connecticut (82.6%) and Vermont (75.7%).
Over half (58.0%) of the jobs lost during the March to April 2020 shutdown were in low wage industries, almost one-third (33.0%) were in mid-wage industries and 9 percent were in high wage industries. To date, 89.2 percent of the low wage industries jobs, 88.8 percent of the mid-wage industry jobs and almost all (97.9) of the high-wage industry jobs have recovered.