

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
COVID-19's Effect on the March 2020 New Residential Construction Indicator

Data Collection

Did the Census Bureau change its data collection procedures this month?

Yes. Data on new housing units authorized are typically collected from local building permit jurisdictions on paper, online, or via fax. Our National Processing Center (NPC) is responsible for mailing, faxing, data capture, and responding to email messages. Services offered by NPC have been limited to ensure employee safety. As a result, data collection is now occurring primarily via email requests and online reporting. Jurisdictions that have not responded are also contacted by telephone.

Data on new housing units started and completed are collected by the Census Bureau's field staff across the country. The Census Bureau has temporarily suspended in-person interviews for its ongoing surveys. Field staff contacted sampled building permit offices by telephone to obtain new residential permits for March, and followed up with builders or owners of newly sampled and previously sampled projects by telephone.

How has the collection of data on New Residential Construction been affected?

Many governments and businesses are operating in a limited capacity or have ceased operations. As a result, their ability to provide accurate, timely information to Census may be limited.

For the March 2020 New Residential Construction Report, processing and data quality were monitored throughout the month and quality metrics, including response rates, fell within normal ranges for these surveys.

Methodology

Were any estimates withheld or delayed because of data collection problems?

No. All March estimates were released as scheduled.

Did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce monthly New Residential Construction estimates for March 2020?

No. Standard weighting and estimation methods were used to produce all indicator estimates for March 2020.

Has the reliability of the monthly New Residential Construction estimates changed?

No. The reliability of the estimates as measured by the coefficient of variation for monthly totals and the standard error for month-to-month change has not changed substantially.

Seasonal Adjustment

Did the Census Bureau alter the procedures for developing seasonally adjusted estimates for monthly New Residential Construction data?

No. An alteration was not made to our procedures for developing our seasonally adjusted estimates. We will continue to monitor March and surrounding months to ensure that the published seasonally adjusted values fully include any immediate effects. If the effects are not typical and should not be permitted to influence the seasonal factors for March and surrounding months we may alter our procedures in the future.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau
Economic Indicators Division

Last Revised: April 15, 2020