Resource Reminders

COVID-19 Rapid Response Requests

As we enter the third official year of the pandemic, the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration (TX RPC) Project continues to develop accessible and accurate resources from health experts in the field. If you would like to request information on a public health topic, please complete the following form.

ACCESS FORM HERE

VIEW AVAILABLE HEALTH POLICY REPORTS

The Texas RPC Project resources are available on our website. We hope these resources are valuable to your respective offices.

- **TX RPC Health Policy Resources** (resources available to policymakers to provide facts and evidence on health-related topics)
- **Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living Webinars** (includes COVID-19 specific webinars)
- **TX RPC Newsletters Archive**
- **Texas Legislatice Bill Tracker**
- **Texas Child Health Status Reports and Toolkits**

General COVID-19 Resources

The TX RPC Project is committed to promoting optimal health for all Texans. For further information and updates on the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the Texas Department of State Health Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and World Health Organization provide masking and social distancing guidelines, as well as recommended best practices to limit transmission of the coronavirus.
NEWLY RELEASED REPORT: Impact of COVID-19 on Child Mental Health
Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project

During Fall 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a national emergency in child and adolescent mental health. As a result of altered experiences at home, school, and in the community during the COVID-19 pandemic, a vast number of children have faced social, emotional, and academic challenges, increasing their risk for depression, anxiety, suicide, sleep disorders, and substance use. This report was released on January 28, 2022.

Key Takeaways:
• Globally, between January 2020 and mid-February 2021, symptoms of depression and anxiety doubled among youth compared to pre-pandemic estimates.
• Mental health-related emergency department visits increased 24% among U.S. children aged 5-11 years and 31% among those aged 12-17 years between mid-March and October 2020 compared to the same time period in 2019.
• Emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts increased 51% among U.S. adolescent girls and 4% among adolescent boys in early 2021 compared to early 2019.

VIEW THE REPORT

UPDATED REPORT: Protecting our Children from COVID-19: How Texans Can Help
Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

TX RPC Project's health policy resource on Protecting our Children COVID-19: How Texans Can Help, was recently updated to include new evidence on the importance of vaccinations, mask adherence, and social distancing as proven methods to slow the transmission of COVID-19, especially with the presence of highly contagious variants. Current recommendations encourage everyone over the age of two to wear a mask, regardless of vaccination status. Masks protect children and adults who are unable to be vaccinated from others who may carry the disease. This report was updated on January 25, 2022.

Key Takeaways:
• Most children who are eligible for the vaccine are not vaccinated. Since May 2021, Only 26% of eligible Texas children between the ages of 12 and 17 are vaccinated.
• Evidence suggests vaccine immunity provides protection for a longer period of time than natural infection. To reach population level immunity, 80-94% of Texans need to be immune by vaccination or infection.
• Get vaccinated. For yourself, for your family, for those around you, and for those who cannot get vaccinated.
The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living is developing a series of reports, *Healthy Children, Healthy State*, to raise awareness of child health risk factors in order to develop new programs and actions, and to build on current initiatives in Texas. The Child Sugar-Sweetened Beverage one-pager was updated with new evidence showcasing the current state of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption for children in Texas and recommendations on how to improve what Texas children drink. This report was updated on January 26, 2022 and utilizes 2019-2020 SPAN data.

**Key Takeaways:**
- Every day, 80.6% of 11th graders drink a sugary beverage.
- Kids who drink one sugar-sweetened beverage per day can potentially gain up to 14.5 pounds of unnecessary weight in one year.
- Every day, 31.6% of 2nd graders drink 1 or more regular sodas, while 68.9% of 2nd graders have 1 or more sugar-sweetened beverages.

**Resources from TX RPC Members and Organizations**

**Free Online Fitness Classes with ‘Tu Salud, Si Cuenta!’**
**Belinda Reininger, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health - Brownsville Campus**

A Brownsville initiative, “Tu Salud, Si Cuenta!”, created to combat obesity and diabetes in the community, is offering free fitness classes to start the new year. A variety of classes are being offered, such as yoga, Zumba, bootcamp, Pilates, and total resistance exercises (TRX). The initiative is guided by UTHealth School of Public Health - Brownsville Campus and has a goal to create a “culture of health”, advocating for infrastructure changes including enhancing hike and bike trails, and access to information about healthy living. Fitness classes are being offered in Brownsville, Harlingen, Combs, La Feria, Port Isabel, Los Fresnos, San Benito, Rio Hondo, Weslaco, and Edinburg.
Key Takeaways:

- The initiative is guided by UTHealth School of Public Health - Brownsville Campus and has a goal to create a “culture of health”. The program advocates for infrastructure changes including enhancing hike and bike trails, and access to information about healthy living.
- The fitness classes can be taken from the comfort of your own home by visiting their Facebook page and livestreaming the class.

Free COVID-19 Tests Are On Their Way. Will They Work for Travel?
Katelyn Jetelina, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health - Dallas Campus

In January, the United States government launched a website to deliver free COVID-19 tests to households across the country. The tests will provide many with the ability to easily test for COVID-19 at home before returning to work or school. However, domestic and international airlines with testing requirements will not accept the home tests - the accepted tests must be those performed by or in front of a provider. Dr. Katelyn Jetelina, TX RPC network member, said the free tests provided by the government can be useful for breaking transmission chains locally but also before traveling to see loved ones, saying the tests are a “fantastic tool” to
Key Takeaways:
- People traveling to the United States can use at-home tests, but those tests must meet specific criteria: be a nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT) or antigen test, have emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, and be supervised by a telehealth provider who is able to confirm test results and the identity of the person taking the test.
- For people traveling, the acceptable testing kits to use are Abbott’s BinaxNOW, COVID-19 AG Card Home test, and Ellume COVID-19 Home Test. The Abbott BinaxNOW antigen self-test is not eligible for use for traveling purposes.

Obesity Increases the Risk of COVID-19 Complications in Children, Report Shows
Deanna Hoelscher, PhD, RD, LD, CNS - UTHealth School of Public Health - Austin Campus

A recent CDC report found that obesity was a key determinant in COVID-19 hospitalizations among children. Six hospitals were monitored during the summer of 2021, and approximately 66% of the children admitted for COVID-19 between the ages of 12 and 17, had obesity. Children and adults who carry excess weight tend to have higher cases of respiratory diseases and asthma, putting them at higher risk for contracting COVID-19. TX RPC Principal Investigator Dr. Deanna Hoelscher says that if we want to see changes in weight, the work starts at home. Parents can be good role models for their kids by preparing more meals at home. She says “you don’t have to be a gourmet chef. You can set a few standard recipes...and prepare healthy meals and have your kids participate as well.” Behaviors such as eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising can help beat the excess weight.

Key Takeaways:
- With food prices going up, parents tend to opt for higher calorie foods, which tend to be less costly, but also tend to be less nutritious for them and their children.
- Children who have obesity can suffer from poor cardiovascular health, a risk factor for severe COVID-19-related complications.
The Best Masks to Wear Against Omicron
Catherine Troisi, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health - Houston Campus

With the COVID-19 Omicron variant circulating through the United States, the CDC updated their mask guidelines to protect against COVID-19. The CDC now suggests wearing KN95 or N95 masks because cloth masks do not provide enough protection. TX RPC network member Dr. Catherine Troisi says the most important thing about masks is to wear them correctly, with the mask covering both your nose and mouth. She also says a good alternative to KN95 or N95 masks are to double-layer masks, with a surgical mask on first and the cloth mask on top to keep the surgical mask from gapping. She also says that if you work in a high risk environment for COVID-19 transmission, it is best to wear a new mask or set of masks every day. If you decide to wear a mask more than once, allow your mask to air out for a couple of days before wearing it again.

**Key Takeaways:**
- Have a rotation of masks so you do not have to wear the same one multiple days in a row!
- Surgical masks are okay to wear, but should be paired with a cloth mask to keep from gapping at the sides.

WATCH THE VIDEO

Has Houston Reached the Peak of Omicron?
Katelyn Jetelina, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health - Dallas Campus

The city of Houston has been testing wastewater for signs of COVID-19 surges since July 2020. While virus transmission was still high in the community in mid-January 2022, fewer wastewater samples are showing signs of the virus, an indicator that COVID-19 cases could decrease. TX RPC network member Dr. Katelyn Jetelina says that it is just as important to look at what is happening in the hospitals as it is at the cases, since hospital admissions lag three to four weeks behind cases. Dr. Jetelina also says we need to continue to be vigilant because more mutations are likely ahead, saying “I think the big question is on what the impact of the next variant is going to have on our hospital systems.” Dr. Jetelina, and others, hope that future mutations and COVID-19 waves will not make as large of an impact on the community if immunity is high.

**Key Takeaways:**
- Dr. Jetelina says many experts hypothesize that because the level of community has been increasing and Omicron has infected so many people, future variants may not have as large of an impact on our hospital systems.
- Wastewater has helped experts detect COVID-19 increases and decreases in...
Los Fresnos Woman Facing Long-Term Effects of COVID-19
Melissa Valerio-Shewmaker, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health - Brownsville Campus

A resident of Los Fresnos, who contracted COVID-19 almost two years ago, is still living with the long term impacts of the virus. She is still battling post-COVID symptoms, including the way she tastes food. She says she struggles with finding food she can eat, especially as she gathers with family and friends, because most food tastes rotten. TX RPC network member Dr. Valerio Shewmaker says, “it’s really a time where we do not know what is happening and for how long, because we don’t know”. She also says it is important to protect children from the virus as they start school after the holiday since we do not yet know and understand the impact of post-COVID conditions..

Key Takeaways:
- Dr. Valerio-Shewmaker says it’s important to protect our children, and to think about how COVID and long-COVID conditions affect adults and children moving forward.
- Health experts are saying it is becoming increasingly important to study post-COVID conditions as the pandemic continues.

UPCOMING EVENT: World Obesity Day Summit 2022
Live Smart Texas and The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Join Live Smart Texas or a summit in observance of World Obesity Day! The summit will feature keynote speaker Ted Kyle, RPh, MBA, of ConscienHealth, along with updates from regional and organizational representatives across Texas. To close out the summit, there will be presentations from Partnership for a Healthy Texas and from the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living. This event will take place on March 4, 2022.
WEBINAR RECORDING: How Good Food Works From Seed to Plate: A Discussion With the Authors
Nourish Program at the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living and UTHealth School of Public Health

*How Good Food Works from Seed to Plate* is a Winner in the 2021 Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in the Best of the Best cookbook category. It is filled with beautiful photography, delicious recipes and helpful tips on building your own garden as well as cooking hints. Plants do take center stage, but there are recipes such as eggplant fried rice with chicken and cashews and Swiss chard shrimp and grits that include poultry and seafood. The book offers examples of simple ways to make food taste delicious. Authors Laura S. Moore and Dr. Wesley McWhorter talk about the challenges of healthy eating and how flavor plays such a major role in changing the way people eat. **This webinar took place on February 15, 2022**

WATCH THE WEBINAR

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WEBINAR RECORDING: Learning to Live with Coronaviruses?
The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Drs. Fisher-Hoch and McCormick from the UTHealth School of Public Health in Brownsville discussed the new COVID-19 variants and their epidemiology in their latest webinar. They also discussed the variant’s implications for the future, vaccines, and other public health measures for 2022. **This webinar took place on January 26, 2022.**

WATCH THE WEBINAR

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WEBINAR RECORDING: It’s Time Texas Community Challenge: Using Competition to Activate Individual Behaviors and Build Momentum for Policy, Systems, & Environmental Change
It’s Time Texas and The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Representatives from It’s Time Texas discussed how they use their statewide 8-week health competition to motivate 40,000 Texans to activate individual behavior change and create a shared value for healthy living. It’s Time Texas also shared how they are using the data collected to work with community champions and leaders to leverage momentum for the planning of the health policy, systems and environmental changes in communities across Texas. **This presentation took place on January 12, 2022.**

WATCH THE WEBINAR
WEBINAR RECORDING: Structural Racism, Unhealthy Housing, and Asthma Disparities
Dell Medical School, The University of Texas at Austin and The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Dr. Elizabeth Matsui from Dell Medical School discussed housing-related environmental exposures and their links to structural racism and asthma disparities. She also discussed potential interventions targeting unhealthy housing. Dr. Matsui also serves as the Director of the newly established Center for Health and Environment: Education and Research at UT Austin and introduced this new Center. This webinar took place on January 18, 2022.

WATCH THE WEBINAR

WEBINAR RECORDING: Texas School Health Advisory Council Action for Healthy Kids

State and regional leaders discussed the importance of School Health Advisory Councils (SHACs), the challenges SHACs are facing and how to better support SHACs moving forward. This webinar was moderated by Dr. Deanna Hoelscher, Regional Dean of UTHealth School of Public Health - Austin Campus. School district SHACs represented include Austin, Richardson, Fort Bend, New Braunfels, and Eanes. Other organizations represented in the town hall include Texas Medical Association, Texas School Nurses Organization, Texas State SHAC, and Texans Care for Children. This webinar took place on January 18, 2022.

WATCH THE WEBINAR

REPORT: Lunch is in the Bag
The Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living, The University of Texas at Austin, and UTHealth School of Public Health
As children return to school, help them get the nutrients they need by packing lunches. The goal is to have one serving from all five food groups in each lunch: meats/beans, grains, vegetables, fruits, and milk/dairy. View the infographic for more information.

Recent Publications by TX RPC Researchers

COVID-19 Publications


Texas COVID-19:

Non-COVID-19


**Texas Population Publications**

**General:**


**Central Texas:**


**North Texas:**


**South Texas:**


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**About the TX RPC Project**

The Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration (Texas RPC) Project is a non-partisan network that aims to bridge research and policy by supporting partnerships between child health researchers and policymakers.

**Learn more online.**

The Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project team and overall network are available to support Texas policymakers with informational requests or resources related to health topics, during the interim and throughout the 2021 Legislative Session.

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**Contact Us**

For more information, email **TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.**

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