

# News & Updates

from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project



February 2021

## Resource Reminders

### COVID-19 Rapid Response Requests

Since the start of the pandemic, Texas legislators have expressed the need for access to accurate information in a timely manner from experts in the field. As a result, the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration (TX RPC) Project has created multiple reports and/or one-pagers using Texas data on public health topics of interest expressed by Texas legislators. If you would like to request additional information on a public health topic related to the upcoming legislative session, please complete the following form.

[ACCESS FORM HERE](#)

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 Legislative Bill Tracker](#)
- [Texas Child Health Status Reports and Toolkits](#)

## Highlights from TX RPC Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

### Comparing COVID-19 Vaccines: Pfizer/BioNTech vs. Moderna

Shreela Sharma, PhD, RD, LD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Houston

Katelyn Jetelina, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Dallas

This graphic describes and compares the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, and is available in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Mandarin. It can be downloaded and distributed to the public free of charge.

### Key Takeaways:

- Both vaccines are mRNA vaccines, meaning they provide "instructions" for our cells to make a piece of protein that is found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. Our body recognizes this protein as "foreign" and will

build an immune response that protects us from COVID-19.

- To gain maximum protection and ensure "memory" immunity, you must get the second dose.
- Vaccine side effects are a sign that the immune system is responding as it should and do not mean that the vaccine is unsafe.

[VIEW THE GRAPHIC IN ENGLISH](#)

[VIEW THE OVERVIEW AND OTHER LANGUAGES](#)

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## Advocates worry vaccines will be out of reach for Black and Hispanic neighborhoods devastated by COVID-19

Dennis Andrulis, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Andrulis was quoted in a Texas Tribune article about COVID-19 and the disproportionate impact on minority communities. Advocates for minority communities are worried that they will have more trouble accessing vaccinations because of where vaccination sites are located. Dr. Andrulis stated that health officials should actively search for places like churches or community centers, which have been used as coronavirus testing sites, as vaccine distribution sites in underserved communities.

### Key Takeaways:

- In Harris, Dallas and Travis counties, there are fewer vaccine distribution sites in majority Hispanic and Black areas.
- COVID-19 and the issues around access to care and the distribution of vaccines has been historically embedded in inequity.
- People in underserved communities do not often have vehicles and must rely on public transportation.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

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## Are two face masks better than one when it comes to slowing the spread of COVID-19?

Catherine Troisi, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Houston

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Troisi spoke to KHOU-TV Channel 11 about wearing two face masks. "If you have a mask that is already double-layered and has a pocket you can put a filter in, it is probably not necessary to double mask," Dr. Troisi said. "If, however, you have a thin mask, then double masking might be a good idea."

### Key Takeaways:

- No matter what kind of mask a person wears, it is always better than no

mask.

- There is no real downside to double masking

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

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## New Variants Mean We Need to Vaccinate Quickly

Katelyn Jetelina, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Dallas

The emergence of three more contagious variants of the virus that causes COVID-19 has created a race to get as many people vaccinated as soon as possible. TX RPC Network Member Dr. Jetelina was quoted by North Texas NPR station KERA about the need to speed up vaccination efforts in order to keep new COVID-19 variants at bay. “We can get a mutation today or in a couple of months, and it will be able to completely escape the vaccine,” she said. “And so all of these people would have to get a new vaccine and that is worst case scenario.”

### Key Takeaways:

- The longer the virus circulates without herd immunity the more likely a variant will come along.
- All three of the more contagious variants have been found in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Only one of them, the UK variant, has been confirmed in Texas.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

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## Your Local Epidemiologist

Katelyn Jetelina, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Dallas

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Jetelina was interviewed by NPR Petrie Dish host Bonnie Petrie about her website, Your Local Epidemiologist. Dr. Jetelina writes about various public health topics surrounding COVID-19 and the pandemic that are evidence based, data driven and in a timely manner. Her YLE posts have reached over 150,000 people and makes it easier for them to understand the firehose of the COVID-19 information by translating science into layman’s terms. During her interview, Petrie asks her several questions about the new variants and more.

### Key Takeaways:

- **Q:** We are closely watching the three variants that have been found in the U.S. The one we've known about the longest is B.11777 that was detected in U.K. There are also variants detected in Brazil and South Africa. Why are we paying attention to these three variants closely?
- **A:** These three variants have mutations on their spike protein. The spike protein is the key into our cells. If the virus figures out how to make a smarter key to get into our cells quicker, we need to know that information. The mRNA vaccines look like they work against the U.K. variant. For the South

African variant, the vaccines will still work but will not be as effective. However, we are very happy to hear during this past week that it will work against it.

- **Q:** According to the CDC, these new variants are more contagious. What does it mean for our lives and the precaution to take?
- **A:** For the U.K. variant, it is more transmissible. We always say that if you're in close contact with someone for more than 15 minutes, your likelihood of getting infected goes up exponentially. Well now, we have to divide that number by 2 so it's more about 7 to 8 minutes. It really underlies the importance of wearing a mask, washing your hands, social distancing, and getting the vaccine.

[LISTEN TO THE NPR INTERVIEW](#)

[VIEW YOUR LOCAL EPIDEMIOLOGIST WEBSITE](#)

## TX RPC Partner Events

### World Obesity Day Summit Live Smart Texas

#### **Thursday, March 4th, 2021**

Join Live Smart Texas as we observe World Obesity Day with a summit highlighting the impact of obesity and how we can work together to address its many root causes. Dr. Tom Farrey, Executive Director, Sports & Society Program at the Aspen Institute will be our keynote speaker. Dr. Farrey is dedicated to improving the world through sports. He founded the Sports & Society Program to convene leaders, facilitate dialogue and inspire solutions that can help sports serve the public interest. Two years later, Project Play, its signature initiative, was launched to help stakeholders build healthy communities.

After the Dr. Farrey's presentation we will have members from Live Smart Texas share how Texans are addressing the obesity epidemic in our state, and the Partnership for a Healthy Texas will present on the "State of Obesity in Texas" plus their priorities for the 87th Texas Legislative Session.

[REGISTER HERE](#)

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### February is Active Classrooms Month! Healthy Living Matters

Research shows how much of an impact brain breaks and active learning can have on the way students feel, interact with others, and retain information. Throughout the month of February, you can participate in Active Classrooms month by

showcasing the ways your classrooms integrate physical activity into learning. Active Classrooms will also host a variety of webinars for Active Classrooms Month that may be of interest to you and your school communities.

WATCH THE  
WEBINARS

## Walk to School Day! Healthy Living Matters

March 4, 2021 is World Obesity Day; the mission of this day is to increase awareness, encourage advocacy, improve policies and share experiences. Organizations and individuals throughout the world will be shining a light on the health issue of obesity on this day with different initiatives. In recognition of World Obesity Day, HLM is encouraging schools to host a "Walk to School Day!" Walk to School days are a great way to encourage families to get physical activity together, and also get kids minds ready to learn.

## Recent Publications by TX RPC Researchers

### Texas Population Publications

#### General:

Clendennen, S. L., Mantey, D. S., **Wilkinson, A. V.**, Perry, C. L., **Harrell, M. B.**, & Loukas, A. (2021). Digital marketing of smokeless tobacco: A longitudinal analysis of exposure and initiation among young adults. *Addictive Behaviors*, 106850.

Davis, J. N., **Pérez, A.**, Asigbee, F. M., Landry, M. J., Vandyousefi, S., Ghaddar, R., Hoover, A., Jeans, M., Nikah, K., Fischer, B., Pont, S. J., Richards, D., **Hoelscher, D.M.**, & **Van Den Berg, A. E.** (2021). School-based gardening, cooking and nutrition intervention increased vegetable intake but did not reduce BMI: Texas sprouts-a cluster randomized controlled trial. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 18(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-021-01087>

Francis, J. K., Kramer, J., Sanchez, V. K., Narain, R., Roman, H. K., **McLeigh, J. D.**, & Lee, S. C. (2021). 19. Confidential Contraception Protections for Adolescents in Foster Care in Texas. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 68(2), S11.

Pike, Jordyn; Marsden, David G.; **Wilkinson, Anna V.**; Lee, Miryoung; **McCormick, Joseph B.**; and Fisher-Hoch, Susan P. (2020) "Susceptibility, Trial, and Current Use Prevalence of Cigarettes, E-cigarettes, Cigars, Snus, and Snuff Products in Mexican-Americans Adults at Texas-Mexico Border." *Journal of Family Strengths* Vol. 20 : Iss. 1 , Article 8. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs/vol20/iss1/8>

Rogers, S. M., Loukas, A., **Harrell, M. B.**, Chen, B., **Springer, A.**, & Perry, C. L. (2021). Multidirectional pathways of tobacco and marijuana use, including comorbid use, among young adults (Aged 18–25 Years) in Texas: A six-wave cross-lagged model. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 68(1), 116-122.

Szeszulski J, Lanza K, Dooley EE, Johnson A, **Knell G**, Walker TJ, Craig DW, Robertson MC, Salvo S, **Kohl III HW**. Y-PATHS: A conceptual framework for classifying

the timing, how, and setting of youth physical activity. (In press: *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*)

### **Central TX:**

Lanza, K., Alcazar, M., **Hoelscher, D. M.**, & **Kohl, H. W.** (2021). Effects of trees, gardens, and nature trails on heat index and child health: design and methods of the Green Schoolyards Project. *BMC Public Health*, 21(1), 1-12. 98.

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-10128-2>

### **South TX:**

Mungia, R., Case, K., **Valerio, M. A.**, Mendoza, M., Taverna, M., de la Rosa, E. M., Nguyen, T., Saenz, G., Winkler, P., & Tsevat, J. (2021). Development of an E-Cigarettes Education and Cessation Program: A South Texas Oral Health Network Study. *Health Promotion Practice*, 22(1), 18-20.

Prochnow, T., Meyer, M. R. U., Patterson, M. S., Trost, S. G., Gómez, L., & **Sharkey, J.** (2021). Active Play Network Influences on Physical Activity Among Children Living in Texas Colonias. *Family & Community Health*.

### **Non-Texas Population Publications:**

Almandoz, J. P., Xie, L., Schellinger, J. N., Mathew, M. S., Bismar, N., Ofori, A., Kukreja, S., Schneider, B., Vidot, D., & **Messiah, S. E.** (2021). Substance use, mental health and weight-related behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic in people with obesity. *Clinical Obesity*, e12440. doi: 10.1111/cob.12440.

Haidar, A., Khoei, A., Alex, S. E., Blick, C., Lopez, E., Wendt, S., Ghanta, R., Almohamad, M., Cousins, S., Noyola, J., Tien, J., **Markham, C.**, & **Sharma, S. V.** (2021). Community-academic partnerships to promote health literacy and address social needs among low-income families during COVID-19. *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, 53(1), 75-78.

Holcomb, J. L., **Walton, G. H.**, Sokale, I. O., Ferguson, G. M., **Schick, V. R.**, & Highfield, L. (2021). Developing and Evaluating a Quality Improvement Intervention to Facilitate Patient Navigation in the Accountable Health Communities Model. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 8, 19.

McNeely, C., Sanchez, V. K., **Jetelina, K. K.**, Tiro, J., & Francis, J. K. (2021). 66. Level of Acculturation of Hispanic Mothers and Conversations With Their Daughters About Reproductive Health Topics. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 68(2), S36.

King, K. G., **Delclos, G. L.**, Brown, E. L., Emery, S. T., Yamal, J. M., & Emery, R. J. (2021). An Assessment of Outpatient Clinic Room Ventilation Systems and Possible Relationship to Disease Transmission. *American Journal of Infection Control*.

Mantey, D. S., Omega-Njemnobi, O., Ruiz, F. A., Vaughn, T. L., **Kelder, S. H.**, & **Springer, A. E.** (2021). Association between observing peers vaping on campus and E-cigarette use and susceptibility in middle and high school students. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 219, 108476.

**Page, R. L.**, **Montalvo-Liendo, N.**, Nava, A., & Chilton, J. (2021). 'Now My Eyes are Open': Latina women's experiences in long-term support groups for intimate partner violence survivors. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*.

**Pérez, A.**, Kuk, A. E., Bluestein, M. A., **Harrell, M. B.**, Perry, C. L., & Chen, B. (2021). Prospective estimation of the age of initiation of hookah use among youth: Findings from



the Population Assessment of Tobacco and Health (PATH) study waves 1-4 (2013-2017). *Addictive Behaviors*. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2021.106838

Shegog, R., Armistead, L., **Markham, C.**, Dube, S., Song, H. Y., Chaudhary, P., Spencer, A., **Peskin, M.**, Maria D.S., **Wilkerson, J.M.**, Addy, R., Emery, S.T., & McLaughlin, J. (2021). A Web-Based Game for Young Adolescents to Improve Parental Communication and Prevent Unintended Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections (The Secret of Seven Stones): Development and Feasibility Study. *JMIR Serious Games*, 9(1), e23088.

Sonawane, K., **Troisi, C. L.**, & Deshmukh, A. A. (2021). COVID-19 vaccination in the UK: Addressing vaccine hesitancy. *The Lancet Regional Health-Europe*, 1.

**Tami-Maury, I.**, Suchil, L., Reynales-Shigematsu, L. M., Garcia-Gomez, L., Chen, M., Shete, S., Betancur, A., Cinciripini, P.M., Hawk, E., & Garcia, H. (2021). Cross-sectional survey for assessing cancer care providers' characteristics and attitudes on smoking cessation in Colombia and Mexico. *BMJ Open*, 11(2), e041447.

Wagers, S. M., **Piquero, A. R.**, Narvey, C., Reid, J. A., & Loughran, T. A. (2021). Variation in exposure to violence in early adolescence distinguishes between intimate partner violence victimization and perpetration among young men involved in the justice system. *Journal of Family Violence*, 36(1), 99-108.

Wijayatunga, N. N., Bailey, D., Klobodu, S. S., Dawson, J. A., Knight, K., & **Dhurandhar, E. J.** (2021). A short, attribution theory-based video intervention does not reduce weight bias in a nationally representative sample of registered dietitians: A randomized trial. *International Journal of Obesity*, 1-8.

## 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.

## Contact Us

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