

News & Updates

from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project



March 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](#)

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](#) provides masking, social distancing guidelines, and recommended best practices to limit transmission of the pandemic virus.

Resources from TX RPC Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

Inaugural State of WIC Report: Healthier Pregnancies, Babies, and Young Children During COVID-19

Steven Abrams, MD, FAAP - The University of Texas at Austin Dell Medical

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Steven Abrams was quoted in the inaugural State of WIC (The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) Report. “WIC is a critically important program providing nutritional support in the first years of life as well as linkages with healthcare providers. Pediatricians and WIC work closely together to ensure the nutritional needs of children and their families are met, especially now as families face challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This collaboration could be strengthened through better data sharing of health-related information. Both primary care and WIC can be more effective at providing education and services if they are able to easily share information like the patient’s weight, length or other measurements, including the blood counts routinely measured during in-person WIC visits.”

Key Takeaway Policy Recommendations:

- WIC’s postpartum eligibility should be extended to two years to strengthen inter-pregnancy nutrition outcomes.
- WIC’s child eligibility should be extended until age six or the beginning of kindergarten to create a seamless transition to school meals.
- COVID-19 flexibilities should be made permanent to allow for remote certifications utilizing video conferencing technology or telephone appointments.

[READ THE ARTICLE
HERE](#)

Untreated Maternal Mental Health Conditions in Texas: Costs to Society and to Medicaid

Mathematica, Texas Care for Children, St. David's Foundation

Mathematica, in collaboration with Texans Care for Children and St. David's Foundation, released a report showing the high cost of Texas failing to address postpartum depression and other maternal mental health challenges. The report found that for one year of childbirths in Texas, failure to treat maternal mental health conditions creates an estimated \$2.2 billion in societal costs from conception through five years postpartum. The largest costs are productivity losses (\$610 million), child behavioral and developmental disorders (\$556 million), maternal health expenditures (\$445 million), and preterm births (\$372 million). The report explains maternal mental health conditions are one of the most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth, affecting families of all backgrounds. However, the report shows that Texas families of color — especially Black families — are disproportionately affected, with untreated maternal mental health conditions affecting an estimated 19% of Black moms in Texas, compared to 15% of Hispanic moms and 12% of White moms.

Untreated maternal mental health conditions are costly and have multigenerational consequences.



Maternal mental health conditions account for an estimated **\$2.2 billion** in societal costs for all births in 2019, from conception through five years post-delivery.

Key Takeaways:

- Texas mothers' lack of access to health insurance is a significant barrier to screening and treatment, especially since Texas is one of the few states that ends Medicaid insurance for mothers two months after pregnancy.
- Several lawmakers have filed bills this session at the Texas Legislature (**SB218** & **SB428**) to extend that health insurance from 2 months to 12 months.

[READ THE REPORT
HERE](#)

Highlights from TX RPC Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

Doctors Answer Houstonians' COVID Questions

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Sharma answered listener questions about the COVID-19 vaccine on Houston Public Media's Town Square. During the town square, listeners were provided more clarity and answers about COVID vaccine reactions and vaccine distribution in the Greater Houston area and in neighboring cities and counties. Guests in the episode include officials from Missouri City and Montgomery County and doctors from Baylor College of Medicine and UTHealth SPH.

- **Q:** Why are people concerned with getting the COVID vaccine?
- **A:** People are concerned with getting the vaccine due to wondering if the vaccine works or not and the side effects of the vaccine. For Pfizer and Moderna, both vaccines are effective in reducing the severity of getting COVID. We do not have adequate data on transmission, so hand washing and mask wearing is still important.
- **Q:** My daughter is a type 1 diabetic but only type 2 diabetics seem to qualify for the vaccine.
- **A:** If there is a question regarding eligibility, especially for pre-existing health conditions, you should to talk to your doctor first. The vaccine triggers an immune response, so the patient response might be different.

[LISTEN TO THE INTERVIEW](#)

Houston-area COVID vaccine and testing sites reopen following worst of Texas winter weather

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Troisi was interviewed by KHOU-TV Channel 11 about a delay in vaccinations due to the 2021 Winter Storm Uri. "Because of the weather, the people who are doing vaccines and testing couldn't continue, which puts us back a week or so," Dr. Troisi said. There may also be a rise in cases related to COVID-19 being on the back burner for many dealing with the impact of the winter storm.

Key Takeaways:

- Texas Winter Storm Uri did impact shipments of some vaccines.
- Health officials say second dose COVID-19 vaccines can be given up to six weeks after the first dose and still be effective.
- To sign up for free COVID-19 vaccinations through Harris County Public Health, please visit vacstrac.hctx.net/landing or call (832) 927-8787.

[READ THE ARTICLE
HERE](#)

Black Austinites have been hit hard by the pandemic, and the 'fight' continues for equitable vaccine distribution

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Andrulis was quoted in *Austonia* magazine about health equity and ensuring that vulnerable communities have access to the COVID-19 vaccine. Changes to the local vaccine rollouts should include pop-up distribution events at community centers, such as fire stations and schools. Dr. Andrulis stated that this strategy could help counterbalance the prevalence of providers in other parts of town and would help make inroads with the vulnerable communities most at risk due to the pandemic.

Key Takeaways:

- According to data from Austin Public Health, black residents who make up 7.6% of the city of Austin's population, account for 10% of COVID deaths in Travis County and 11.6% of COVID-related hospitalizations in the five-county Austin metropolitan area
- Vaccine providers have been largely concentrated on Austin's west side, even though the most affected ZIP codes are on or straddle the east side.
- Most providers and vaccine hubs rely on an online registration system which may be inaccessible to Austinites without personal computers or spare time to spend refreshing a webpage in the hopes of securing an appointment.

[READ THE ARTICLE
HERE](#)

READ THE RPC REPORT ON PRE-EXISTING CONDITIONS

Texas Winter Storm May Lead to COVID-19 Surge

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Jetelina spoke to Texas Public Radio about the likelihood Texas will see a COVID-19 surge due to people leaving their COVID-safe bubbles in search of electricity and running water during Winter Storm Uri. Many people left their homes to stay warm with friends or family, and people also gathered in warming centers and shelters. This is also concerning due to the presence of the B.1.1.7 variant, which has been identified in Texas. “Those could certainly be super spreader events, as well,” Dr. Jetelina said.

Key Takeaways:

- Grocery stores and people standing in long lines for water could influence transmission of B.1.1.7.
- The presence of the B.1.1.7 variant in Texas could pass between people more easily and could also contribute to a surge in cases.
- The surge of cases will likely be a combination and interaction between the storm and the surge of variants.

READ THE ARTICLE
HERE

TX RPC Partner Events

WEBINAR: World Obesity Day Summit, March 4, 2021

Live Smart Texas

Live Smart Texas observed World Obesity Day on March 4th 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 of the Sports & Society Program at the Aspen Institute was the 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 they had members from Live Smart Texas (including Action for Healthy Kids!) share how Texans are addressing the obesity epidemic in our state, followed by the Partnership for a Healthy Texas session on the “State of Obesity in Texas.”

VIEW THE RECORDING
HERE

WEBINAR: State of Obesity in Texas, March 4, 2021

Partnership for a Healthy Texas

The Partnership for a Healthy Texas, with support from Methodist Healthcare Ministries, produced a report that paints a picture of the obesity crisis in Texas - in which more than a third of adults and nineteen percent of children have obesity - to serve as background to the Partnership's Legislative Priorities for the 87th Session.

On World Obesity Day, Live Smart Texas acknowledged the issues around obesity and the health effects on Texans after almost a year working and learning virtually due to COVID-19. The impacts that restrictions such as lockdowns have had on the overall health and mental wellbeing of Texans, and specifically on healthy weight management, are alarming. They are particularly concerning because of the growing body of evidence that suggests obesity heightens the risk of a more severe response to COVID-19 infection.

[VIEW THE RECORDING HERE \(TIME STAMP 2:15:00\)](#)

WEBINAR: The Future of Quitting: Emerging mHealth Strategies for Smoking Cessation

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States. While most smokers want to quit, access and adherence to evidence-based cessation treatment is poor. Mobile technology has enormous potential to overcome many of the barriers that have hampered the use of empirically supported smoking cessation treatment. This webinar explored the evolving field of smoking cessation interventions using smartphones and other emerging technologies.

[VIEW THE RECORDING HERE](#)

Recent Publications by TX RPC Researchers

Burt, S. A., Clark, D. A., **Gershoff, E. T.**, Klump, K. L., & Hyde, L. W. (2021). Twin Differences in Harsh Parenting Predict Youth's Antisocial Behavior. *Psychological Science*, 0956797620968532.

Davis-Kean, P., Domina, T., Kuhfeld, M., Ellis, A., & **Gershoff, E. T.** (2021). It Matters How You Start: Early Numeracy Mastery Predicts High School Math Course-Taking and College Attendance. <https://psyarxiv.com/wdvth>

Hong, J. S., Hunter, S. C., Kim, J., **Piquero, A. R.**, & Narvey, C. (2021). Racial differences in the applicability of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model for adolescent bullying involvement. *Deviant Behavior*, 42(3), 404-424.

Kelder, S. H., Mantey, D. S., Van Dusen, D., Vaughn, T., Bianco, M., & **Springer, A. E.** (2021).

Dissemination of CATCH My Breath, a middle school E-Cigarette prevention program. *Addictive Behaviors*, 113, 106698.

Kellstedt, D. K., Washburn, D. J., Lee, S., Gwarzo, I., Ahenda, P., & **Maddock, J. E.** (2021). Household motor vehicle ownership and obesity among Indian females and males: 2005–2016. *International Health*, 13(2), 143-150.

Masiano, S., Machine, E., Mphande, M., **Markham, C.**, Tembo, T., Chitani, M., Mkandawire, A., Mazenga, A., Ahmed, S., & Kim, M. (2021). Video-Based Intervention for Improving Maternal Retention and Adherence to HIV Treatment: Patient Perspectives and Experiences. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(4), 1737.

Sattler, M. C., Ainsworth, B. E., Andersen, L. B., Foster, C., Hagströmer, M., Jaunig, J., Kelly, P., **Kohl III, H.W.**, Matthews, C. E., Oja, P., Prince, S. A., & van Poppel, M. N. (2021). Physical activity self-reports: past or future?. *British Journal of Sport Medicine*; doi: 10.1136/bjsports-2020-103595

Xie, L., Atem, F., Gelfand, A., **Delclos, G.**, & **Messiah, S. E.** (2021). Association between asthma and sugar-sweetened beverage consumption in the United States pediatric population. *Journal of Asthma*, 1-11.

Zewdie, H., Zhao, A. Y., Patel, H. H., Hansen, E., **Messiah, S. E.**, Armstrong, S. C., Skinner, A. C., Neshteruk, C. D., Hipp, J. A., & D'Agostino, E. M. (Feb 2021). The Association Between Neighborhood Quality, Youth Physical Fitness, and Modifiable Cardiovascular Disease Risk Factors. *Annals of epidemiology*, 57: 30-39. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2021.02.004>

Zucker, T. A., Cabell, S. Q., Petscher, Y., Mui, H., **Landry, S. H.**, & Tock, J. (2021). Teaching Together: Pilot study of a tiered language and literacy intervention with Head Start teachers and linguistically diverse families. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 54, 136-152.

COVID-19 Publications

Callaghan, T., Lueck, J. A., Trujillo, K. L., & **Ferdinand, A. O.** (2021). Rural and urban differences in COVID-19 prevention behaviors. *The Journal of Rural Health: Official Journal of the American Rural Health Association and the National Rural Health Care Association*, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jrh.12556>

Jetelina, K. K., **Knell, G.**, & Molsberry, R. J. (2021). Changes in intimate partner violence during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA. *Injury Prevention*, 27(1), 93-97.

Texas Population Publications

General:

Sumbe, A., Clendennen, S. L., Opara, S. C., Jackson, C. D., Chen, B., **Wilkinson, A. V.**, & **Harrell, M. B.** (2021). ENDS Device Type and Initiation of Combustible Tobacco Products Among Adolescents. *Nicotine and Tobacco Research*, 23(3), 479-486.

Rodríguez, L., Banks, T., Barrett, N., Espinoza, M., & Tierney, W. M. (2021). A Medical School's Community Engagement Approach to Improve Population Health. *Journal of Community Health*, 46: 420-427.

Walker, T. J., Craig, D. W., Robertson, M. C., **Szeszulski, J.**, & Fernandez, M. E. (2021). The relation between individual-level factors and the implementation of classroom-based physical activity approaches among elementary school teachers. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa133>

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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