

News & Updates

from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project



October 2021

Resource Reminders

COVID-19 Rapid Response Requests

Twenty-two months into the worldwide 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 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](#) provide masking and social distancing guidelines, as well as recommended best practices to limit transmission of the coronavirus.

[Texas Research-to-Policy Newly Released Reports](#)

Double Up Food Bucks: A SNAP Produce Incentive Program Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration

The Double Up Food Bucks (Double Up) program is a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Produce incentive that matches SNAP benefits spent on locally produced fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets and selected grocery stores up to \$20.00/visit. Double Up supports families by improving health and combating food insecurity, boosts business for local farmers, and strengthens rural and urban communities in the United States.

Key Takeaways:

- Food insecurity in Texas has nearly doubled from December 2018 to June 2021 and remains high as the pandemic continues.
- Expanding funding and partnership opportunities statewide for Double Up Food Bucks is essential, especially in regions with high food insecurity and low healthy food access, like the lower Rio Grande Valley and Brownsville.

[VIEW THE REPORT](#)

Highlights from TX RPC Network Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

COVID-19 Lockdowns Feeding Childhood Obesity

Sarah Messiah, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Houston

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Messiah spoke with KTRH radio in Houston about the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on childhood obesity. She discussed that the rate of body mass index nearly doubled during the pandemic, and children who were already overweight saw increased weight gain. Dr. Messiah also said parents should focus on their children's metabolic rate through adequate nutrition, sleep, and physical activity. She hopes more kids will go back to safely playing outside, and that if a child is to be in front of a screen, that the activity involves movement.

Key Takeaways:

- Children have naturally high metabolic rates, which could work to their advantage, especially when eating right and exercising.
- Early pandemic lockdown orders led to increased sedentary and screen time.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

11 Lessons From Schools That Kept COVID Cases Low

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

School districts in different parts of the country engaged in partnerships with local health departments to reopen schools safely. TX RPC Network Member Dr.

Jetelina was quoted in the article saying, “what the CDC basically said is that each school has to become a little health department in its own right” and that many schools are not able to do that on their own, so local public health departments can be valuable resources during the pandemic. Other lessons learned since the beginning of the pandemic are to communicate with parents about updates occurring at their child’s school, and to emphasize that masks continue to provide protection against COVID-19, especially when fitted and worn properly. Additional lessons learned can be found within the article.

Key Takeaways:

- Modeling of mask wearing by parents can help children understand the importance of wearing a mask during school to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Regular testing of students who attend school in-person can help curb outbreaks within schools. Voluntary testing likely includes families who follow other safety protocols.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Millions Approved For Pfizer Booster Shot
Catherine Troisi, PhD - UTHHealth School of Public Health in Houston

As of early October, the 14-day moving average for COVID-19 cases continues to decrease in Texas. Additionally, the number of daily cases admitted to hospitals also continues to drop. TX RPC Network Member Dr. Troisi said cases may be decreasing because “the virus is running out of people to infect”, especially among vaccinated individuals. However, she cautions everyone to not let their guard down just yet. While the CDC’s latest model shows that cases will drop significantly in the United States by March 2022, the model is based on two factors: 1) that a vaccine for children 5-11 years of age will be released by then and that parents will have their children vaccinated against the virus; and 2) that another variant does not arise before then. Dr. Troisi recommends to continue doing what we know works: vaccines, masking and social distancing.

Key Takeaways:

- Natural immunity and vaccinated individuals are helping minimize the spread of COVID-19, but cases among the unvaccinated remain high.
- Masking and social distancing are important factors to continue mitigating the spread of the virus.

[WATCH THE VIDEO](#)

As Nation Gets Hotter, Efforts to Prevent Worker Heat Deaths Accelerate, But Fixes Aren't As Simple As They Seem
William B. Perkison, MD, MPH - UTHHealth School of Public Health in Houston

Record-setting heat waves swept across the Pacific Northwest over the summer, with many day laborers struggling to work the entire day because of heat-related illnesses. However, many workers were unable to take time off of work because it meant less income, and the heat led to the potential potential for more working opportunities. In July, Oregon's Occupational Safety and Health Division implemented an emergency heat rule that outlined steps employers were required to take in extreme temperatures, which included having shaded rest areas for workers and monitoring workers for heat-related illnesses. TX RPC Network Member Dr. Perkison spoke about heat-stress prevention programs saying, "heat stress often presents very subtly, so people are unaware they're suffering potentially life-threatening symptoms." He also mentioned that people can have heat-related injuries, such as kidney failure and irreversible damage to their sweat glands, which makes it harder for workers to tolerate the heat. Dr. Perkison stated that the adoption of heat standards at all levels of government is critical for keep day laborers safe.

Key Takeaways:

- Dr. Perkison said buddy-systems help to keep workers safe because they can watch out for each other.
- Ensuring workers have water, rest, shade, and safety training is one tactic to keep day laborers safe.

[READ THE NEWS
ARTICLE](#)

Seven Strategies to Keep COVID-Safe at School

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

As children continue returning to in-person learning, it is imperative to keep them safe. There are multiple factors contributing to children's safety in schools, including wearing masks that fit well that they can wear comfortably all day. Masks are the best way to decrease the spread of COVID-19 symptoms; opening windows or for unvaccinated individuals like children. Additional lessons learned in schools include learning COVID-19 symptoms, opening windows or having class outside to keep air circulating to prevent infection; and getting tested for COVID-19 if schools have the option available to their students. TX RPC Network Member Dr. Jetelina was quoted in the article saying that people shouldn't be afraid to talk to their friends about "the elephant in the room" and that "everyone should be really open about talking about it". Learning about COVID-19 by asking questions can help children understand the importance of safety during the pandemic. Further, it is important to continue providing compassion to others who have lost loved ones during the pandemic. Compassion goes a long way.

Key Takeaways:

- Ask students how you may be able to help. Having a friend to talk to about changing family or home dynamics can be invaluable.
- Thank educators and community members who have supported students over the past year. The pandemic has been difficult on everyone, but community members and teachers have helped provide internet and work spaces for students during remote learning.

- COVID-19 symptoms are similar to the cold or flu, but sudden loss of smell and taste are not. Learn the difference between symptoms to know if you have COVID-19.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

How Helpful is Natural Immunity?

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

Canada continues to implement vaccine mandates in return-to-work and in specific establishments. However, many continue to wonder if natural immunity protects people as well as the vaccine. The short answer is, it depends, because there is much we don't know about an individual's immune response. Natural immunity varies between people and depends on the total amount of antibodies in a person's blood, which helps the body identify and fight against the virus. Research shows that vaccinated individuals have higher levels of antibodies compared to naturally infected people. Both types of immunization, vaccination and natural immunity, provide protection against infection for at least 6-8 months. Medical professionals still recommend people get vaccinated against COVID-19, regardless of whether they have previously been infected with COVID-19 or not.

Key Takeaways:

- While natural immunity provides protection against COVID-19 for a period of time, being vaccinated after previous infection increases antibody counts to help fight off subsequent infection.
- The COVID-19 vaccine allows your body to create antibodies naturally to help fight infection.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

TX RPC Partner Events

WEBINAR: The 87th Legislative Session, Interim Opportunities, and Updates on the Fight Against Obesity

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living and Partnership for a Healthy Texas

On **November 4, 2021 from 11am-12pm (CDT)**, participants will learn about the ongoing advocacy of the Partnership for a Healthy Texas (PFHT), whose mission is to combat obesity in the state via policy change. In this webinar, Joel Romo, Legislative Committee Chair of PFHT, will discuss the work of the Partnership, policy wins in the 87th legislative session, the work happening between legislative sessions, and what the landscape looks like for future efforts. Additionally, participants will hear an update from Dr. Deanna Hoelscher, Principal Investigator of the Texas Research-to-Policy Project, and the use of Texas SPAN data to

provide information to decision-makers. Learn more about the Partnership for a Healthy Texas and get involved at <https://partnershipforahealthytexas.org>.

**REGISTER FOR THE
EVENT**

RECORDING: Texas Coronavirus Antibody Response Survey: Fall 2021 Update

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

How bad is COVID-19 and the Delta Variant in Texas and how should schools respond?

As Texas schools adapt for learning in the 2021-2022 school year, experts at the UTHealth School of Public Health and TX RPC Network Member Drs. Bill Kohl, George Delclos, and Sarah Messiah provided updated information on the statewide COVID-19 antibody study called Texas CARES. Key topics of interest to school administrators and teachers were covered, such as:

1. How should I answer questions from my students about COVID-19, the delta variant, vaccines, and antibodies?
2. What common sense strategies can I use for protecting my school from getting COVID-19 and spreading it to my community?
3. When will it be safe enough in my community to resume normal activities?

The webinar took place on **Thursday, October 21, 2021 from 12-1pm CT.**

WATCH THE RECORDING

CONFERENCE: The Virtual Healthier Texas Summit

IT'S TIME TEXAS in collaboration with **The University of Texas System**

The 2021 Healthier Texas Summit is a three-day virtual event for health champions to learn alongside leaders at a national, state, and local level about emerging insights to transform health and health equity in Texas. A premier population health conference, the Healthier Texas Summit offers informative sessions and interactive workshops, with education credits available for numerous professions. The conference will be held on **October 27-29, 2021.**

REGISTER FOR THE CONFERENCE

RECORDING: 2021 Philip R. Nadar Legacy of Health Lectureship - Responsive Feeding and Childhood Obesity Prevention: An Equitable Nurturing Care Perspective

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Watch the Philip R. Nader Legacy of Health Lectureship hosted by the Michael &

Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living! The keynote speaker, Dr. Rafael Perez-Escamilla provided a presentation on “Responsive Feeding and Childhood Obesity Prevention: An Equitable Nurturing Care Perspective”. Dr. Perez-Escamilla is a professor of Public Health, the Director at the Office of Public Health Practice, Director of Global Health Concentration, and Director of Maternal Child Health Promotion Program at the Center for Methods on Implementation and Prevention Sciences (CMIPS) at Yale School of Public Health. The lectureship took place on **Thursday, October 7, 2021**.

[WATCH THE RECORDING](#)

RECORDING: Resuming In-Person Physical Activity Safely: Updated COVID-19 Guidance and Practical Recommendations

Live Smart Texas and the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

As COVID-19 rates fall and vaccinations are being administered, many people are returning to in-person physical activity. However, the guidance on how to safely participate in physical activities varies by sport and by setting and is often updated based on the latest research evidence. This webinar reviewed the latest safety guidelines. Speakers include Bertha Hidalgo, PhD, MPH, Associate Professor at University of Alabama at Birmingham, Vanessa Castro, Program Director for Stronger Austin at IT’S TIME TEXAS, and Heidie Swartz, Coordinator at Cowtown Marathon. This webinar took place on **Thursday, September 23, 2021**.

[WATCH THE RECORDING](#)

BRIEF: How Stressed Are Health Providers During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

The University of Texas at Austin Latino Research Institute

Researchers from the Latino Research Institute of The University of Texas at Austin conducted a study, *Psychosocial Impact of COVID-19 on Health Care Workers and Providers (HCWP) Survey, 2020*, to describe and evaluate levels of stress, anxiety, and depressive symptomatology and coping behaviors among HCWPs who serve underprivileged groups such as immigrants, refugees, people living in poverty, homeless, and other socially vulnerable populations amid the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S.

[VIEW THE POLICY BRIEF](#)

REPORT: Our Kids Want to Walk the Walk!

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

The Texas Childhood Obesity Prevention Policy Evaluation (T-COPPE) Project

was a collaborative effort that studied the impact of policies: the allocation of funds for the Safe Routes to School program in Texas and a rule revision to the federal food allocation package administered by the Texas Women, Infants and Children program. The T-COPPE project recently released a new infographic! Approximately 10% of children walk to school, compared to 50% of students who walked to school in 1969.



[VIEW THE INFOGRAPHIC](#)

Recent Publications by TX RPC Researchers

COVID-19 Publications

Ajayi, K. V., Harvey, I. S., Panjwani, S., Uwak, I., Garney, W., & Page, R. L. (2021). Narrative Analysis of Childbearing Experiences During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *MCN. The American Journal of Maternal Child Nursing*, 46(5), 284–292. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMC.0000000000000742>

Maddock, J. E., & Suess, C. (2021). A Cross-Sectional Survey of Risky Travel and Leisure Behaviors During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Inquiry : A Journal of Medical Care Organization, Provision and Financing*, 58, 469580211048673. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580211048673>

Merino, J., Joshi, A. D., Nguyen, L. H., Leeming, E. R., Mazidi, M., Drew, D. A., Gibson, R., Graham, M. S., Lo, C. H., Capdevila, J., Murray, B., Hu, C., Selvachandran, S., Hammers, A., Bhupathiraju, S. N., Sharma, S. V., Sudre, C., Astley, C. M., Chavarro, J. E., Kwon, S., Ma, W., Menni, C., Willett, W. C., Ourselin, S., Steves, C. J., Wolf, J., Franks, P. W., Spector, T. D., Berry, S., & Chan, A. T. (2021). Diet quality and risk and severity of COVID-19: a prospective cohort study. *Gut*, 70(11), 2096–2104. <https://doi.org/10.1136/gutjnl-2021-325353>

Non-COVID-19

Tami-Maury, I. M., Liao, Y., Rangel, M. L., Gatus, L. A., Shinn, E. H., Alexander, A., & Basen-Engquist, K. (2021). Active Living After Cancer: Adaptation and evaluation of a community-based physical activity program for minority and medically underserved breast cancer survivors. *Cancer*, 10.1002/cncr.33904. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.33904>

Lathan, E. C., Hong, J. H., Heads, A. M., Borgogna, N. C., & Schmitz, J. M. (2021). Prevalence and Correlates of Sex Selling and Sex Purchasing among Adults Seeking Treatment for Cocaine Use Disorder. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 1–13. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2021.1981391>

Lavagnino, L., Gurguis, C., & Lane, S. (2021). Risk factors for metabolic and cardiovascular disease

in inpatients with severe mental illness. *Psychiatry Research*, 304, 114148.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.114148>

Mantey, D. S., Case, K. R., Omega-Njemnobi, O., **Springer, A. E.**, & **Kelder, S. H.** (2021). Use frequency and symptoms of nicotine dependence among adolescent E-cigarette users: Comparison of JUUL and Non-JUUL users. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 228, 109078. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.109078>

Montalvo-Liendo, N., **Page, R.**, Chilton, J., & Nava, A. (2021). Nurse-led long-term support groups for Latina women survivors of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research*. Advance online publication.
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JACPR-02-2021-0577/full/html>

Natale, R., Atem, F. D., Lebron, C., Mathew, M. S., Weerakoon, S. M., Chang Martinez, C., Shelnutt, K. P., Spector, R., & **Messiah, S. E.** (2021). Cluster Randomized Trial of the Impact of an Obesity Prevention Intervention on Child Care Center Nutrition and Physical Activity Environment Over Two Years. *Public Health Nutrition*, 1–25. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980021004109>

Price, A. M., **Knell, G.**, Caze, T. J., Abt, J. P., Loveland, D., & Burkhart, S. O. (2021). Exploring Vestibular/Ocular and Cognitive Dysfunction as Prognostic Factors for Protracted Recovery in Sports-Related Concussion Patients Aged 8 to 12 Years. *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine : Official Journal of the Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine*, 10.1097/JSM.0000000000000975. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1097/JSM.0000000000000975>

Walker, T., Craig, D., **Szeszulski, J.**, & Fernandez, M. (2021). Examining the Validity and Reliability of Measures for Individual-Level Constructs related to Implementation of School-Based Physical Activity Approaches. *Journal of Healthy Eating and Active Living*, 1(3), 117-126.
<http://profpubs.com/index.php/jheal/article/view/18>

Webber, H. E., Kessler, D. A., Lathan, E. C., Wardle, M. C., Green, C. E., **Schmitz, J. M.**, **Lane, S. D.**, & Vujanovic, A. A. (2021). Posttraumatic stress symptom clusters differentially predict late positive potential to cocaine imagery cues in trauma-exposed adults with cocaine use disorder. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*, 227, 108929. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2021.108929>

Texas Population Publications

General:

Temple, J. R., Baumler, E., Wood, L., Thiel, M., **Peskin, M.**, & Torres, E. (2021). A Dating Violence Prevention Program for Middle School Youth: A Cluster Randomized Trial. *Pediatrics*, e2021052880. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-052880>

Wilkerson, J. M., Di Paola, A., Nieto, D., **Schick, V.**, Latini, D. M., Braun-Harvey, D., Zoschke, I. N., & McCurdy, S. (2021). Sexual Violence and Chemsex among Substance-Using Sexual and Gender Minorities in Texas. *Substance Use & Misuse*, 1–10. Advance online publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2021.1975743>

South Texas:

Bauer, C., Zhang, K., Lee, M., Jones, M., Rodriguez, A., de la Cerda, I., **Reininger, B.**, Fisher-Hoch, S. P., & **McCormick, J. B.** (2021). Real-time geospatial analysis identifies gaps in COVID-19 vaccination in a minority population. *Scientific Reports*, 11(1), 18117.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-97416-y>

Prochnow, T., Pickett, A. C., Gómez, L., **Sharkey, J.**, & Umstattd Meyer, M. R. (2021). Maternal Perceptions of Physical Activity Spaces for Children in Texas Border colonias. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 07399863211044887.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/07399863211044887>

Hispanic Heritage Month: Interview with Gabriela Gallegos

In celebration of Hispanic Heritage Month, the Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living's Diversity & Inclusion Committee recently sat down with Gabriela Gallegos, JD, MPP, Associate Professor of Management, Policy and Community Health at the UTHealth School of Public Health in El Paso, to learn more about how growing up and working in a predominantly Hispanic community has shaped her career path. A member of the Center's Texas RPC Project, Network Member Gallegos discusses her work in the fields of law, policy, research and education through the lens of a Hispanic woman.

[WATCH THE INTERVIEW](#)

TX RPC Project Presentations

Society of Public Health Educators (SOPHE) Advocacy Summit

October 13-14, 2021

- Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project (TX-RPC) COVID-19 Newsletter Open Rate and Click Rate Among Texas Legislators and Staff. Shelby Flores-Thorpe, MEd

American Public Health Association Virtual Annual Meeting and Expo

October 24-27, 2021

- The Use of a Legislative Tracker to Monitor the Progress of Proposed Public Health Bills During the Legislative Session in Texas. Margaret (Marnie) Moore, JD, LLM, MPH
- Development and dissemination of health policy resources for state legislators: findings from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project (TX-RPC). Amelia Roebuck, BS
- Evaluating public health researchers' communication activities and policy-related knowledge in Texas. Kathleen Manuel, MPH

Healthier Texas Summit

October 27-29, 2021

- Development and dissemination of health policy resources for state legislators: Findings from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project (TX-RPC). Amelia Roebuck, BS
- Tools for translating Research to Policy and Practice: The Texas Legislation Bill Tracker. Tiffni Menendez, MPH

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

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

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