



October 2020

## 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 TX RPC Project Team wants to remind you that all of our resources are available on our website. We hope these resources are valuable to your respective offices.

- [Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living Webinars \(includes COVID-19 specific webinars\)](#)
- [TX RPC Resources for Improving Measurable Impact \(resources available to policymakers to provide facts and evidence on health-related topics\)](#)
- [TX RPC Newsletters Archive](#)
- [Texas Legislative Bill Tracker](#)
- [Texas Child Health Status Reports and Toolkits](#)

## Resources from TX RPC Members and Organizations

### COVID-19: Impact of Pre-Existing Health Conditions in Adults

Deanna Hoelscher, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

Harold W. (Bill) Kohl, III, PhD, - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

Joseph B. McCormick, MD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Brownsville

Studies have found adults with underlying medical conditions—or pre-existing conditions such as hypertension, chronic kidney disease, obesity, diabetes, and asthma—who contract COVID-19 have a higher risk for more severe illness, including hospitalization, admission to intensive care units (ICU), and death. COVID-19 hospitalizations were up to 6 times higher and deaths 12 times higher among patients with reported pre-existing conditions compared to patients with no reported pre-existing conditions between January and May of 2020.

#### Key Takeaways:

- Based on strong evidence from multiple studies, the list of pre-existing conditions that put individuals at increased risk for severe illness include: serious heart conditions (heart failure, coronary artery disease), chronic kidney disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), obesity, sickle cell disease, solid organ transplantation, and type 2 diabetes.
- Among COVID-19 hospitalizations, the three most common underlying conditions are hypertension (57.7%), obesity (47.8%), and metabolic disease (42.9%).

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## COVID-19: Impact of Pre-Existing Health Conditions in Children

Deanna Hoelscher, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

Harold W. (Bill) Kohl, III, PhD, - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

Joseph B. McCormick, MD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Brownsville

Though data on pediatric cases ( $\leq 18$  years) of COVID-19 are limited, early studies indicate that severe complications from COVID-19 appear to be less common among children compared to adults. Children with underlying medical conditions—or pre-existing conditions such as obesity, diabetes, asthma, chronic lung disease, and immunosuppression—who contract COVID-19 have a higher risk for severity of illness, hospitalization, admission to pediatric intensive care units, and death.

### Key Takeaways:

- Among 121 childhood deaths related to COVID-19, 75% had an underlying health condition.
- In the U.S., among 246 pediatric COVID-19 hospitalizations with information on underlying medical conditions, 52.7% had at least one pre-existing condition, the most common being obesity (44.5%), asthma (14.0%), and neurologic conditions (13.2%).
- Children with underlying conditions that pre-dispose them to possible severe disease should not be exposed in face-to-face school participation.

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## COVID-19: Impact of Childhood Obesity on Health Outcomes

Deanna Hoelscher, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

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

Sarah Messiah, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Dallas

Belinda Reininger, DrPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Brownsville

Leah Whigham, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in El Paso

Emily Dhurandhar, PhD - Metabologix, LLC

Though COVID-19 infections remain low in younger populations, children with obesity are at greater risk for hospitalization and mechanical ventilation from COVID-19.

Recommendations include supporting telemedicine to coordinate care for youth with obesity, strengthening school- and community-based efforts to promote healthy eating and physical activity, and reinforcing COVID-19 prevention efforts in childcare centers and schools.

### Key Takeaways:

- Texas has the **5th highest rate** of adolescent obesity and **19th highest rate** of childhood obesity among states in the U.S.
- During stay-at-home orders, youth have reported more physical inactivity, sedentary behavior, and consumption of unhealthy foods and sugar-sweetened beverages - all of which increase risk for weight gain.
- Severe obesity is an even higher risk for COVID-19 complications among children compared to obesity, asthma, and neurologic conditions .

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## COVID-19: Impact of Adult Obesity on Health Outcomes

Deanna Hoelscher, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

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Emily Dhurandhar, PhD - Metabologix, LLC

Adults with obesity are at increased risk for severe illness, invasive mechanical ventilation, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19. Prevalences of obesity and deaths from COVID-19 are substantially greater in the United States compared to other countries.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Obesity is a stronger predictor of severe COVID-19-related illness than cardiovascular or pulmonary disease.
- Many adults have difficulty maintaining a healthy diet and exercising, which are important precursors to maintaining a healthy weight gain, during stay-at-home orders.
- Black and Hispanic populations are disproportionately affected by chronic diseases (including obesity), increasing their risk for worse outcomes from COVID-19.

[DOWNLOAD THE REPORT](#)

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

### Coronavirus in the United States

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

Dr. Troisi, TX RPC Network Member, was quoted on the New York Times front page. In this article, she discusses how unpredictable coronavirus will be for the upcoming season, "What will happen, nobody knows," said Dr. Troisi.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Resurgence of the virus as universities and schools reopen and as colder weather pushes people indoors might have an impact on the nation's daily count of new cases.
- Early detection of COVID-19 and efforts to keep the virus away from vulnerable populations will result in fewer people needing to be placed on ventilators and improved outcomes for those who fall seriously ill.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

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### COVID-19 During the Holidays

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

Dr. Troisi, TX RPC Network Member, was interviewed on KTRK-Channel 13 to discuss safety measures in preparation for spending the holidays with families and friends. Dr. Troisi offers general advice on traveling and advice on safely traveling by plane.

**Key Takeaways:**

- Driving is safer than flying.
- Watch for COVID-like symptoms 2 weeks prior to traveling and try to quarantine 48 hours in a hotel or alone.
- If planning to fly, choose a window seat at the back of the plane to limit contact.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

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Prior to Gov. Greg Abbott's announcement of reopening bars at 50% capacity, which became effective on October 14th, TX RPC Network Member, Dr. Troisi, spoke to the Texas Tribune about Texas bars reopening and what this means for the state's COVID-19 rates. "The concern is that we do know what conditions are more amenable for spread. Bars pretty much check off every one of them," said Dr. Troisi.

### Key Takeaways:

- Bars are designed for socializing and are places where it can be difficult to stay distanced and use face coverings.
- Bars are places where people tend to stay longer and meet others outside of their familiar social circles.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

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## COVID-19 Food Needs in Travis County 2-1-1 Call Analysis Summary Report - August 2020

Kathryn Janda, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin

In April 2020, the City of Austin Office of Sustainability reached out to the UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin and Dell Medical School for assistance in identifying communities where there are unmet food needs in Austin due to COVID-19. In response, TX RPC Network Members Drs. Janda and van den Berg have been developing reports on food insecurity from March-August.

### Key Takeaways:

- Two zip codes have been consistently recommended for strategic placement of emergency food assets due to their high food need call volume and lack of emergency food asset presence in the zip code.
- Overall and food need call volumes throughout August 2020 are still higher than they were in early March 2020, prior to the COVID-19 outbreak
- As of the end of September 2020, a local non-profit has added emergency food delivery to the 78747 zip code. The impact of the strategic placement of this asset could potentially be measured by analyzing October 2-1-1 call data.

[READ THE REPORT](#)

## August & September Publications by TX RPC Researchers

### September

**Messiah, S. E.**, Xie, L., Atem, F., Mathew, S. M., Qureshi, F., Schneider, B. E., & Muñoz, N. C. (2020). Disparity Between United States Adolescent Class II and III Obesity Trends and Bariatric Surgery Utilization, 2015-2018. *Annals of surgery*.

Nguyen, L. H., Drew, D. A., Graham, M. S., Joshi, A. D., Guo, C. G., Ma, W., .. **Sharma, S. V.**,... & Kwon, S. (2020). Risk of COVID-19 among front-line health-care workers and the general community: a prospective cohort study. *The Lancet Public Health*.

Shahani, L., **Glazier, S.**, Ostrosky, L., **Lane, S.**, & Soares, J. C. (2020). Universal SARS-CoV-2 testing versus symptom based screening and testing in inpatient psychiatric setting. *Psychiatry research*, 293, 113444. Advance online publication.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2020.113444>

Janda, K.M., Hood, R., Price, A., Night, S., Marty, W.E., Rohlich, A., Hanson, K., Espinoza, M.,

**van den Berg, A.** (Under Review). Examining Food Insecurity and Areas with Unmet Food Needs during COVID-19: A Geospatial, Community-Specific Approach. *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*.

## October

**Sharma, S. V.** (2020). Social Determinants of Health–Related Needs During COVID-19 Among Low-Income Households With Children. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 17.

**Sharma, S. V.**, Haidar, A., Noyola, J., Tien, J., Rushing, M., Naylor, B. M., ... & **Markham, C.** (2020). Using a rapid assessment methodology to identify and address immediate needs among low-income households with children during COVID-19. *PloS one*, 15(10), e0240009.

## 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](mailto:TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu).

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