

# News & Updates

from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project



December 2020

*Happy Holidays!*

From the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project

## 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 share our newly released resources:

- [Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity](#)
- [87th Texas Legislative Bill Tracker](#)
- [Vaping Advertisements and Teens](#)
- [Vaping with Flavors](#)
- [Child Obesity Toolkit](#)

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](#)

## Resources from TX RPC Members and Organizations

Texas CARES Project: Public health experts at DSHS and UTHealth are collaborating on nation's largest COVID-19 serological testing assessment

Steven Kelder, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin,  
Harold W. (Bill) Kohl, III, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Austin,  
Sarah Messiah, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Dallas,  
Melissa Valerio-Shewmaker, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Brownsville



To help public health professionals and scientists better understand the spread of COVID-19 in Texas and the immune response it causes in individuals, researchers at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston (UTHealth) are partnering with the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to launch the Texas Coronavirus Antibody Response Survey (Texas CARES). Texas CARES will determine the proportion of people throughout Texas who have COVID-19 antibodies, indicating a past infection and presumably some degree of immune protection. Survey team members involved in Texas CARES include TX RPC Network Members Drs. Steven Kelder, Bill Kohl, Sarah Messiah, and Melissa Valerio-Shewmaker.

### Key Takeaways:

- Texas CARES is providing up to 3 free COVID-19 antibody tests over a 6-month period to Texans (5-80 years of age).
- Texas CARES is offered by the UTHealth School of Public Health and the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Help them understand how COVID-19 antibodies work in our community by enrolling in their study!
- The survey team is looking to enroll a diverse population of participants to gather more insight on why some individuals infected with the virus are asymptomatic and if that affects their antibody response. Those who have tested positive, negative, or have never been tested for COVID-19 are eligible to enroll in this assessment.

## 87th Texas Legislature Bill Tracker

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Since the 2013 session, the Center has hosted a legislative bill tracker that identifies proposed bills related to child and adolescent health and to research taking place at the Center and the expertise of our faculty.

The 2021 legislative tracker is segmented into general categories: early childhood education, food policy, school/after-school care, tobacco/e-cigarettes, and more. Each legislative biennium, Center students and staff identify related bills as new bills are filed and the status of each bill as the session progresses. Each category of the legislative tracker is accompanied by relevant resources.

[VIEW THE TRACKER](#)

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## Webinar: Supporting Families in Crisis: A rapid assessment methodology to address needs in low-income houses during COVID-19

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

In the wake of the COVID-19 crisis, Brighter Bites was unable to deliver its standard program to families due to school closures. Instead, in partnership with the UTHealth School of Public Health, Brighter Bites deployed a rapid epidemiological assessment qualitative methodology to identify families in need and support their most acute social needs. The webinar was presented by TX RPC Network Member Dr. Shreela Sharma along with Senior Program Director Mike Pomeroy, and Program Manager of Nutrition Education Jacqueline Noyola from Brighter Bites.

### Key Takeaways:

- 132 families have been supported through this grocery assistance initiative since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- \$25 produce vouchers were sent bi-weekly to more than 15,000 Brighter Bites households for fruit and vegetable purchases at partner grocery chains over 2-3 months.

[WATCH THE RECORDING](#)

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

### Adults Reporting to their Workplace

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Troisi was interviewed on abc13. "We use six feet as

a guideline, but there is new research coming out that the virus can be spread through aerosols which can travel further in the air," infectious disease expert Dr. Catherine Troisi said. "Just try to keep as far away from other people as you can."

### Key Takeaways:

- Community transmission was drastically lower in areas where more workers were given the option to telework.
- As a reminder, according to the CDC, here are the groups who are at a higher risk for the virus and should be working from home if possible:
  - Older adults (65 years and older),
  - Pregnant women,
  - Anyone with an underlying pre-existing condition, and
  - If you live with someone who falls under one of the above categories

READ THE  
ARTICLE

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## Epidemiologist Answers COVID-19 Questions

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Troisi regularly appears on the Q&A portion of the Thursday Houston Matters show. On the November 16 show, Dr. Troisi fielded listeners' questions about COVID-19 (24.40 mark on the recording).

### Q&A Highlights:

- **Q:** I heard that the flu vaccine is not effective for older people. Is this true?
- **A:** It is not just the flu vaccine, every vaccine is less effective for older people. This is due to the immune system of older people not working as well when they were younger. However, there are high dose vaccines available for people 65 years and older.
- **Q:** Every time I take the high dose vaccines, I have localized reactions that I would need to report to the CDC per my doctor's instructions. If a person 65 years and older can take a normal dose flu vaccine and have a normal reaction but has a reaction with the high dose vaccine, is this person experiencing an allergic reaction?
- **A:** Just because you have the option to take a higher dose vaccine, it does not mean you have to take it. We always say get whatever flu vaccine you can get. The higher dose vaccines are more likely to cause side effects because they have a higher content of proteins. It's unlikely that you're actually allergic, and genetics can also play a role. Getting the normal dose flu vaccine is fine if you have a history of reactions from receiving higher dose vaccines. However, talk to your healthcare provider before choosing which vaccine to get.

LISTEN TO THE  
RECORDING

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## December is a dangerous month for people with heart conditions

Jay Maddock, PhD, FAAHB - Texas A&M School of Public Health

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Jay Maddock was interviewed by KAGS-LD about how people with heart conditions are not visiting their doctors due to the pandemic. December, specifically between Thanksgiving and the new year is when doctors see an increase in patients who have heart attacks or heart failure. “More people this year will die in the United States from heart disease than will die from COVID-19. Unfortunately, that has come at the cost of forgoing preventive care, and so it really is important that people visit their doctors and the safety protocols are in place. Your doctor’s office is probably one of the safest places you can go.”

### Key Takeaways:

- Unhealthy eating, salt intake, lack of physical activity, and alcohol consumption spike during the holiday season, increasing risk of heart problems.
- Those who skip their visits to the doctor related to heart condition check ups and treatment can increase long-term risk of mortality.
- Individuals who have heart conditions are already at increased risk for COVID-19

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

## TX RPC Partner Events

### Webinar: Finding Effective Technology-Based Tools for the Promotion of Healthy Lifestyles During COVID-19

Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living

Live Smart Texas

Many clinics, schools, and community health partners have to reinvent how to deliver programs and services to help people live healthier lives during COVID-19. This webinar gave an overview of what to look for when choosing an online program so that decision makers can navigate the large market of remote programs and apps available. Insight on what makes implementation successful, how to overcome challenges, and best practices for measuring engagement were also presented.

[VIEW THE RECORDING](#)

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## 87th Legislative Priorities

Partnership for a Healthy Texas

The Partnership for a Healthy Texas (PFHT) presented their 2021 Priorities for the 87th Legislative Session to 80 advocates, lawmakers, and legislative staff during a virtual Legislative Briefing. Health advocates and PFHT leaders Dr. David Lakey,

Dr. Rose Haggerty, Jamie Olsen, and TX RPC Network Members Dr. Leah Whigham and Michelle Smith discussed the state of obesity during the current pandemic as well as the policy recommendations that the Partnership will be advocating for this session. By ensuring that every child has the physical and health education they need to create habits that last a lifetime and that every adult has access to healthy, affordable food, they are striving towards a more healthy Texas - a goal made even more critical by the current crisis.

Their 2021 Legislative Priorities include policy recommendations around:

1. Ensuring all Texas children have access to a well-rounded education which includes recess, physical education, and instruction on health.
2. Eliminating food insecurity exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic; increase Texans' access to healthy foods and decrease their risk of obesity.
3. Maintaining and strengthening Texas' current public health and educational infrastructure to address obesity.

[VIEW THE WHITE PAGES](#)

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## New Ideas for the New Normal

### Texas Action for Healthy Kids 2020 Virtual Summit

Texas Action for Healthy Kids hosted a 2-day Summit on Nov. 16-17 focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic, school's responses to the pandemic, physical education and social emotional health, feeding Texas families and children, and research and policy for the upcoming legislative session. Each session was introduced with brief comments from our youth! The Summit recordings are available on YouTube.

[VIEW THE RECORDING: DAY 1](#)

[VIEW THE RECORDING: DAY 2](#)

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## Youth Video Challenge

### Healthy Living Matters

Healthy Living Matters works to enact policies at the community, county, and state levels that make healthy eating and physical activity the “easy” choice for Harris County children and families, thereby helping to reverse the obesity trend. They are raising awareness about what's needed to make your school or community a healthier place by asking children to use their creativity to create and submit a 1-minute video telling us what is important to you as it relates to EAT (healthy eating), PLAY (physical activity) or LEARN (health education). Eligible videos will be shared on social media and with elected officials during a meet & greet in early 2021.

[VIEW THE](#)

## Report on TX Early Childhood Intervention Funding and Enrollment Lagging for Toddlers with Disabilities

### Texans Care for Children

A new report from Texans Care for Children shows that the Texas Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) program is under-enrolling infants and toddlers with disabilities and developmental delays as state funding for the program continues to lag behind previous funding levels. A number of recommendations are included in the report, including restoring the amount of state funding previously provided to serve each child enrolled in ECI, addressing the disproportionate under-enrollment of Black children, and reducing the children's uninsured rate in Texas by allowing eligible children to remain enrolled in Children's Medicaid for 12 continuous months. The report by Texans Care for Children also shows that the COVID-19 pandemic has created new costs and challenges for community organizations that provide ECI services, even as ECI providers have successfully transitioned to telehealth during the pandemic.

[VIEW THE REPORT](#)

## Recent Publications by TX RPC Researchers

### November

Burford, K., Dooley, E., Lanza, K., & **Knell, G.** (2020). Associations of Urbanicity and Sociodemographic Characteristics with Protective Health Behaviors and Reasons for Leaving the Home During COVID-19. *Health Psychology Bulletin*, 4(1).

Cardel, M. I., Pavela, G., Janicke, D., Huo, T., Miller, D., Lee, A. M., Gurka, M. J., **Dhurandhar, E.**, Peters, J. C., & Caldwell, A. E. (2020). Experimentally Manipulated Low Social Status and Food Insecurity Alter Eating Behavior Among Adolescents: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *Obesity*, 28(11), 2010-2019

Dooley EE, Pettee Gabriel K, **Kohl III HW**, Durand CP, **Hoelscher DM**, **Byrd-Williams CE**. Adiposity, cardiovascular, and health-related quality of life indicators and the reallocation of waking movement behaviors in preschool children with overweight and obesity: An isotemporal data analysis. *PLOS one*. 2020;15(11):e0242088.

Driscoll, M., Dalton, D., Jenkins, P., Tinc, P., Murphy, D., **Douphrate, D.I.**, Lundqvist, P., Pate, M., Lindahl, C., Meyerhoff, A. and Scott, E., 2020. A Scoping Review of Safety and Health Interventions in the High-Risk Dairy Industry: Gaps in Evidence Point to Future Directions in Research. *Journal of Agromedicine*, pp.1-13.

Fischer, R. S., Unrine, J. M., Vangala, C., Sanderson, W. T., Mandayam, S., & **Murray, K. O.** (2020). Evidence of nickel and other trace elements and their relationship to clinical findings in acute Mesoamerican Nephropathy: A case-control analysis. *PLOS one*, 15(11), e0240988

Font, S. A., & **Gershoff, E. T.** (2020). Foster Care: How We Can, and Should, Do More for Maltreated Children. *Social Policy Report*, 33(3), 1-40.

Mantey DS, **Harrell MB**, Chen B, **Kelder SH**, Perry CL, Loukas A. A Longitudinal Examination of Behavioral Transitions among Young Adult Menthol and Non-Menthol Cigarette Smokers Using a Three-State Markov Model. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*. 2020.

Meyer, M. R. U., Ylitalo, K. R., Prochnow, T., Gómez, L. A., & Sharkey, J. R. (2020). Physical activity Space Methodology for Assessment and Prioritization (PASMMap): Combining systematic observations with community perceptions to identify community physical activity resource priorities. *Health & Place*, 66, 102443.

Morales-Marroquin, E., Xie, L., Meneghini, L., de la Cruz-Muñoz, N., Almandoz, J.P., Mathew, S.M., Schneider, B.E. and **Messiah, S.E.**, 2020. Type 2 Diabetes and HbA1c Predict All-Cause Post-Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery Hospital Readmission. *Obesity*.

### **December**

Haidar, A., **Sharma, S.V.**, Durand, C.P., **Barlow, S.E.**, **Salahuddin, M.**, Butte, N.F. and **Hoelscher, D.M.**, 2020. Cross-Sectional Relationship between Regular Bedtime and Weight Status and Obesity-Related Behaviors among Preschool and Elementary School Children: TX CORD Study. *Childhood Obesity*. In press.

## 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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