

News & Updates

from the Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration Project



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 office.

- [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](#)

Highlights from TX RPC Members Conducting COVID-19 Research

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

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 developed these reports for March-July.

Key Takeaways:

- There has been higher overall call volume and food need call volume to 2-1-1 from March-June 2020 compared to March-June 2019 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The majority of overall and food emergency calls to 2-1-1 during the pandemic have been from callers residing in the Eastern Crescent of Travis County, a historically underserved and racially/ethnically diverse area.
- The reports identified several zip codes that have unmet food needs and no emergency food asset/resource (i.e., food bank/pantry, soup kitchen, school meal pick-up site) located within the zip code. These recommendations in the report were provided to City of Austin officials and various collaborating non-profit organizations to help ameliorate these disparities.

[READ THE JULY REPORT](#)[READ THE JUNE REPORT](#)[READ THE MAY REPORT](#)[READ THE MARCH/APRIL REPORT](#)

Resources for Schools on Re-Opening

Michelle Smith - Action for Healthy Kids

The Planning for the Next Normal at School playbook by Kaiser Permanente, co-authored by Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Action for Healthy Kids, Healthy Schools Campaign, and SHAPE America, addresses the health needs of the school community for in-person and virtual learning environments. The playbook provides a framework to understand, assess, and implement strategies for COVID-19 prevention, social drivers of health, physical activity and physical education, staff and teacher well-being, and mental health and well-being.

Key Takeaways:

- The playbook is meant to offer tools for district and school leaders to use to support staff, teacher, and student health as schools reopen.
- The playbook is provided for informational purposes and should not be considered comprehensive or definitive instructions for safely reopening school or school district.
- As the situation continues to quickly evolve, school and parents are encouraged to stay up to date with the guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), your local health department, and any relevant national and local regulations.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Re-Opening: what's the Plan to Keep Kids Healthy?

Michelle Smith - Action for Healthy Kids

Alice Kirk - Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Hosted by Action for Healthy Kids, TX RPC Network Members Michelle Smith and Alice Kirk moderated a webinar on August 27, 2020 on school reopening and the importance of health being part of the equation. Presenters include Fort Bend ISD school district administrators: Dr. Charles Dupre, Superintendent, and Ms. Grayle James, Board Member.

Key Takeaways:

- Social-emotional learning (SEL), the process through which children understand and manage emotions, is being practiced among students and staff during this time.
- Physical activity and physical education classes/courses should not be avoided
- We need to advocate for all children to have access to the Internet.
- Review the Fort Bend ISD Pandemic Management Plan as an example for other school districts.

[WATCH THE 1-HR WEBINAR](#)

[FORT BEND ISD PANDEMIC MANAGEMENT PLAN](#)

The Adolescent Vaccination Project

Lara Savas, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Houston

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Savas serves as a CO-PI on The Adolescent Vaccination Project (AVP). The project aims to increase HPV vaccination rates in Texas pediatric clinics by promoting the adoption of evidence-based strategies. The AVP is currently being implemented in the Christus Pediatric Network in San Antonio. The AVP project is uniquely positioned to track the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on vaccination rates and to examine organizational and personal level facilitators and barriers to regaining vaccination rates within a pediatric clinic network.

Key Takeaways:

- An AVP implementation tool is in development to provide online decision support to clinics
- The tool is expected to be an important asset for clinics to re-engage patients in ongoing vaccination programs

[READ THE PROJECT DETAILS](#)

Social Determinants of Health and COVID-19

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

TX RPC Network Member Dr. Jetelina was interviewed by the Dallas Observer for an article

about how social determinants of health play a role in COVID-19 outcomes. Scientists and Dallas residents say that the virus is highlighting the city's racial fault and exposing a convergence of racial, economic and social inequities. "It's not just about the resources; it's the social and clinical infrastructure of our city. It's all connected." – Dr. Jetelina

Key Takeaways:

- Social determinants of health such as food insecurity, racism, and violence affect a community's health
- Compared to Northern Dallas communities, Southern Dallas communities are seeing the highest numbers of hospitalizations and death. The Southern Dallas communities are lower-income, racially and ethnically diverse, and in many cases, unable to practice social distancing.
- The virus is affecting Texas' Hispanic populations, especially on the Texas border, which is currently a hotspot for COVID deaths and cases, but is receiving little attention.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

COVID-19 Infection Rates and In-Person Learning

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

Diana Cervantes, DrPH - UNT Health Science Center

TX RPC Network Members Drs. Troisi and Cervantes were quoted in the Texas Tribune. In this article they talk about the absence of widespread testing and limited tools in Texas schools to prevent coronavirus spread. Each individual prevention measure is somewhat effective, but "altogether they can be very effective," Dr. Cervantes said.

Key Takeaways:

- Many of Texas' biggest districts – Houston ISD, Dallas ISD, Austin ISD and El Paso ISD will not require systematic or on-going testing for COVID-19
- State health and education officials will provide weekly updates on how many cases school districts report among their staff and students.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

Re-Opening Texas During the Ongoing Pandemic

Joseph McCormick, PhD - UTHealth School of Public Health in Brownsville

TX RPC Network Member Dr. McCormick was quoted in a Houston Press story about Governor Greg Abbot's plan to reopen Texas during the ongoing pandemic. "If we are reopening at a level that is far higher than we saw in April and May, that strikes me as pretty risky," said Dr. McCormick. "We have to remember that... we reopened not only too fast, but we were not prepared to practice the guidelines that were set for reopening."

Key Takeaways:

- We have to remember that our businesses are not fully open now because of the surge.

- Texas Medical Center data show a multi-week decrease in COVID-19 hospitalizations and a general downward trend in new cases since June and July. However, other TMC metrics show COVID-19 is not fully under control across greater Houston.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

[TEXAS MEDICAL CENTER UPDATES](#)

August & September Publications by TX RPC Researchers

August

Knell, G., Robertson, M. C., Dooley, E. E., Burford, K., & Mendez, K. S. (2020). Health Behavior Changes During COVID-19 Pandemic and Subsequent “Stay-at-Home” Orders. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(17), 6268.

September

Jetelina KK, Knell G, Molsberry RJ. Changes in intimate partner violence during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic in the USA. *Inj Prev Epub ahead of print: 29 September 2020*. doi:10.1136/injuryprev-2020-043831

Nguyen, L. H., Drew, D. A., Graham, M. S., Joshi, A. D., Guo, C. G., Ma, W., Mehta, R. S., Warner, E. T., Sikavi, D. R., Lo, C. H., Kwon, S., Song, M., Mucci, L. A., Stampfer, M. J., Willett, W. C., Eliassen, A. H., Hart, J. E., Chavarro, J. E., Rich-Edwards, J. W., ... Zhang, F. (2020). Risk of COVID-19 among front-line health-care workers and the general community: a prospective cohort study. *The Lancet Public Health*, 5(9). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667\(20\)30164-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30164-X)

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.

[Deanna M. Hoelscher, PhD, RDN, LN, CNS, FISBPA,](#)
Principal Investigator
[Alexandra van den Berg, PhD, MPH,](#) Co-Investigator



