

COVID-19 and its Impact on Latino Children's Health and Learning

All children and their families should have the opportunity and ability to be healthy and learn in a safe environment.

However, long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put Latino families at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Latino community threatens to undermine the health and educational progress of more than 13 million Latino students and five million English learners (ELs) enrolled in K-12 schools. This reality challenges the vision of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the nation's main education law for all public schools enacted in 2015, which elevated the critical role that health and wellness play in education. School-based health centers, nurses, and clinics help guarantee that students are healthy and better prepared to learn. Protecting students' health has never been more important than it is today.

LATINO CHILDREN STRUGGLED WITH FOOD INSECURITY AND HIGH UNINSURED RATES PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC

Even before the pandemic, Latino children were more likely to be uninsured and live in households experiencing hunger than their peers. Between 2016 and 2018, the number of uninsured Latino children increased by more than 122,000, bringing the total number of uninsured Latino children to almost 1.6 million.


- **In 2019, the Latino child uninsured rate rose from 8.2% to 9.2%**

 compared to 4.3% for non-Hispanic White children.

- 
NEARLY 17% of Latino children lived in a food-insecure household compared to 10.4% of non-Hispanic White children, prior to COVID-19.

COVID HAS EXACERBATED THESE DISPARITIES FOR LATINO CHILDREN

COVID-19 has only exacerbated these disparities for Latino children, making them even more vulnerable as they head back to school.

-  Preliminary data from the U.S. Census collected during the pandemic shows the overall **Latino uninsured rate increased** from approximately 18% in late April **to 23% in July 2020**.
- A recent survey using a comprehensive measure of hunger suggests that 42% of Latino households with children might be experiencing food insecurity due to COVID-19, the highest percentage reported for all racial and ethnic groups.

42% of Latino households with children **might be experiencing food insecurity due to COVID-19**.

While many states have sought and used flexibility granted by federal agencies to continue delivering meals to students, the pandemic has only reinforced the critical role that federal nutrition programs play in keeping kids well-fed and ready to learn.

COVID-19 HAS DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED CHILDREN OF COLOR

Despite the claim by some that children are “almost immune” to the virus, the evidence demonstrates that is not the case. A recent analysis of COVID-19 hospitalization found that even though the rate of COVID-19-associated hospitalization among children is low when compared to adults, one in three hospitalized children have been admitted to an intensive care unit, with Latino and Black children having the highest rates of hospitalization.¹

- Latino children are getting sick and dying at the highest rates. While Latinos only make up one-fourth of the child population (0-17), they account for 38% of all confirmed cases and deaths in children ages 5-17. Latino children also make up roughly 38% of all deaths between 5-17.²



Latino children accounted for 38% of all confirmed cases in children ages 5-17.



8X Hospitalization rates among Latino children were the highest—nearly eight times the rate in White children.

- 44% of children had one or more underlying medical condition, with higher prevalence among Latino (45.7%) and Black (29.8%) children—obesity being the most prevalent underlying medical condition.



45.7% of Latino children had **one or more underlying medical condition.**

THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF LATINO CHILDREN HAS SERIOUS IMPLICATIONS ON THEIR READINESS TO LEARN

These health disparities have serious implications for the millions of Latino children and ELs—and their families—as they contemplate returning to in-person classrooms. If children are sick, hungry, and anxious, they are less likely to be able to engage in the learning process—a process that itself has been upended by the pandemic. As the new school year has begun, students, educators, and parents continue to grapple with lack of support at the federal level while parents make an impossible choice—struggle with distance learning at home or risk the health and safety of their kids and families by going back to school.

- In a national poll released by UnidosUS and SOMOS in August, 60% of Latinos said they are concerned that their children or close family members will have trouble accessing free or reduced school meal programs.



60% concerned access to free or reduced school meal programs will be limited.

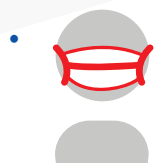
- And while remote learning presents big challenges for Latino families, 85% are concerned their child will be exposed to coronavirus with in-person schooling, and 79% believe that governors should reopen schools on a schedule that works for local districts in their state, using a gradual phased-in approach based on the advice of teachers, scientists, and health experts.



85% concerned **their child will be exposed to coronavirus** with in-person schooling, **and 79%** believe **governors should reopen schools** on a schedule that works for local districts in their state.



84% support **having classrooms extensively cleaned every day** and requiring teachers and students to wear masks to prevent the spread of the virus.



91% believe the next congressional response package should include **funding to make schools safer** by minimizing the risk of contracting COVID-19.⁶

Steps to Keep Children Healthy and Ready for School: There are a variety of explanations for the disparities in COVID-19's impact by race and ethnicity. Higher uninsured rates, higher rates of certain underlying health conditions, and overrepresentation in frontline occupations with decreased opportunities for social distancing or teleworking are some of the factors which have contributed to the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Latino households and children living in those households. Lack of insurance makes it especially difficult for children and families to seek preventative care.

Many schools rely on Medicaid for reimbursement of school-based health services to alleviate constraints on education budgets. Recent estimates are that Medicaid spending on school-based health services amounted to \$4.5 billion in 2016.³ The increase in demand as children return to school amid the ongoing health crisis—and as parents lose job-based coverage—only further emphasizes the need for increased federal funding for Medicaid, school-based health centers, and education grants that support safe and healthy students. To ensure Latino children have the resources they need to stay healthy and ready to learn as they return to school:

- Visit UnidosUS's COVID-19 resource hub to find our policy priorities, updated health information, and community resources.⁴
- Read and share our recent report, *The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response*, and its [digital advocacy toolkit](#).⁵
- Urge Congress to:
 - Guarantee every child has access to COVID-19 testing, treatment, and a vaccine regardless of ability to pay or immigration status.
 - Provide critical federal resources for schools and districts that are not contingent on physically reopening schools and endangering students and staff. This should include reauthorizing funding for school-based health centers and providing increased funding for ESSA programs such as the Student Support and Academic Enrichment program (Title IV, Part A) that can help provide school-based mental health services and implement programs that support a healthy lifestyle.

About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

Endnotes

- 1 Centers for Disease Control, Hospitalization Rates and Characteristics of Children Aged <18 Years Hospitalized with Laboratory-Confirmed COVID-19 — COVID-NET, 14 States, March 1–July 25, 2020, August 7, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932e3.htm> (accessed September 5, 2020).
- 2 Centers for Disease Control, CDC COVID Data Tracker, <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#demographics> (accessed September 24, 2020).
- 3 MACPAC, “Medicaid in Schools: Issue Brief,” <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Medicaid-in-Schools.pdf>.
- 4 UnidosUS, Responding to the Coronavirus Pandemic, (UnidosUS, Washington, DC: 2020), <https://www.unidosus.org/campaigns/coronavirus-covid-19/main> (accessed October 1, 2020).
- 5 UnidosUS, “The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response,” (UnidosUS, Washington, DC: 2020), <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2066>, (accessed October 1, 2020).
- 6 UnidosUS and Latino Decisions, “Health Issues and Priorities: Latino Voters in the 2020 Electorate,” (UnidosUS, Washington, DC: 2020), <http://publications.unidosus.org/handle/123456789/2089>, (accessed October 14, 2020).