

Health, well-being and food security of families deteriorating under COVID-19 stress

24 July 2020

The ongoing disruptive changes from efforts to reduce the spread of COVID-19 are having a substantial negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of parents and their children across the country, according to a new national survey published today in *Pediatrics*.

Families are particularly affected by stressors stemming from changes in work, school and day care schedules that are impacting finances and access to community support networks, according to the five-day survey of parents across the U.S. run June 5-June 10 run by Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt and Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago.

Top line results showed:

- 27% of parents reported worsening [mental health](#) for themselves
- 14% reported worsening [behavioral health](#) for their children
- 24% of parents reported a loss of regular child care

The impact of abrupt, systemic changes to employment and strain from having access to a limited social network is disrupting the core of families across the country. Worsening physical and mental health were similar no matter the person's race, ethnicity, income, education status or location. However, larger declines in mental well-being were reported by women and unmarried parents.

"COVID-19 and measures to control its spread have had a substantial effect on the nation's children," said Stephen Patrick, MD, MPH, director of the Vanderbilt Center for Child Health Policy and a neonatologist at Children's Hospital in Nashville. "Today an increasing number of the nation's

children are going hungry, losing insurance employer-sponsored insurance and their regular child care. The situation is urgent and requires immediate attention from federal and state policymakers."

Parents with children under age 18 were surveyed to measure changes in their health, insurance status, [food security](#), use of public food assistance resources, child care and use of health care services since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Since March, more families are reporting food insecurity, and more reliance on food banks, and delaying children's visits to health care providers. With COVID-19 cases and deaths on the rise around the country, families may continue to experience higher levels of need and disruption.

- The proportion of families with moderate or severe food insecurity increased from 6% to 8% from March to June.
- Children covered by parents' employer-sponsored insurance coverage decreased from 63% to 60%.

Strikingly, families with young children report worse mental health than those with older children, pointing to the central role that child care arrangements play in the day-to-day functioning of the [family](#).

"The loss of regular child care related to COVID-19 has been a major shock to many families," says Matthew M. Davis, MD, MAPP, interim chair of the Department of Pediatrics at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine and senior vice-president and chief of Community Health Transformation at Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago. "In almost half of all cases where parents said that their own mental health

had worsened and that their children's behavior had worsened during the pandemic, they had lost their usual child care arrangements. We need to be aware of these types of stressors for families, which extend far beyond COVID-19 as an infection or an illness."

Provided by Vanderbilt University Medical Center

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