

# Food security and food access for People of Color and Hispanic/Latinx households in Maryland during the first four months of the COVID-19 pandemic

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## Introduction

This brief describes the experiences and perspectives of food insecurity for BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color) and Hispanic including Latinx households in Maryland during the first four months of the pandemic. Many disparities were magnified during the pandemic, and this brief covers the racial disparities in food access and food insecurity. Food insecurity was measured in 903 households using the US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 6-item tool, in which respondents who say "yes" to two or more of the six questions are categorized as experiencing food insecurity. In this brief, households are grouped into three categories:

- **Households with food security** at the time of the survey, regardless of prior food insecurity status;
- **Households with persistent food insecurity**, both in the year before and since the pandemic began;
- **Households with new food insecurity**, classified as food secure in the year before the pandemic, but having food insecurity after the pandemic's start.

See "Approach" section for further background details.

## Food security and access decrease during the first four months of the pandemic

The pandemic has exacerbated longstanding racial disparities in food security and food access in the US, demonstrated by greater increases in food insecurity for BIPOC household compared to white households early in the pandemic (Figure 1).

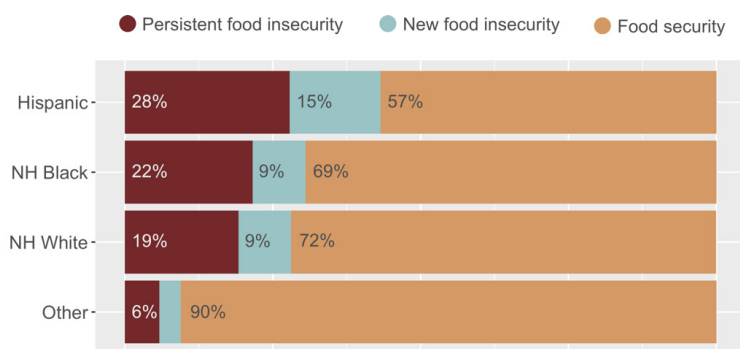
- Of all Maryland respondents that experienced food insecurity during the first four months of the pandemic, 41% were BIPOC households.
- Over a quarter (29%) of BIPOC households said they experienced food insecurity during the first four months of the pandemic, a 6% increase from before the pandemic began.
- Nearly half of Hispanic respondents experienced both new and persistent food insecurity. Hispanic communities make up approximately 10% of Maryland's population<sup>1</sup>.
- Eastern Shore\* residents reported the highest percentage of households with food insecurity (58%) among BIPOC residents compared to other regions.
- BIPOC Marylanders made up 52% of all respondents who were either furloughed or lost their jobs. Of these, over half (57%) experienced new or persistent food insecurity.
- 52% of BIPOC respondents said they rely on public transit to obtain food. However, public transit has become limited during the pandemic and many people may have decreased use due to a perceived increased risk of coronavirus infection.

## Key Findings

1. Food access in Hispanic communities was disproportionately impacted during the pandemic, experiencing food insecurity 1.5 times the rate of NH White Marylanders.
2. More than half of BIPOC respondents reported job disruption. Among them, 57% also experienced new or persistent food insecurity.
3. Over 1 in 4 BIPOC respondents would like more public transit to buy food and additional information for food assistance.

\*Eastern Shore includes Cecil, Kent, Queen Anne's, Talbot, Caroline, Dorchester, Wicomico, Worcester, and Somerset Counties. Source: Maryland Department of Health

**Figure 1.** Proportion of households experiencing new and persistent food insecurity in the first four months of the pandemic by race and ethnicity

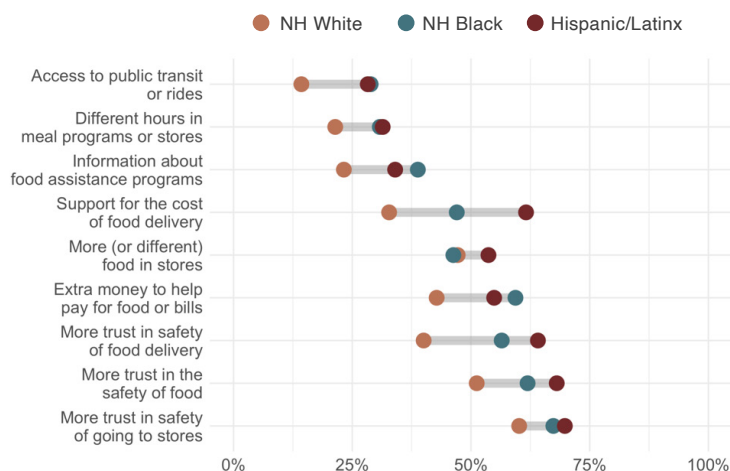


## Helpful Strategies to Improve Food Insecurity

We asked respondents experiencing food insecurity about their level of interest in several supports that could help them meet their food needs during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2).

- Over a quarter of Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic respondents said they would like more access to public transit, more/different hours for food assistance programs or stores, and more information about food assistance programs.
- Compared to Non-Hispanic White respondents, Hispanic and Non-Hispanic Black respondents reported much higher interest in support for cost of food delivery and more trust in food delivery. Most respondents, regardless of race, sought more trust in safety of going to stores.

**Figure 2.** Proportion of households interested in supports to help meet their food needs during the first four months of the COVID-19 pandemic



## Approach

We surveyed 1,045 adults living in Maryland in July/August 2020 using the Qualtrics online panel. 142 households were excluded due to incorrect zip codes or missing information on food insecurity. Survey participants reflect the Maryland adult population by race. We oversampled those with lower incomes to support further insights, then adjusted so that analyses reflect the national income, race and ethnicity distribution in 2019. Limitations of surveys like this one may include underrepresentation of groups including those: with low literacy or unable to take survey in English/Spanish, without cell phone or Internet, those facing high pandemic demands, and those with low trust of surveys. Additionally, responses may be influenced by factors such as aspiration, social desirability, misunderstanding, or rushing to complete.

## Funding Statement

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## About NFACT

This research is conducted as part of The National Food Access and COVID research Team (NFACT), which is implementing common measurements and tools across study sites in the US. NFACT is a national collaboration of researchers committed to rigorous, comparative, and timely food access research during the time of COVID. We do this through collaborative, open access research that prioritizes communication to key decision-makers while building our scientific understanding of food system behaviors and policies. A series of summary briefs of this survey are available at [www.nfactresearch.org](http://www.nfactresearch.org) to learn more.

## Reference

- Maryland, 2019 Census QuickFacts: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/MD,US/PST045219>