

# Take Charge Of Your Health Today. Be Informed. Be Involved.

## Parents, children and COVID-19

This month in Take Charge of Your Health, we are discussing parents, children and COVID-19. During the COVID-19 pandemic, parents and children have been tested. For parents, the stress can be overwhelming—from trying to navigate education for their children to the financial strain on their family. The constant worry about everyone's mental, emotional and physical health can, at times, be too much. Even though many families have experienced

these same feelings, each family has a different story to tell. We know families in Pittsburgh are feeling these stresses, and we must find a way to talk about it.

Topics like mental health, food access and technology overload are on everyone's radar. Many of these issues existed before the pandemic and were only made worse during this unforeseen time. COVID-19 has exposed how we depend on each other as members of



ESTHER BUSH

society, and the foundation of society starts with the family. COVID-19 is an equal-opportunity disease, and, unfortunately, it has a larger impact on those who have limited access to resources. COVID-19 doesn't care what your job title is or how much money is in your bank account. All families, Black or white, are affected, and we

must check in on families.

Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, PhD, professor of psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, has developed a study called Triple C (the "C" stands for "children, COVID-19 and consequences"). This study measures economic precarity. Economic precarity refers to families' income, wealth, economic hardship, food insecurity, parental unemployment and access to health insurance and financial stability. Dr. Votruba-Drzal is gathering data on how families are managing through the pandemic. The data that are being collected may help others who are going through similar challenges. Dr. Votruba-Drzal alarmingly points out

that many of the people who are being affected by COVID-19 might not easily rebound, especially my brothers and sisters of color. My hope is that the importance of this topic will be elevated upon seeing the results of this study. But perhaps even more important are individual community members' involvement in these discussions. I urge everyone to engage in these types of discussions with your own health care providers or seek out researchers like Dr. Votruba-Drzal or other health care and mental health professionals to share your stories so that together we can fight to be in a better place, a better Pittsburgh.

Inequity has played a

huge role in the hardships that are continuing to unfold, not only in the City of Pittsburgh but throughout the world. With the support and research that is available within Allegheny County, many families can and will overcome these challenging times. The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh will continue to be a shoulder for you to lean on, an ear to listen to your worries and your fears and a compassionate heart in continuing to be your advocate and supporter. We will continue to weather this COVID-19 storm together.

Esther L. Bush, President and CEO  
Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh

Children  
COVID-19 &  
Consequences

A research collaboration for understanding child and family well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic



## How socioeconomically, racially and ethnically diverse families are faring during COVID-19

As it stretches into its second year, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost everyone in some way. At its best, the pandemic has allowed loved ones to spend more time together and find communities of support; at its worst, the pandemic has caused job loss, social isolation and deaths. University of Pittsburgh researchers are interested in describing how families are faring no matter where Pittsburghers fall on the spectrum of pandemic experiences.

The Triple C study—which stands for “children, COVID-19 and its consequences”—will offer a descriptive portrayal of the economic precarity families face and of the well-being of their children during the pandemic. The term “economic precarity” is a “multidimensional concept that includes income, wealth, economic hardship, food insecurity, parental unemployment, access to health insurance and financial stability,” according to the study's author, Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal, PhD, professor of psychology and senior scientist at the Learning Research and Development Center at the University of Pittsburgh's Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences. At four sites in the United States, including Pittsburgh, Dr. Votruba-Drzal and fellow researchers are compiling descriptive data about how families who are socioeconomically, racially and ethnically diverse



DR. ELIZABETH VOTRUBA-DRZAL

are faring.

“The study has a few aims,” says Dr. Votruba-Drzal. “The first is to describe the magnitude and scope of economic precarity that families and children are experiencing during the pandemic. The second is to look at the implications of that economic precarity for family functioning and child health and well-being. We're collecting measures of parents' physical and mental health, parenting stress and parent-partner relationship interactions. We're asking parents to report on a range of children's outcomes, like their psychosocial development and schooling experienc-

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— Dr. Elizabeth Votruba-Drzal.

es during the pandemic.”

Dr. Votruba-Drzal notes that there is strong evidence to suggest that the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and families are being borne disproportionately by children and families from backgrounds that are racially minoritized. Therefore, a third aim of the Triple C study is to examine whether the pandemic has exacerbated racial and ethnic disparities and economic circumstances.

“Childhood is important in shaping adult health and well-being, and COVID-19 will likely have long-lasting ramifications for children facing increased familial economic uncertainty and deprivation,” says Dr. Votruba-Drzal. “These ramifications are likely particularly pronounced for Black and Latino children and children in households of lower socioeconomic status, as the virus's health and economic effects

have been more severe for people of color.”

In the long-term, Dr. Votruba-Drzal and her colleagues hope to secure funding to follow up with parents who participated in the study at future intervals to see how they are doing. She thinks that families who were experiencing hardship or inequality before the pandemic may prove to have a harder time recovering from its negative effects. More immediately, she hopes the study data inform local and state governments' policies and offer insights into how best to support children and families during these difficult times.

Across the country, people have seen examples of widespread economic hardship, including food and housing insecurity. However, in many communities, people have also shown tremendous generosity and understood that the well-being of everyone in communities means better lives for everyone.

“It's a challenging time for families,” says Dr. Votruba-Drzal. “People who care about the well-being of their communities need to be aware of the effect of the pandemic on the broader structure of inequality in this country. The pandemic's effects on children and families may endure well beyond the end of COVID-19.”

## Community Vaccine Collaborative welcomes community participation

The Community Vaccine Collaborative (CVC) is an innovative community-academic partnership centered on mitigating the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black and Latinx communities, from increasing participation in vaccine trials to promoting vaccine uptake, and, more distally, improving trustworthiness of research and health care among minoritized communities. The CVC was co-developed with four community organizations in Allegheny County (Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, the Neighborhood Resilience Project, UrbanKind Institute and Casa San Jose) as well as researchers from Pitt to address disparities in vaccine acceptance and uptake among marginalized and minoritized communities.

Core to the CVC is connection to Community Health Deputies (CHDs), trained community health workers recruited by the Neighborhood Resilience Project to provide accurate information about COVID-19. Sustained involvement of minoritized communities is needed to ensure that research and health care delivery systems address equity and increase trustworthiness. Our longer-term vision is to use the approach developed in this integrated program to sustain local community networks and facilitate vaccine uptake



SOME AMPOULES WITH NCOV-2019 VACCINE IN A BOX. TO FIGHT THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC.

among individuals in southwestern Pennsylvania, increase their active participation in clinical trials, and support equitable vaccine delivery in community and clinic-based settings by nurturing trustworthiness of the

vaccines themselves, health care and research.

The Community Vaccine Collaborative members are welcoming invitations to attend community meetings such as Public Safety meetings (by in-

dividual zones), neighborhood alliances, community town halls, and congregations, among others.

Each of these community meetings is attended by at least one scientist able to speak about COVID-19 and the vaccines, one health professional who identifies as BIPOC, and one community health deputy or CVC member.

This ‘Speakers’ Bureau’ allows for personal connections with experts, an opportunity to discuss questions in a safe, nonjudgmental setting, and encourage each participant to share information learned with others in their network.

The goal is to have these community meetings occurring regularly in the most overburdened and under-resourced neighborhoods which have been the hardest hit by the medical, social and economic consequences of this pandemic.

These offer opportunity for community leaders to work alongside health and research professionals to ensure expert voices (including those of community members) are equipped to speak knowledgeably, sensitively, creatively and authoritatively about the “how's, what's and why's” of COVID-19 prevention with our fellow Pittsburgh neighbors. Here's a link to request a presentation - <https://tinyurl.com/1rxwcwos>