

Rates of food insecurity remain high despite expansion of NYC food assistance programs

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In the last several months, the proportion of New Yorkers reached by the public food programs initiated by New York City to address rising rates of food insecurity has doubled, indicating progress in reaching those in

need. In the latest COVID-19 tracking survey from the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy (CUNY SPH) conducted from September 25 to 27, 34% of the sample of one thousand New York City adults reported that their households had received SNAP benefits since September 1st. Among the survey participants, 28% reported they had used an emergency food program or soup kitchen since the beginning of September and 26% had received food from the New York City school system's Grab and Go Food program. In an earlier CUNY SPH survey (April 24-27), only 16% of respondents reported receiving SNAP benefits, 16% reported use of an emergency food program, and 13% reported obtaining food from school-based food programs.

Despite these successes in providing more people with [food](#) assistance, levels of food [insecurity](#) remain high. In the latest survey, 38% of New Yorkers expressed worry that their household would run out of food before they could buy more and almost a third (31%) said they had actually run out of food for their household during September. In the May survey (May 1-3), 44% were worried about running out of food and 30% said they had actually run out. Thus, while the proportion of people helped by public food programs doubled, the rates of those reporting worries about food security fell by only 14% and the rates of those running out of money for food did not decline at all. "Despite its accomplishments in launching new public food programs, New York City must do more to stem the new pandemic of food insecurity triggered by COVID-19," said Nicholas Freudenberg, Distinguished Professor of Public Health at CUNY SPH and Director of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute. "Only by taking on the fundamental drivers of food insecurity—persistent poverty, unemployment, low wages, and lack of affordable housing—can our [city](#) reduce this troubling trend."

The latest survey also showed that rates of food insecurity are highest in low income, Black and Latinx communities. Data show that the proportion of New Yorkers who worry that their households will run out

of food before they can buy more is twice as high for Latinx as for white city residents and 1.4 times as high for Black as white residents. Both Latinx and Black residents report substantially higher rates of actually ran out of money for food in the last month. Of interest, 60% of respondents who chose to answer the poll in Spanish (a group that includes Latinx-identified residents as well as other Spanish speakers) reported worries about running out of food and 48% reported actually running out of food, an indicator of high levels of food insecurity in this group. Survey participants of all races reporting annual household incomes of \$100,000 or less are almost twice as likely to report running out of money for food in the last month than those making more than \$100,000.

The survey also showed that populations with higher rates of food insecurity participated more in public food programs. Black and Latinx residents used SNAP, emergency food programs, and school feeding programs at higher rates than White or Asian residents. Respondents who chose to answer the survey in Spanish again had the highest rates of use, with rates of SNAP use at 53%, Emergency Food programs at 37%, and Grab and Go school programs at 45%

Provided by CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy

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