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NEW SURVEY RESULTS: Effects of COVID-19 on Overlooked Farmworker Populations and Their Vulnerabilities

County, federal public health officials, employers, and organizations can do more as farmworkers experience high risk of COVID transmission and vaccination rates fall behind others in their community

Texas – Today, The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH), in partnership with local organizations, unveiled preliminary results of its Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments (FCCA) that detailed the evolving COVID-19 burden and access to testing and vaccinations for farmworkers over the last two years of the pandemic in five key diverse agricultural communities in California, Florida, Texas, Mississippi, and New Mexico. The assessments are part of a national COVID-19 outreach and vaccination project supported by funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

“Farmworkers are essential workers, who despite the pandemic and supply chain demands, have remained on the front lines of providing for our country and their families,” **said Dr. Bethany Boggess Alcauter, Director of Evaluation and National Agricultural Worker Health Program at NCFH.** “Now is the time for lasting collaborations, past the pandemic, between farmworkers, public health departments, policy makers, and agricultural employers to improve the quality of life for workers in a critical industry by providing sustainable improvements to living conditions and access to public health resources for farmworker communities.”

NCFH surveyed over 1,000 farmworkers from California, New Mexico, Texas, Mississippi, and Florida both in-person or through the phone and conducted fifty-two in-depth interviews with farmworkers, employers, and organizations. Many risk factors for COVID-19 transmission were documented in farmworker communities.

According to the survey, many workers confront high-risk of exposure due to residing in overcrowded housing with family or other workers and needing to carpool to work with persons outside of their household. Nationally, only about 2% of people in the U.S. live in overcrowded households, but 26-69% of farmworkers surveyed in each of the five communities resided in overcrowded homes.

“The housing problem was really tough. Sometimes we saw five or six people in a one-bedroom trailer. To put them in quarantine was not easy. At first, we had organizations fund for housing or would pay for a worker to quarantine in a hotel, but it only lasted for two months early in the pandemic,” **said Odilest Guerrier, a medical assistant in Immokalee, Florida.**

The survey also found that a substantial percentage of participants did not receive a training in the workplace on COVID-19 safety that included information on hand washing, mask usage, physical distancing, and isolation and quarantine in their preferred language. Only 16% of surveyed farmworkers reported speaking English as a primary language.

“The area that we are in, the majority do not know how to read, so it would be better to have conversations about COVID-19 at work, for the information to be verbal,” **said a farmworker in Mississippi when asked how agricultural employers and public health officials can make sure trusted information about COVID-19 and the COVID vaccines make it to farmworker communities.** *

The National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) reports that 6% of crop workers in the U.S. self-identify as racially Indigenous or speak an Indigenous language, however 20% of farmworkers were Indigenous in NCFH’s FCCA surveys. Eighteen different Indigenous languages were spoken by participants, and the main languages spoken included Nahuatl, Tsotsil, and Mam.

Healthcare staff are aware of their limitations and admit that providing care to farmworkers who speak a different language proves to be difficult when resources are limited. “It’s tough for those who only speak one language. We do not have anyone here that speaks Mam so we show them a video,” **described Odilest Guerrier.**

Between 40% and 71% of farmworkers in each community had been fully vaccinated against COVID-19, which lagged in comparison to county vaccination rates in most communities. Few farmworkers said they did not want to be vaccinated, which indicates that farmworkers in these communities would benefit from easier access to vaccines provided by culturally sensitive health care personnel. NCFH hopes that these findings not only continue to validate the experiences of farmworkers but also offer recommendations on how to best meet their needs during a public health crisis.

This is preliminary data and NCFH will start a second phase of community assessments in March 2022 in seven additional farmworker communities across the U.S.

**Quotes above are from the FCCA in-depth interviews, therefore due to confidentiality all participant responses remain anonymous.*

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The National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) is a private, not-for-profit corporation located in Buda, Texas dedicated to improving the health status of farmworker families. We provide information services, training and technical assistance, and a variety of products to community and migrant health centers nationwide, as well as organizations, universities, researchers and individuals involved in farmworker health.



Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments

www.ncfh.org/fcca



Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments: Phase One

Conducted by the National Center for Farmworker Health.



The first phase of assessments included the following communities:

- 1) Monterey, Tulare, & Kern counties, CA
- 2) Hidalgo County, TX
- 3) El Paso County, TX & Dona Ana County, NM
- 4) Calhoun & Coahoma counties, MS
- 5) Collier County, FL

Risk Factors

A substantial percentage of participants in all communities reported experiencing systemic risk factors for COVID-19 transmission.



Overcrowded Housing

Defined as having more than one person per room in the home



Shared Transportation

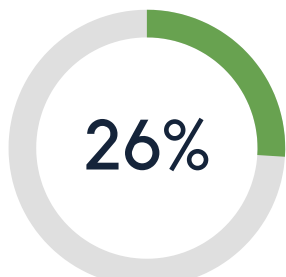
Defined as sharing transportation with persons outside their household



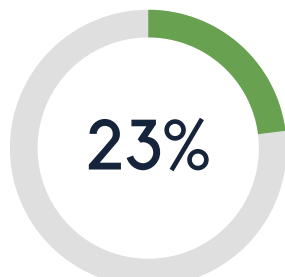
Inadequate workplace training

Defined as not receiving information on hand washing, mask usage, physical distancing, and isolation in their preferred language

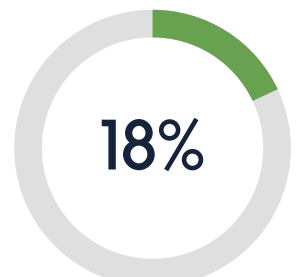
LOWEST



El Paso and Doña Ana Counties

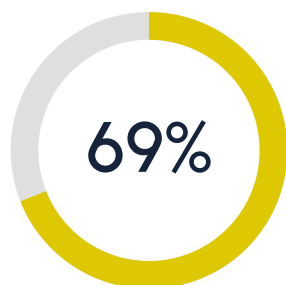


Calhoun and Coahoma Counties

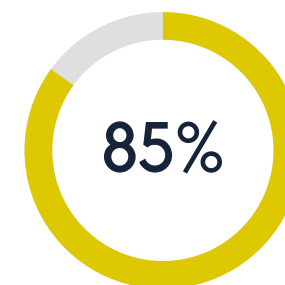


Monterey, Tulare, and Kern Counties

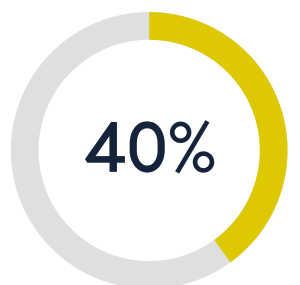
HIGHEST



Calhoun and Coahoma Counties



Collier County

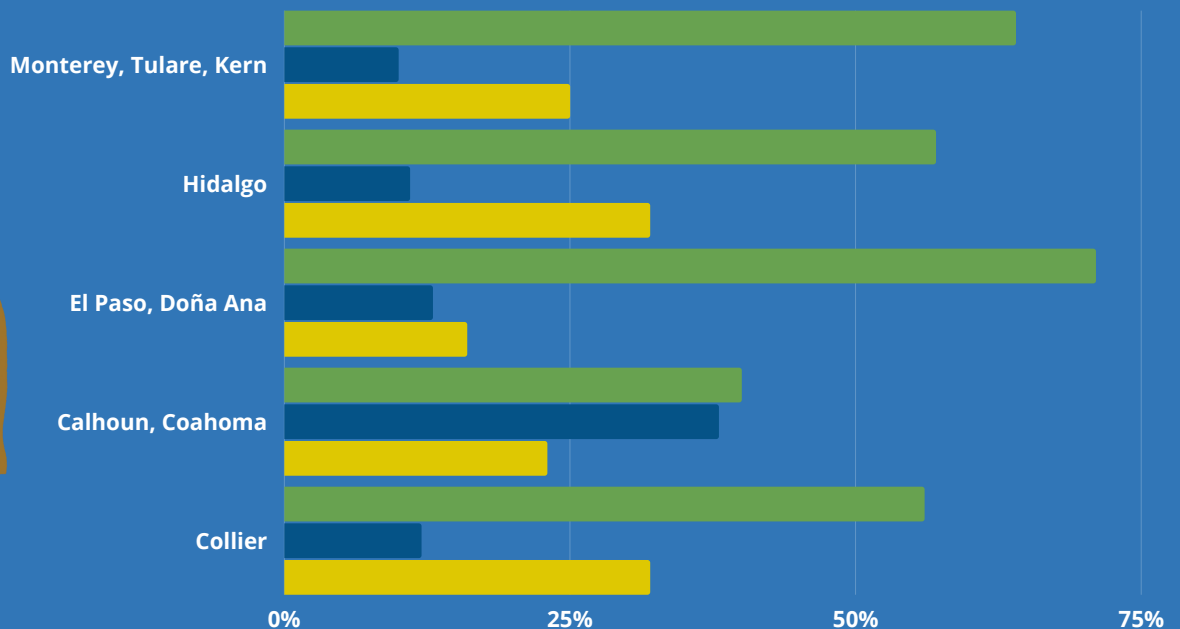


Hidalgo County

Vaccination Status

Fully vaccinated includes respondents who received one dose of the Janssen/Johnson and Johnson vaccine or two doses of any COVID-19 vaccine approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or the World Health Organization. Partially vaccinated respondents include those who received one dose of a two-dose FDA-or WHO-approved vaccine and those who received an unapproved vaccine. Unvaccinated respondents did not receive any COVID-19 vaccine.

Legend: Fully Vaccinated (Green), Partly Vaccinated (Dark Blue), Not Vaccinated (Yellow)



Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments

The Farmworker COVID-19 Community Assessments (FCCA) were conducted by the National Center for Farmworker Health (NCFH) as part of a national outreach and vaccination project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The assessments will provide actionable findings about farmworkers' experiences and recommendations on how to best meet their needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The FCCA methodology includes in-person or phone-based surveys with farmworkers and qualitative interviews with farmworkers, agricultural employers, and representatives of farmworker-serving organizations.

Findings and Recommendations

- A significant number of farmworkers did not receive any workplace COVID-19 safety training in their preferred language.
 - Therefore, we recommend increased support for collaborations among farmworker serving organizations, health care providers, and agricultural employers to bring accessible health information, trainings, and vaccinations to farmworkers directly.
- Few farmworkers in this area received any government support during the pandemic even though many experienced unemployment. Additionally, findings indicate that a high percentage of farmworkers in this community lack access to support services and health care.
 - Social support programs for workers excluded from existing programs could help farmworkers continue to provide for their families.

Partners

- Elizabeth Marquez
- Claudia Garcia
- JBS International

