WHERE ARE CHILDREN HUNGRY IN TARRANT COUNTY DURING COVID-19?
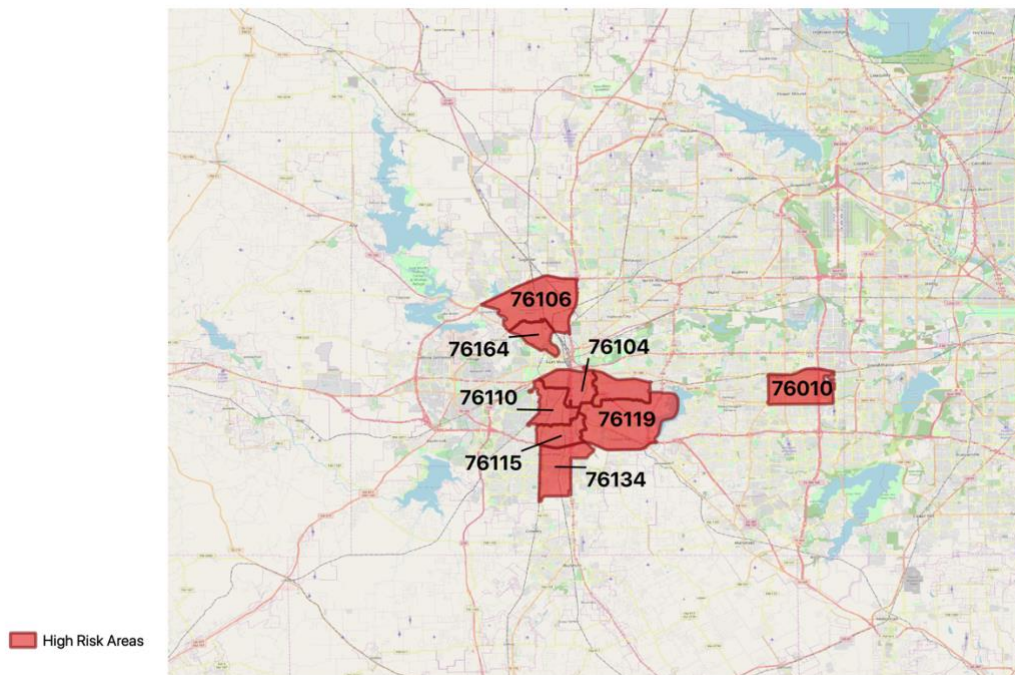*When Schools Close and Parents Lose Jobs, Kids Go Hungry*

FOOD-INSECURE CHILDREN IN TARRANT COUNTY

A shocking 25% of children in North Texas were food insecure[1] before COVID-19, despite supports like the National School Lunch Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and an area food bank. Now, many more children have even less access to food due to school closures and increasing unemployment caused by COVID-19. Several factors may worsen the problem. Families may face barriers to access due to a lack of transportation or disabilities. They may be unaware of opportunities to access food in their community because of limited English language proficiency. Single parent households may be unable to take advantage of low- or no-cost meal services if they are taking care of children and working from home.

Map 1 shows several neighborhoods in Tarrant County that are grappling with food insecurity for their students and families. This analysis shows neighborhoods in Tarrant County that are of concern due to a convergence of factors: Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs)[2] 76106, 76164, 76110, 76104, 76119, 76010, 76115, and 76134. These neighborhoods have the highest concentration of social vulnerability and students who qualify for free or reduced-cost meals. Now, due to COVID-19, children can no longer access school breakfast and lunch programs due to school closure, which means they are likely receiving one or two less meals a day.
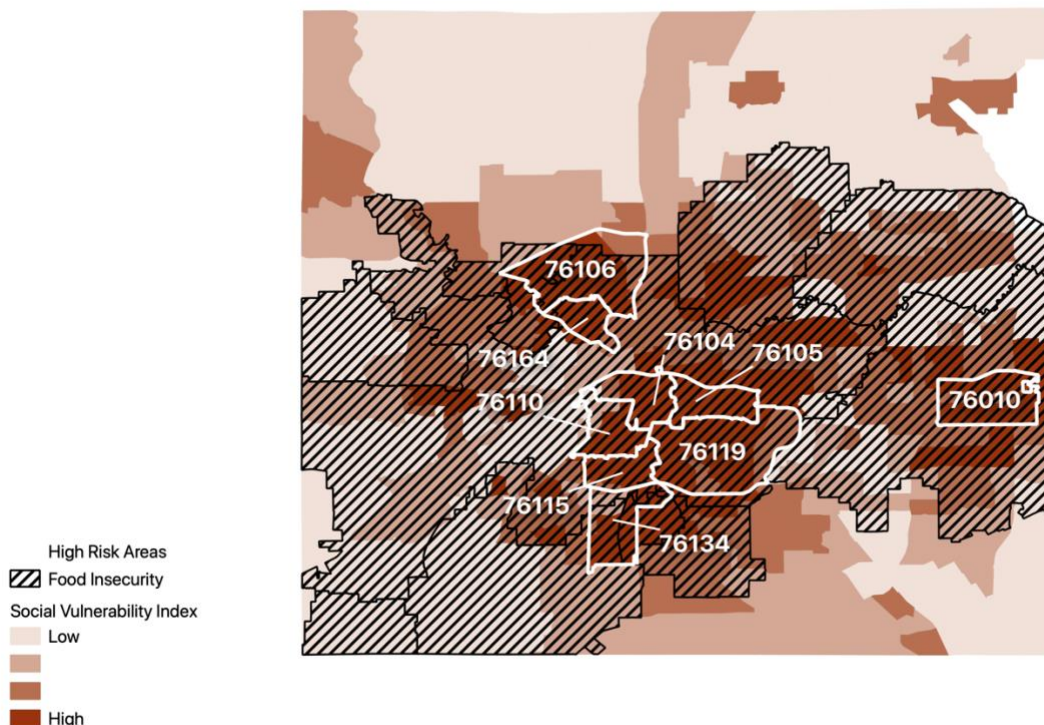
Map 1. Food Insecurity

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[1] Following the UDSA, food insecurity is a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food, which can lead to an individual-level physiological condition. https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/definitions-of-food-security.aspx#ranges

[2] ZIP Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs) are generalized territorial representations of United States Postal Service (USPS) ZIP Code service areas. ZIP Codes identify the individual post office or metropolitan area delivery station associated with mailing addresses. USPS ZIP Codes are not actually territorial features but a collection of mail delivery routes. The term ZCTA was created to differentiate between this entity and true USPS ZIP Codes. ZCTAs are used in mapping Census data. ZCTA is a trademark of the U.S. Census Bureau; ZIP Code is a trademark of the U.S. Postal Service.

Identifying Socially Vulnerable and Food Insecure Children in Tarrant County

Map 2 shows the CDC's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI), an indicator of vulnerability during crisis. The darkest red shows the top quartile (1/4) of highest concentration of most vulnerable people. This index includes socio- economic status, household composition and disability status, minority/language status, and housing and transportation status. The black dashed areas show school districts where more than 50% of students are enrolled in free and reduced-cost meals.

Map 2. Food Insecurity and Social Vulnerability

KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Several neighborhoods in Tarrant County have limited access to food pantries and community services due to social barriers. These barriers include lack of transportation, disabilities, lack of time and resources among single-parent households, difficulties navigating food benefit options due to language and literacy barriers, and fear of repercussion based on immigrant status.

Steps are being taken at the local, state and federal levels to combat food insecurity. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service has extended SNAP benefits to those who are up for renewal. States now can waive meal pattern requirements with the Child and Adult Care Food Program, the National School Lunch Program, and School Breakfast Program. (Historically, feeding sites must follow guidelines regarding meal times and afterschool feeding requirements. During this pandemic, parents now can pick-up meals for their children without entering building and risking exposure to the virus.) Furthermore, to help ensure that all children will have access to food, USDA is extending its Community Eligibility Provision Data Waiver. Schools and school districts in low-income areas can serve breakfast and lunch at no cost and are reimbursed using a formula based on SNAP and TANF and the overall percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Meals, in lieu of collecting household applications.

At the same time, school districts, food banks, and other safety net providers are finding innovative ways of serving children and families. Supply of non-perishable food and outlets for distribution, however, continue to be factors that limit the number that can be helped. Nonprofits, community leaders, district leaders and food pantries must join forces to ensure they reach all children and families in need.

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

For families who cannot easily drive to food pantries, the North Texas Food Bank offers a Mobile Food Pantry. Check the schedule at https://ntfb.org/mobile-pantry/. For families able to venture out, TEA is monitoring free school meal pickup locations here: https://txschools.gov/ and the North Texas Food Bank has a similar map here: https://ntfb.org/our-programs/get-food-assistance/find-a-food-pantry/.

Data Sources: 2018-2019 CHILDREN AT RISK school rankings data and the CDC's 2018 SVI data.

For questions or comments on these maps please contact:

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