

COMMUNITY  
**PULSE**  
REPORT



# Pulse Report for Children & Families

December 2021

# Taking Our Pulse

The goal of the Community Pulse Report is to keep track of a consistent set of indicators as a way of taking the pulse of our community during these difficult times and to further inform policy makers, nonprofit leaders, reporters, and the public in general. The report is organized into five sections:



**COVID-19:** [life expectancy](#) | [vaccinations for children](#) | [vaccine equity](#)



**Education:** [learning lag](#) | [supports for students](#) | [kindergarten](#) and [college](#) enrollment declines



**Health & Wellness:** [aging in place](#)

Our aim is to utilize data that will give us a snapshot of what is happening in the five-county region—Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette and Westmoreland Counties. Important to the project will be finding data that deepens our understanding of the intersecting disparities in health care, society, and the economy and their impacts on Black and Latino/a/x children and families.

# A Note on Disaggregated Data & Geographies

We are committed to utilizing data that can be disaggregated by race, gender, and age.

We continue to strive to identify proxy indicators where disaggregated data is not available, and advocate for the disaggregation of data by race, gender, and age.

Where such data is available, we note that throughout the report with this symbol:



Where it is not available, we note with this symbol:



Throughout this report, the geography of analyzed data is noted in the upper left-hand corner of each chart or graph:



United States



Pennsylvania



Five-County Region  
*(Allegheny, Armstrong, Butler, Fayette, Westmoreland)*



Allegheny County  
*(Only used rarely – where regional data is not available)*



## COVID-19

COVID-19 continues to impact our communities' health. Nationally, COVID-19 was the third leading cause of death in 2020. And recent data suggests life expectancy has dropped, with declines more severe among Black and Latino/a/x populations.

November saw the approval of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 5-11, a long-awaited milestone. Early numbers indicate a fast initial uptake, but a Kaiser Family Foundation survey suggests parents are split on how eager they are to vaccinate their 5-11 year old children.

Lower-income households are more likely to have concerns about accessing the vaccine, including getting time off of work to care for their children, transportation to appointments, and trust in medical providers.





# Declines in Life Expectancy



**Nationally, life expectancy fell by 1.5 years in 2020**, according to [The National Center for Health Statistics](#). **The drop was most severe in Black and Latino/a/x populations, down 2.9 and 3 years respectively**, compared to 1.2 years for White people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has **exacerbated existing racial health disparities** caused by certain social determinants of health.

## Compared to their White peers, Black and Latino/a/x households:

- 1 Are overrepresented in front-line, “essential,” high-risk jobs;
- 2 Have unequal access to health care and insurance;
- 3 Live with higher rates of housing insecurity and density;
- 4 Face increased exposure to environmental hazards, like air pollution; and
- 5 Have greater rates of food insecurity.



Source: [Andre Perry, Ariel Gelrud Shiro, Anthony Barr, and Carl Romer](#)

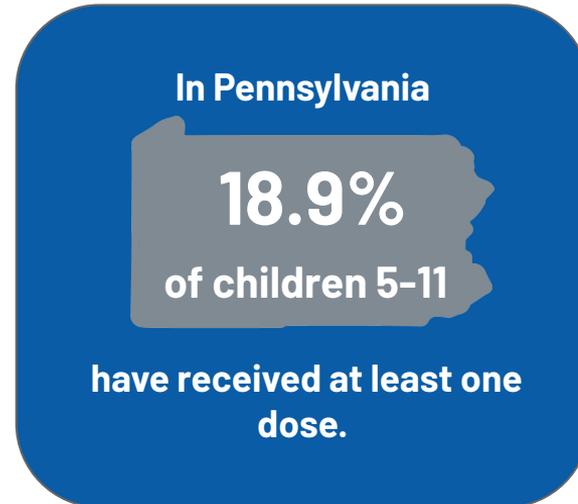
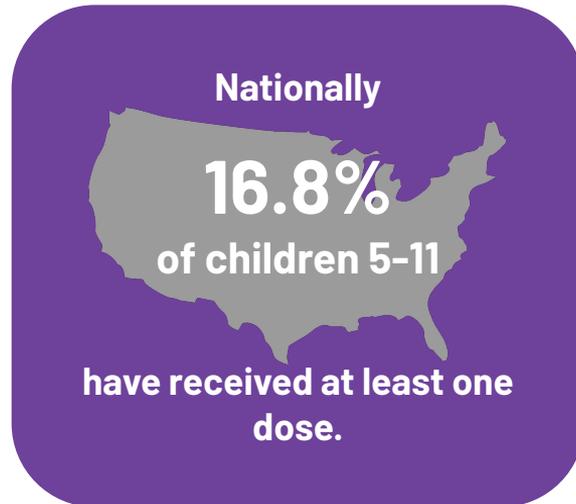


# Vaccination Rates, Nationally: Children 5 - 11



Vaccination for children ages 5-11 was approved on November 2, and saw a quick initial uptake. Nationally, it took **50 days for 10% of adults** to receive at least one dose of the vaccine, vs. **two weeks for children 5-11**. (Source: [White House Press Briefing](#))

As of 12/5/2021:



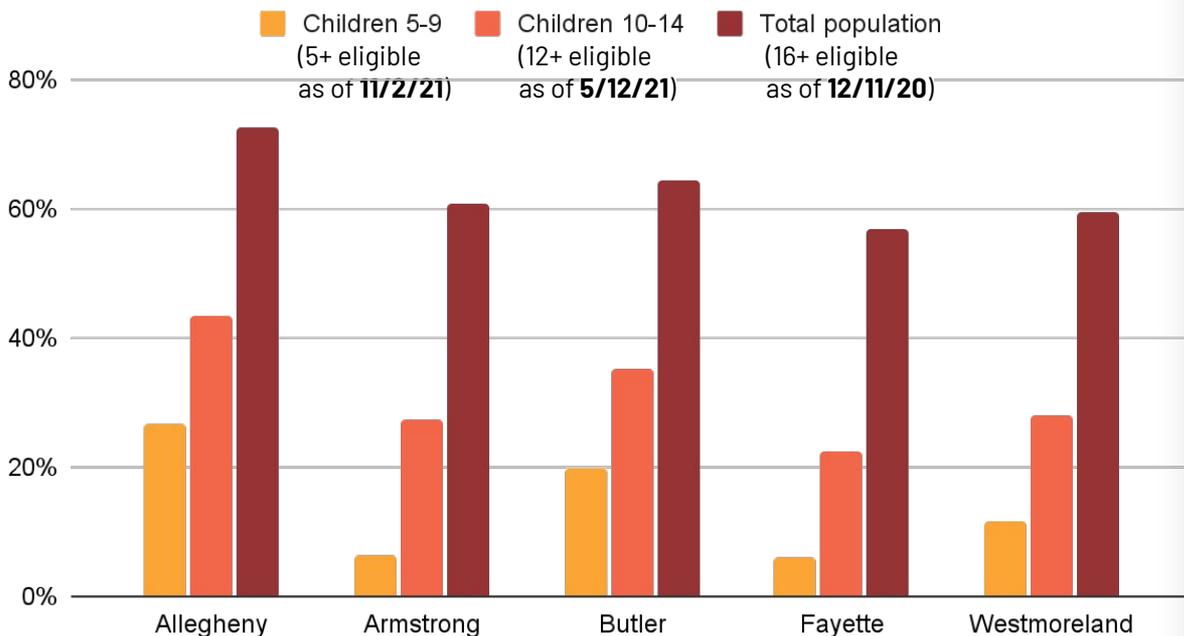
Source: [Kaiser Family Foundation estimates](#) based based on data from the [CDC COVID Data](#).  
Vaccination rates as of 12/5/21.



# Vaccination Rates: Children 5-14, Five-County Region



## Vaccination Rates by County (at least one dose)



While statewide PA trends match national trends, there is significant variation between counties in our region.



Sources: Vaccination data from PA Department of Public Health (as of 12/8/21); population estimates from 2019 ACS 1 Year Estimates



# Parents' Eagerness to Vaccinate, Nationally



While the fast uptake is encouraging, there is some indication that about **one third** of parents prefer to wait to vaccinate their child and about **one third** will choose not to vaccinate their child.

**In October (before the vaccine was officially approved for 5-11-year-olds), of parents with children ages 5-11:**

**27%**

Planned to vaccinate their child "right away"

**33%**

Preferred to wait and see how the vaccine is working in children

**30%**

Said they will "definitely not" get their 5-11 year old vaccinated

**5%**

Would only vaccinate their child "if required" by school



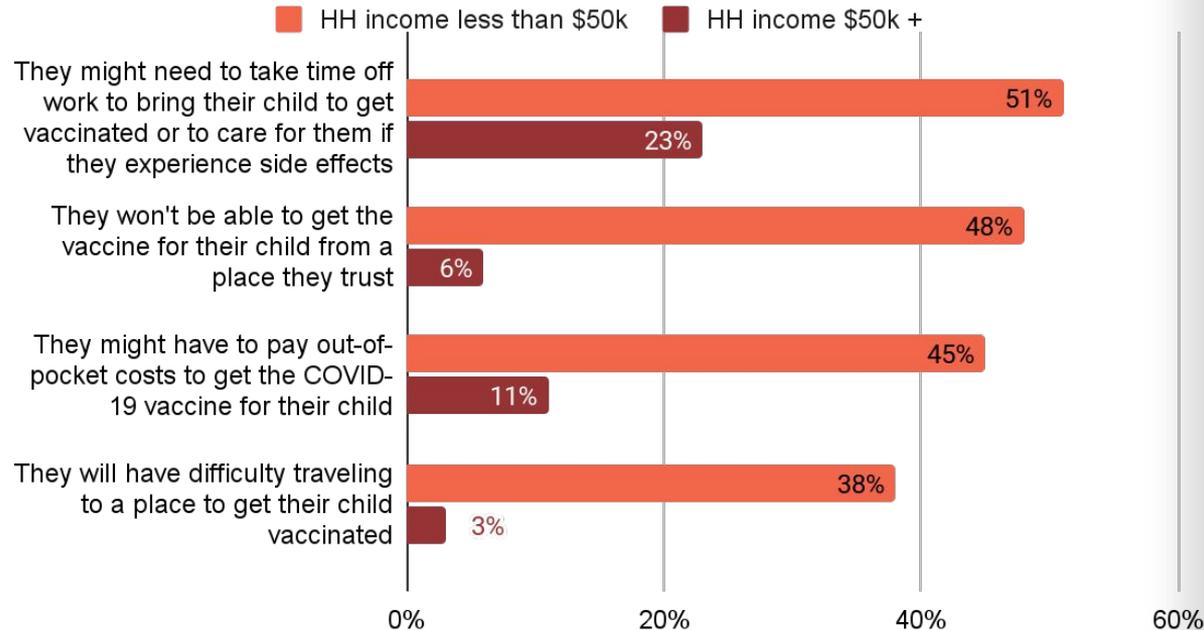


# Childhood Vaccine Access Barriers



## Percent of parents of 5- to 11-year-olds who said they were very or somewhat concerned about the following:

(as of October, before the vaccine was officially approved for 5-11-year-olds)



Among parents with children ages 5 - 11, **lower income parents are more likely to be concerned about accessing the vaccine.**

Concerns include getting time off work, transportation, cost, and trust.



Source: Kaiser Family Foundation October Vaccine Monitor



## EDUCATION

COVID-19 interrupted education from pre-K to college, and the effects of these disruptions are still being felt as educators and policymakers work towards solutions to support their students.

While gains were made in reading and math achievement in the 2020-21 school year, they were not as high as in a typical pre-COVID year (2018-19). Existing educational disparities were exacerbated by the pandemic, and Black and Latino/a/x students were impacted the most. Schools in the five-county region have been implementing creative solutions to work towards making up this learning loss and supporting their students' social-emotional growth.

Additionally, Kindergarten enrollment in fall 2020 and college enrollment in fall 2021 were both significantly lower than fall 2019 enrollments.





# Learning Lag



**Long-standing existing educational disparities have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Black and Latino/a/x students and students attending high-poverty schools have experienced the greatest negative impacts on their learning.

Over the past year, these students were less likely to be learning in person and more likely to have difficulty accessing instruction compared to White students.

**In the 2020-2021 school year, students made gains in learning (reading and math achievement) – though these gains were lower than in a typical pre-pandemic year.**



**A bright spot:** The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading launched its [Learning Loss Recovery Challenge](#) to encourage and support communities in slowing and stopping learning loss, jumpstarting the recovery planning process, and launching “Learning Happens Everywhere.”



Source: NWEA, [Center for School and Student Progress](#)



# Supports for K-12 Students



Districts across the region are using creative solutions in school and through out-of-school-time programming to support their students, including:



**Implementing Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)**, focused tiers of support based upon student needs including behavioral health and wellness – that often involve implementation of a social emotional learning (SEL) curriculum.



**Adding support staff**, including social workers, intervention specialists and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA).



**Implementing mindfulness programs**, like [The Chill Project](#), to help students, teachers, and parents identify and react positively to stress.



# Supports for K-12 Students: Plum Borough



From February 21, 2021 to March 20, 2021 [emergency department visits for suspected suicide attempts by adolescent girls aged 12-17 were 51% higher](#) than during the same period in 2019.

To demonstrate their commitment to supporting students' mental and emotional well-being, in March 2021, the **Plum Borough school board hired three school licensed social workers** to work closely with guidance counselors, teachers, and administrators.

"Our counselors, social workers and nurses have undoubtedly been the unsung heroes for the school district these past two years...We are so proud of their non-stop, critical efforts that are saving lives and helping children reach their fullest potential."

-Michael Caliguiri, President, Plum Borough School Board





# Supports for K-12 Students: Plum Borough



Plum Borough School District shares a "day in the life" of a school social worker [here](#).

**"...more social anxiety than ever..."**

*"Truancy is more often than not a symptom of a system failure, and we work together to address shortcomings."*

**"My coworkers and I see these alarming statistics play out in real-time every day among our students...We don't take breaks, we work tirelessly, think outside the box, accommodate a variety of needs, and go above and beyond to help our students. We are turbo charged."**

*"Rachel's Community Closet [is] a free resource available for every student and family in the district, free of judgment or stigma. Consumers can shop for food, clothing, and hygiene supplies. As a district, we realize that we can't expect students to be at their best academically if their basic needs aren't being met."*

-Eliana Jorgensen, LSW, HSV, Plum Borough School District Social Worker Grades 7-12





# Kindergarten Enrollment Disruptions, Five-County Region



## Kindergarten enrollment in the five-county region fell by almost 10%

in the 2020-21 school year vs. the 2019-20 school year. Overall K-12 enrollment fell by 3%.

## Enrollment of Black Kindergarteners fell by 18%

compared to 9% for White Kindergarteners.



**“These issues require immediate attention from researchers, advocates, and policy makers in order to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and families.”** -RAPID-EC Survey, September 2019





# College Enrollment Disruptions, Nationally



September 2021 marked the start of the second fall semester of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Associate degree enrollment **fell 15%** from fall 2019, while master's degree enrollment **increased 6%**.

Undergraduate enrollment **declined 7.8%** from fall 2019.

Community college enrollment **declined 15%** from fall 2019.



Source: [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#)



## HEALTH & WELLNESS

Older adults have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, and according to a local survey by Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh, older adults have social, physical, and environmental needs to age in place that are not always being met sufficiently.

Surveying seniors reveals inequity and community needs in the region. Findings can be used to inform public investment decisions, particularly in terms of human and built environment infrastructure.



ALLIES  
FOR CHILDREN

# Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh Survey



[Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh](#) surveyed **1,646** Allegheny County adults 45 years and older about physical and social factors that promote aging in place. Conducted during early 2021, [the survey](#) also asks respondents about the impact of COVID-19 on their physical and social health.

**1/5**

Have lived in their community for 45+ years.

**84%**

Rate their health as excellent, very good, or good.

**69%**

Have gone outside less often for exercise due to coronavirus.



# Disparities in Aging in Place



Experience aging in place varies by race in Allegheny County. Adults who considered their **community “excellent” or “very good” to live and age in** was not the same for White and Black residents:

**50.5%**

of White respondents

**28.3%**

of Black respondents

“

Everyone should have the opportunity to grow old in an environment that is safe and healthy, and in communities that are thriving. No one wants to “age in place” within the confines of four walls. Equitably aging in community involves: built environment features like accessible, convenient public transportation, as well as social environment features like job training opportunities and meaningful activities for all ages.

”

**Laura Poskin**

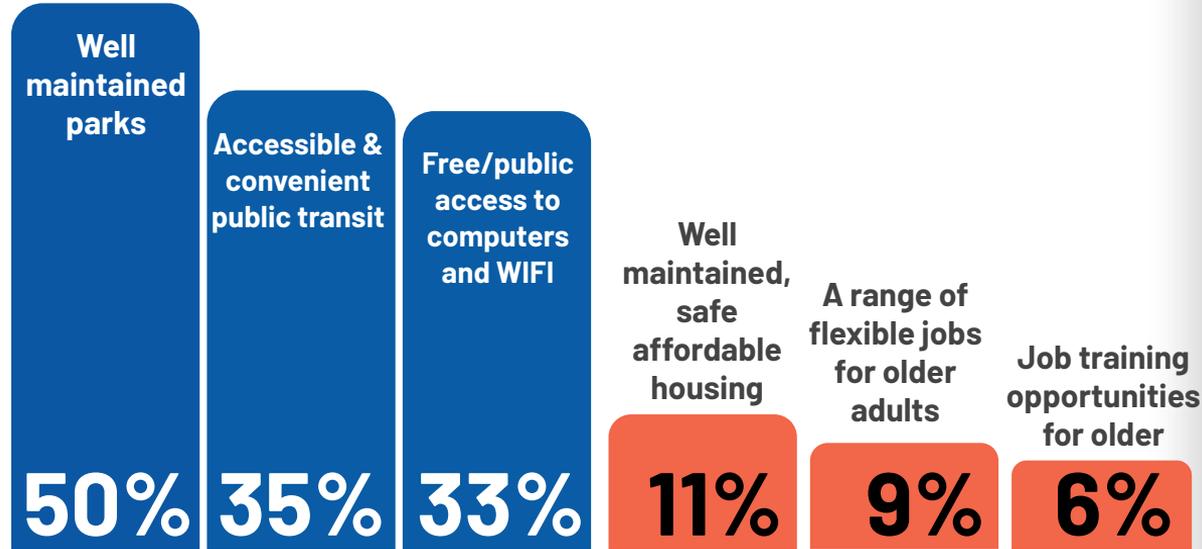
Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh



# Satisfaction with Community Resources



Satisfaction Level



Aging adults had higher levels of satisfaction with these amenities in their communities.

Very few aging adults were satisfied with these amenities in their communities.

Age-Friendly survey respondents rated satisfaction levels with different amenities in their communities.

Across geographies, parks and public amenities ranked high, while job training and housing availability ranked low.

Source: Age-Friendly Greater Pittsburgh Survey. Percentages represent respondents who rated amenities "excellent" or "great."



# More Information & Previous Reports

- Previous reports:
  - [Community Pulse Report: September '20](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: October '20](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: November/December '20](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: January '21](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: February '21](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: April '21](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: June '21](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: August '21](#)
  - [Community Pulse Report: October '21](#)