

# Food Insecurity and COVID-19: Significant Racial Disparities Measured

## Policy Recommendations



### 1) Ensure benefits reach people who need them through

- targeted outreach and
- creating synergies between programs to streamline eligibility and enrollment.

These benefits should be sufficient to **ensure recipients can afford healthy, nutritious food over the long term** and not just during the pandemic.



### 2) Provide schools and emergency food systems with sufficient financial resources and flexibilities to meet this unprecedented demand during the pandemic.

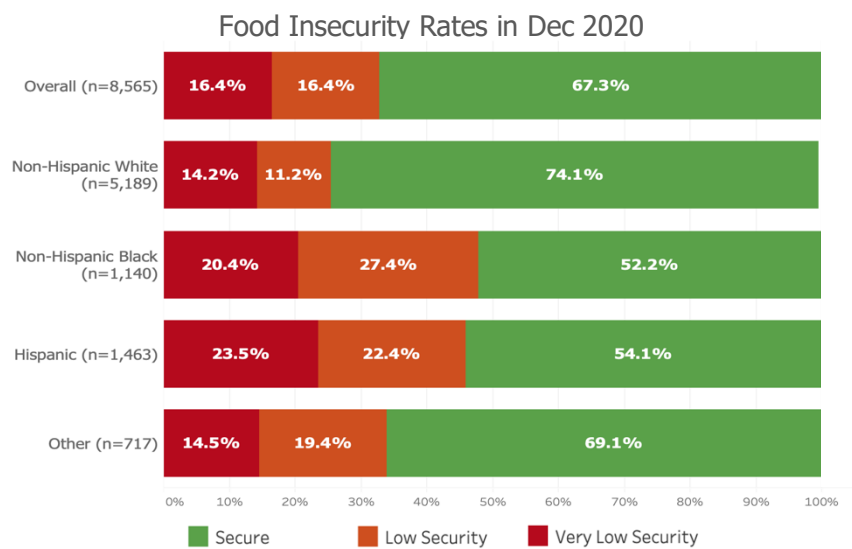


### 3) Invest in structural factors that contribute to food insecurity disparities such as

- increasing minimum wage,
- equitably improve access to public transportation,
- improve access to affordable, healthy food options in low-income communities.

## Food insecurity is historically high.

**Black and Hispanic Americans at almost two times the rate of white Americans.**



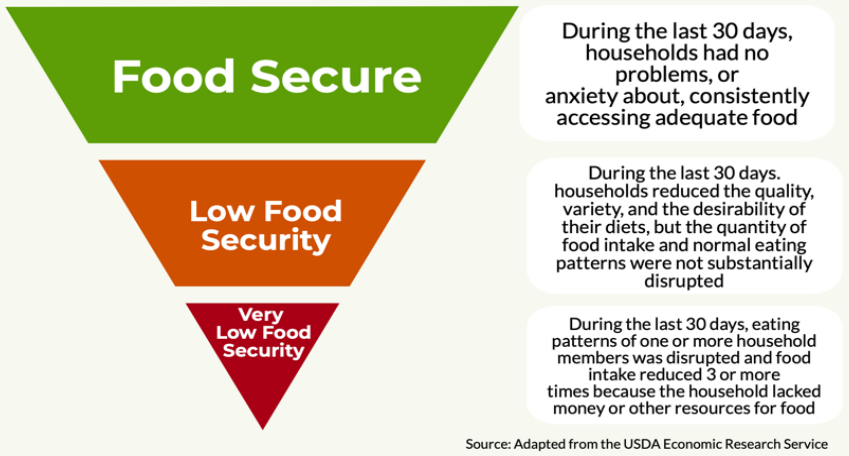
The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating existing inequalities and disparities in food security.

- **47.8% of Black Americans are food insecure**
- **45.9% of Hispanics are food insecure**
- **25.4% of white Americans are food insecure.**

Over the last 20 years, 10-12% of Americans experience low and very low levels of food insecurity. During the Great Recession, food insecurity rose to 14-16%. We found that as of December 2020, **33% of Americans reported being food insecure in the last 30 days.**

We found stark disparities in rates of food insecurity based on race/ethnicity. **As of December 2020, food insecurity was nearly twice as high among African Americans compared to white Americans.**

Policymakers must target structural factors and systemic racism that contribute to high food insecurity rates among Black and Hispanic Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic.



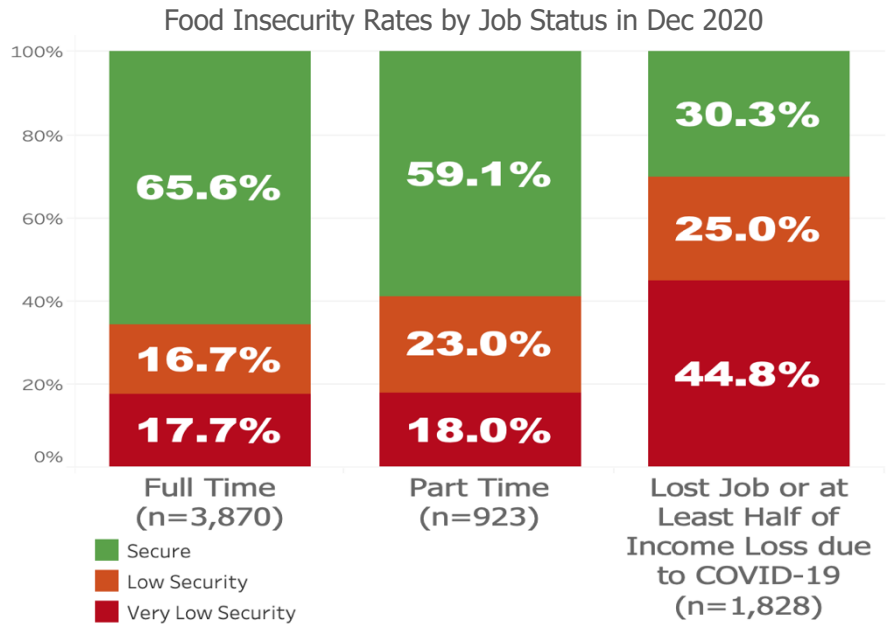
## What is Food Insecurity?

Levels of food insecurity range from high food security to very low food security. The diagram to the right illustrates the measures we used to gauge food security in this study using the USDA Household Food Security Screener Module six item short form. We studied food insecurity rates within the last 30 days.

## Food Insecurity & Economic Distress

# 70%

of those who lost jobs or at least half of their income during the COVID-19 pandemic are food insecure.



# 40%

of food insecure Americans did not receive any social safety net benefits in the last 30 days.

## Receiving Meals and Benefits

Ability to access free food from schools, food banks, or other community organizations has been an important resource for those experiencing low food security during COVID-19. Social safety net benefits from programs such as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) are also critical. **We found that half of respondents with very low food security received free meals or groceries in the last 30 days.** 1 in 5 respondents reported receiving SNAP benefits in the last 30 days, compared to historical levels of 1 in 9 Americans who received these benefits, while 72% of respondents (including 40% of food insecure Americans) reported receiving no benefits at all, signifying unmet needs within this population.

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## About National Pandemic Pulse

To better understand the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 pandemic among low-income and minority communities in the United States, researchers at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health launched the National Pandemic Pulse surveys. These population-representative surveys are administered across the United States, matching US Census estimates to gauge different aspects of population response to the pandemic – ranging from adherence to anxiety, access to testing and care, vaccine perceptions, food insecurity, among others. The sample was selected to be representative of the US population by age, gender, education, and income for each US Census region. The survey specifically oversampled Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx populations to analyze the impacts of COVID-19 by race and ethnicity, where these classifications are seen as proxy socioeconomic constructs. Round 2 of the nationwide survey, implemented between 12/15/2020 – 12/23/2020, had 8,565 respondents. It covered the following modules: risk perceptions, pregnancy experiences, pandemic anger, trust in science, vaccine hesitancy, testing access, economic distress, food insecurity, and mental health.

Results are currently under peer-review.