

Executive Summary

Latinos/Hispanics are the third largest ethnic group in Santa Clara County and by 2050, they will be the largest. As the Latino/Hispanic population grows, our public health and healthcare systems will have to expand and adjust to meet changing health needs.

Latinos/Hispanics face significant socioeconomic challenges, which may impact their health and wellbeing. Previous countywide assessments have also found that they are more likely than other racial/ethnic groups to be overweight or obese; to have lower levels of physical activity and poorer nutrition; and to experience higher rates of injury and violence. For these reasons, and at the request of Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors, the Public Health Department conducted an assessment of Latino/Hispanic health in Santa Clara County.

Purpose of the Report

- Provide a comprehensive picture of health in the Latino/Hispanic community, relative to other racial and ethnic groups
- Identify socioeconomic factors that may influence Latino/Hispanic health
- Assess neighborhood conditions related to obesity, nutrition, physical activity, and safety

Latino/Hispanic Health Matters

The following report presents findings from this assessment. Latinos/Hispanics experience both health advantages and disadvantages relative to other racial/ethnic groups. Health may also differ within the Latino/Hispanic population, depending on gender, age, education, income, and place of birth. For instance, Latinos/Hispanics who are immigrants have some healthier behaviors than those born in the United States. Understanding these patterns will help to identify strategies for improving Latino/Hispanic health and the health of all residents in our community.

"Many of us come from small towns where we ate more healthfully and saw where the livestock are raised. When you get here to this country you learn to eat different foods, such as pizza, hamburgers, etc."

Rengstorff community member

Key Health Advantages Among Santa Clara County Latinos/Hispanics

- Latinos/Hispanics live longer than Whites and African Americans.
- Latino/Hispanic adults have lower rates of cancer (all cancer sites combined).
- Latina/Hispanic women are slightly less likely to deliver low birth weight babies.
- Latino/Hispanic adults have half the rate of high blood pressure of Whites and African Americans.
- Latino/Hispanic immigrants are less likely to report that their physical health was not good on at least one day in the past month.
- Latino/Hispanic immigrants are less likely to be obese than Latinos/Hispanics born in the United States.

Key Health Disadvantages Among Santa Clara County Latinos/Hispanics

- Latino/Hispanic adults have higher rates of overweight and obesity than adults countywide.
- Latino/Hispanic adults have higher rates of diabetes than adults countywide.
- Fewer Latino/Hispanic youth meet all physical fitness standards than youth overall.
- Latinos/Hispanics account for 4 in 10 homicide deaths, even though they comprise 27% of the population.
- Latina/Hispanic females have the highest rates of teen birth.

Socioeconomic Conditions and Healthcare Access

The Latino/Hispanic population faces significant socioeconomic challenges relative to other major racial/ethnic groups in the county, which can limit opportunities and resources linked to health and wellbeing. More Latino/Hispanic households live in poverty and struggle financially. More Latino/Hispanic households spend a large proportion of household income on mortgages and rent and Latinos/Hispanics are more likely to live in overcrowded housing conditions.

Latino/Hispanic adults overall and Latino/Hispanic immigrants are less likely to have health insurance or to seek healthcare when needed due to cost or lack of insurance. While there is little information about the number of Latinos/Hispanics who are undocumented in Santa Clara County, immigration status affects access to healthcare, social services, and emotional wellbeing. Latino/Hispanic community members, regardless of immigration status, report fear and discrimination, reluctance to call the police for fear of immigration reprisals, and unfair treatment from landlords, police and service providers.

“We don’t have health insurance. We have to wait until it’s an emergency.”

Washington/Guadalupe community member

“The cost of rent is killing us.”

Rengstorff community member

Neighborhood Conditions that Affect Health

Some of the health advantages and disadvantages experienced by Latinos/Hispanics in Santa Clara County may be due, in part, to the conditions in their neighborhoods, such as how close they live to parks and grocery stores. These conditions affect people's health by influencing their behaviors and the choices they make, such as what they choose to eat or how active they are. We examine neighborhood conditions countywide and in eight selected neighborhoods with a high percentage of Latinos/Hispanics.

Key Findings on Neighborhood Conditions that Promote Good Health

Countywide

- Residents do not have to walk as far to grocery stores, restaurants, and schools in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of Latinos/Hispanics compared to other parts of the county.

Eight Selected Neighborhoods

- All food banks and emergency food outlets provide nutrition education.
- Childcare centers offer a variety of healthy foods and beverages and regularly encourage physical activity.
- There is almost no outdoor marketing of unhealthy foods around schools and parks.
- In general, neighborhood streets are pleasant and attractive for walking.
- Sidewalks are in good condition.

Key Findings on Neighborhood Conditions that are Barriers to Good Health

Countywide

- Relative to the total number of healthy and unhealthy food stores, there are fewer stores where residents can purchase healthy foods in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of Latinos/Hispanics compared to other parts of the county.
- There are more automobile/pedestrian and automobile/bicycle collisions in neighborhoods with a higher proportion of Latinos/Hispanics compared to other parts of the county.
- There are more violent crimes in and around neighborhoods with a higher proportion of Latinos/Hispanics compared to the county as a whole.

Eight Selected Neighborhoods

- Retail food stores are more likely to have advertising for unhealthy than healthy products.
- Only 1 in 3 food banks and emergency food outlets meet nutritional standards and offer fruits and vegetables at least once per week.
- Mobile food vendors are present at more than two-thirds of schools, and nearly all products they sell are unhealthy.
- Many schools sell high-fat a la carte entrees such as hamburgers and pizza and lack policies on the nutrient quality of foods offered outside of regular school meals.
- Most childcare centers lack written policies on nutrition and physical activity.
- Many streets do not feel safe or attractive for bicycling.
- Few streets have amenities for pedestrians and bicyclists, such as bike lanes and bus stops.

Healthy Eating

Although residents of neighborhoods with a high proportion of Latinos/Hispanics live closer to supermarkets and large grocery stores, there is also a large proportion of stores selling and marketing unhealthy foods. As a result, access to high quality, healthy, and affordable foods may be limited and it is often difficult for these individuals and families to make healthy choices.

“There is a store that has fruits and vegetables that are not cheap. They are also not healthy because most of the vegetables and fruits are rotten or they rot before they ripen. This is typical of the stores in our neighborhood.”

Mayfair/Suenos community member

“When you go grocery shopping and you’re ready to check out, what do you have right over by the check-out area? The chips and the candy and all that.”

South Central Gilroy community member

“Teachers educate their students about healthy food. But once they get to the cafeteria what are they being served? Cheeseburgers, pizza, etcetera.”

Burbank/Buena Vista community member

Quality of retail food environments

Few stores in the selected neighborhoods meet benchmarks for availability, quality and price of produce; participation in food assistance programs such as WIC and CalFresh; or advertising of healthy and unhealthy foods. While supermarkets and large grocery stores are most likely to meet benchmarks for quality, they account for only 18% of retail food outlets in the neighborhoods. Only half of surveyed stores sell produce, and only a quarter offer a wide variety of produce or have produce items priced below the county average.

Marketing of unhealthy foods

Unhealthy marketing is widespread on the exterior of retail food stores and by the checkout counters in the neighborhoods, although there is no unhealthy marketing near schools and parks. Such marketing can be influential—parents in focus groups report that their children ask for unhealthy foods that they see in advertisements.

Unhealthy foods at and around schools

Parents describe the difficulty they face in providing healthy meals when their children are exposed to unhealthy food at school. Over a quarter of schools surveyed indicate that they sell high-fat, low nutrient entrees a la carte (outside of regular school meals) and have no policy about the type of food offered to students as incentives or rewards. The majority of schools in the neighborhoods have mobile vendors stationed nearby, and almost all sell unhealthy foods.