

# COVID unemployment assistance puts food on the table: study

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Another wave of COVID-19 is putting millions out of work, while tens of millions more remain unemployed, and Congress debates aid.

Now, a new Boston University School of Public Health (BUSPH) study shows that unemployment help directly translates to people being able to put [food](#) on the table.

The CARES Act—passed in March of 2020—expanded [unemployment insurance](#) coverage, amount, and duration.

Published in *JAMA Network Open*, the study finds that receiving unemployment [insurance](#) cuts a person's risk of food insecurity by a third, and halves the likelihood of needing to eat less because of financial constraints. And receiving more coverage, such as the weekly \$600 supplement included in CARES until last July, means an even bigger reduction in the risk of going hungry.

"There has long been a need to improve the proportion of people covered, the duration of

coverage, and the amount of coverage in our unemployment insurance system. This paper speaks to the critical role that unemployment insurance can play in preventing people from facing food insecurity during a crisis," says study lead author Dr. Julia Raifman, assistant professor of health law, policy & management at BUSPH.

Raifman and colleagues used data from the Understanding Coronavirus in America study, looking at a sample of 2,319 people who had household incomes less than \$75,000 and had been employed in February. By the end of July, 1,119 people (nearly half) had experienced unemployment.

Of those who lost their jobs, 415 reported food insecurity and 437 reported that they sometimes ate less because of financial constraints.

The researchers found that receiving unemployment insurance was associated with a 35.0% relative decline in a person's risk of food insecurity, and a 47.8% relative decline in the likelihood of having to eat less. Receiving larger amounts of [unemployment](#) insurance and/or the weekly \$600 CARES supplement came with even more substantial declines in food insecurity and having to eating less.

The researchers also identified major disparities in who is facing food insecurity among those who have lost their jobs during COVID: 69.2% of Indigenous participants in the study reported food insecurity, as did 52.5% of Hispanic participants, 42.2% of Black participants, 40.3% of Asian participants, and 26.9% of non-Hispanic white participants.

They also found that 46.1% of households with kids faced food [insecurity](#), compared to 32.8% of households without kids.

"It is heartbreaking that families with children are

even more likely to face [food insecurity](#)," Raifman says. "The recent Booker/Pressley policy proposal to provide direct payments to children's families could make a big difference for their food security and short- and long-term health."

**More information:** Julia Raifman et al, Association Between Receipt of Unemployment Insurance and Food Insecurity Among People Who Lost Employment During the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States, *JAMA Network Open* (2021). [DOI: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.35884](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2020.35884)

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