

Newark Kids Count Data Snapshot

The Impact of COVID-19:



A Look at the Utilization of Programs Assisting Families

Newark's Response to COVID-19

Since the pandemic's onset, City of Newark officials have worked to keep residents informed and ensure that both testing and vaccination sites were available. Mayor Ras J. Baraka and his team created a comprehensive website, <https://newarkcovid19.com/home>, detailing information for both residents and small businesses. The website includes pertinent information on vaccine and COVID-19 testing sites, as well as comprehensive assistance for small businesses and residents in need. Visitors can find links for more information regarding the availability of vaccines. Of the sites, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FEMA) operates the largest, which is located at New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT) and serves Newark and its surrounding communities. In addition to these resources, a real-time data dashboard provides statistics on positive cases of COVID-19 within the city. These data are a result of a robust effort to ensure widespread access to COVID-19 tests. Testing sites are also located throughout Newark and are free to residents.

By Alana Vega, Kids Count Coordinator

● Introduction

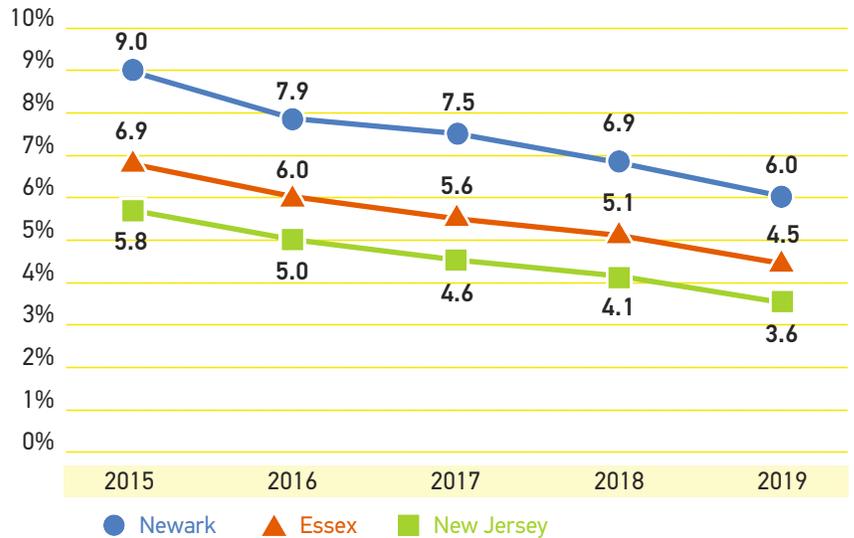
In March of 2020, New Jersey emerged as one of the states hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey, an experimental data product developed to quickly gain information on the experiences during the COVID-19 crisis, showed that 58 percent of New Jersey's households with children reported losing income since the pandemic's onset.¹ The loss of employment income has impacted families across the state in many ways. As 2020 drew to a close, 23 percent of the state's adults in households with children reported little to no confidence in their ability to make their next housing payment on time.² The state's location relative to the Northeast's economic hubs made it a transmission hotspot, and its largest city—Newark—felt the impact of the pandemic early on. As a city with 25 percent of the total population living below the federal poverty level prior to the pandemic's onset, compared to roughly 9 percent of the total statewide population, many of the challenges experienced by those living in the rest of the state were magnified in Newark.³ Officials within the city rose to the occasion and worked to create a robust set of supports for families across the city.

While many of the public data reflecting the realities of the pandemic in Newark are not yet available, programmatic data showing access to different types of economic and nutritional supports give us some insight into the experiences of Newark's families.

Unemployment Benefits and Program Eligibility

Eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is limited to those earning below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, or roughly \$48,000 for a family of four in 2020. During the pandemic, many families benefited from expanded unemployment benefits and federal stimulus dollars. Although federal stimulus monies did not count towards eligibility for SNAP, the initial additional \$600 in monthly unemployment benefits did count towards a household's eligibility. Later, a federal rule stipulated that the additional \$300 in unemployment benefits, known as Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, would not count against eligibility for SNAP specifically.

Figure 1: Unemployment Rate



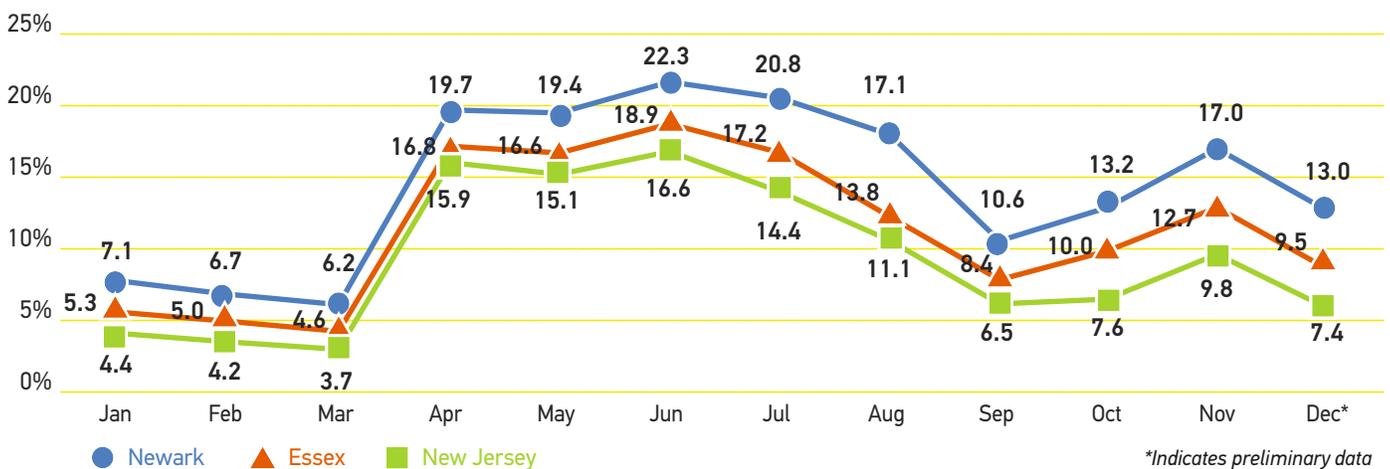
Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Rates are not seasonally adjusted and are annual averages. Please note that data reported in previous Newark KIDS COUNT reports have been updated to reflect revised inputs, re-estimation and new statewide controls, per the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Data retrieved February 21, 2021 from <https://www.bls.gov/data/>.

Trends in Newark

Unemployment

Annual data from 2015 to 2019 show that Newark's unemployment rates were declining in lockstep with Essex County and New Jersey. In 2019, Newark's unemployment rate, although higher than that of Essex and the state, was at a low of 6.0 percent (see Figure 1). However, monthly data collected from January through December of 2020 show how COVID-19 disrupted this progress. Figure 2 indicates that Newark's unemployment rate jumped from 6.2 percent in March 2020 to 19.7 percent in April 2020. Unemployment rates continued to remain high in Newark throughout the spring and summer of that year, with a slight decrease beginning in September. Rates began to creep upwards as the fall progressed into winter.

Figure 2: 2020 Monthly Unemployment Rate



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics. Rates are not seasonally adjusted. Data retrieved February 21, 2021 from <https://www.bls.gov/data/>.

COVID-19 Testing

As the city reeled from the economic downturn, many residents became ill with COVID-19. In April 2020 alone, more than 8,000 polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests were conducted for adults living in Newark ages 18 and older (see Figure 3). A PCR test is considered one of the more sensitive tests for checking if one is ill with COVID-19. For that same month, more than 4,700 tests came back positive. Testing increased as the year progressed, and from March through December 2020, more than 127,000 tests were administered to adults living in Newark, with 16 percent of those resulting in a positive case. These positive cases reflect all adults with and without children; however, the prevalence of COVID-19 positive test results among Newark’s adults undoubtedly impacted children living throughout the city.

Figure 3: 2020 PCR COVID-19 Tests, Adults Ages 18 and Older

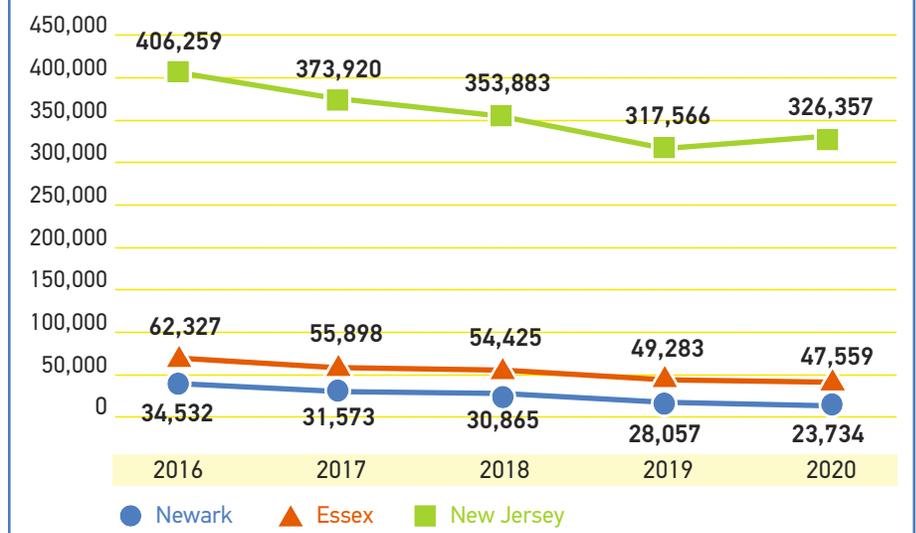
	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Total Tests	1,391	8,037	13,383	16,539	11,600	11,617	8,479	14,081	20,295	22,345	127,767
# Positive	804	4,736	1,870	941	732	815	579	2,095	4,093	4,234	20,899
% Positive	58	59	14	6	6	7	7	15	20	19	16

Source: City of Newark, Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard. <https://newarkcovid19.com/data>. Data reflect the number of tests for the period of March-December 2020. Data may include duplicates, as each figure represents the number of tests and not unique test recipients.

SNAP and TANF Utilization in Newark

Despite high rates of unemployment throughout the summer, usage of public benefits programs, such as SNAP or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), did not increase among Newark’s children from June of 2019 to June of 2020. Figure 4 shows that the number of Newark’s children receiving NJ SNAP benefits declined both from 2016 to 2020 as well as in the one-year comparison between 2019 and 2020. The state overall experienced a decline in child recipients over a five-year period similar to Newark’s, yet the one-year trend data differ. Statewide, children receiving NJ SNAP increased by more than 8,000 between 2019 and 2020.

Figure 4: Children Receiving NJ SNAP



Source: N.J. Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development; data are for June of each year. State and county data retrieved from <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/news/cps.html>.

Looking at data in rough six-month increments for January, June and December of 2020, Newark and Essex County saw a decline in the number of children receiving NJ SNAP in the first half of 2020, but those figures later increased between June and December of 2020. The changes in SNAP enrollment in Newark alone were substantial— from June 2020 to December of 2020, child recipients increased by more than 10,000 individuals.

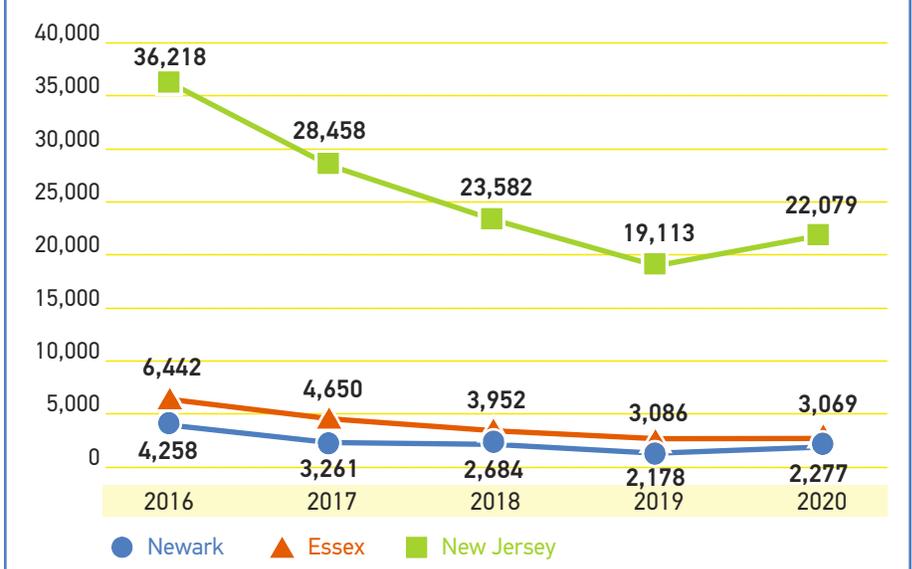
For TANF, annual data from June of 2019 and 2020 reveal similar trends to NJ SNAP figures (Figure 6) — declines in Newark and Essex recipients but increases in statewide child recipients. Yet the monthly data do not follow the same trends as the NJ SNAP figures. From January to December 2020 (Figure 7), Newark and Essex saw very slight increases, while statewide data show a slight decline. Overall, the change in the number of children living in families receiving TANF has been less pronounced than the trends shown in SNAP recipients.

Figure 5: Children Receiving NJ SNAP

	Jan 2020	Jun 2020	Dec 2020
Newark	27,291	23,734	33,874
Essex	46,610	47,559	56,021
New Jersey	301,901	326,357	354,408

Source: N.J. Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development. County and state data retrieved from <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/news/cps.html>. Data are as of the end of each month listed.

Figure 6: Children in Families Receiving TANF



Source: N.J. Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development; data are for June of each year. State and county data retrieved from <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/news/cps.html>.

Figure 7: Children in Families Receiving TANF

	Jan 2020	Jun 2020	Dec 2020
Newark	2,167	2,277	2,273
Essex	3,137	3,069	3,146
New Jersey	19,510	22,079	19,496

Source: N.J. Department of Human Services, Division of Family Development. County and state data retrieved from <https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/news/cps.html>. Data are as of the end of each month listed.

● Conclusion

Newark, like many other municipalities across the state, experienced a number of challenges as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Municipal leaders responded with much-needed support and guidance for residents, but unemployment data and the number of positive cases within the city indicate that public safety net programs are also necessary to ensure that Newark residents are able to meet basic needs. Although usage of safety net programs has varied, trends in NJ SNAP show the demand for additional assistance for families looking to have their nutritional needs met. One of the many significant obstacles of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the reduced capacity of social service agencies to provide in-person services, in order to meet social distancing guidelines. Agencies transitioned to providing virtual or remote support for the public, but families may rely on or prefer in-person help when completing applications in order to receive clarification on eligibility criteria and ask questions regarding the application form itself.

As more residents receive vaccinations and social distancing guidelines relax, it will be important to continue to monitor these data. Growth in usage of these programs as the months progress may reflect the long-term economic effects of this pandemic, even as schools reopen and more families return to work. It is likely that many children and their parents will need additional support after months of high unemployment rates. Analysis of trends from the Great Recession show that the economic recovery took roughly 6 to 8 years to restore pre-recession employment rates.⁴ Comprehensive policy solutions, like the recent federal stimulus package and expanded child tax credit, are important steps in ensuring that more families are able to afford basic necessities.

● References

¹ Adults living in households with children who lost employment income since March 13, 2020 in New Jersey, data are from responses collected Nov. 25, 2020–December 21, 2020 from the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey. Data retrieved February 22, 2021 from www.datacenter.kidscount.org

² Adults living in households with children who have little or no confidence in their ability to pay their next rent or mortgage payment on time in New Jersey, data are from responses collected Nov. 25, 2020–December 21, 2020 from the U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey. Data retrieved February 22, 2021 from www.datacenter.kidscount.org.

³ As reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey chart B17001, 2019 1-year estimates.

⁴ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. (2019). The Legacy of the Great Recession. Retrieved April 1, 2021 from <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/the-legacy-of-the-great-recession>.

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