

Changes in Dietary Intake During COVID-19 Among Youth in Urban Communities: Insights From the COACHES Study

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Objectives: Disruption to nutrition education and school meal programs and widespread reports of increased food insecurity due to COVID-19 have raised concerns about the potential effect on the dietary quality of youth. Accordingly, this study sought to examine the impact of the pandemic on the dietary intake of youth participating in the Creating Opportunities for Adolescents through Coaching, Healthy Eating, and Sports (COACHES) program, an intervention using coaches trained in trauma-informed coaching strategies to improve health of youth from at-risk communities.

Methods: The COACHES program recruited 6th and 7th grade students from five schools in New Orleans, LA. Students ($n = 67$) completed an adapted version of the CoRonavIrus Health Impact Survey (CRISIS) for Youth (V0.3) to assess dietary intake and perception

of health during the pandemic. Descriptive statistics were used to examine self-reported impact of the pandemic on eating behaviors.

Results: Among the students who completed the CRISIS questionnaire ($n = 67$, 11.7+/-0.73 yrs, 55.2% female, 41.8% overweight/obese), 49.3% reported an overall physical health decrease during the pandemic, 65.6% were not meeting recommendations for daily fruit and vegetable intake, and 72.7% consumed sugary beverages two or more times daily. However, more than one-third actually reported increasing fruit and vegetable consumption during the pandemic, and more than one-quarter reduced their sugary beverage intake. Boys were more likely than girls to report increased fruit and vegetable intake, and youth who were overweight or obese were more likely to report maintaining or improving their overall diet, though results were only significant at the 90% level ($P = 0.065$).

Conclusions: Despite challenges due to COVID-19, urban youth report improved dietary intake during the pandemic. These results highlight the importance of school-based intervention programs in meeting the nutrition needs of at-risk youth.

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