



2021

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# FOOD INSECURITY

## DURING COVID-19

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

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During the Covid-19 pandemic, a dramatic increase occurred in the number of households struggling to put enough food on the table. Shutdowns to prevent the spread of Covid-19 have resulted in tens of millions of lost jobs, reduced incomes, and financial precarity. As a result of this economic downturn, the United States is facing even higher levels of food insecurity than during the Great Recession.<sup>1</sup> Food banks, in turn, have seen

significant increases in visitors since the start of the pandemic, and many of these visitors are new to the pantry system, never having had to rely on food pantries in the past.<sup>2</sup> As part of the UJA Covid-19 Impact Study, we asked questions about this critical topic area and analyzed patterns of food insecurity by geography and key demographics.

The report focuses on two main areas:

1 | Overall Food Insecurity

2 | Free Food

## Study Methodology and Defining Jewish Households

The UJA Covid-19 Impact Study collected information from a **representative sample of 4,400 New York area adults** who are Jewish or living in a household with one or more Jewish adults to learn more about the ways the coronavirus pandemic has affected the lives and livelihoods of the Jewish community. The broad coverage area included the **five New York City boroughs, as well as Nassau, Suffolk, and Westchester counties**. To learn more about the methodology, you can read our [brief](#) or [detailed methodology report](#).

This study aims to understand the impact of Covid-19 on **all members of the Jewish community**, across all — and regardless of — levels of observance, religious belief, and belonging to Jewish communal organizations.

This study relies on an **expansive definition of who is a Jew** by considering anyone who identifies as a Jew or lives with a self-identified Jew as a member of the Jewish community. For the purposes of this study, a Jewish adult is defined as someone aged 18 and over who self-identifies as Jewish or partially Jewish, either religiously, ethnically, culturally, or because of family background. This study counts those respondents who identify religiously with both Judaism and another religion, such as Christianity or Buddhism, as Jewish respondents. A household is defined as a Jewish household if it includes one or more Jewish adults ages 18 and over. To learn more about this, please visit our report [“Who counts as Jewish in the survey.”](#)

# KEY FINDINGS

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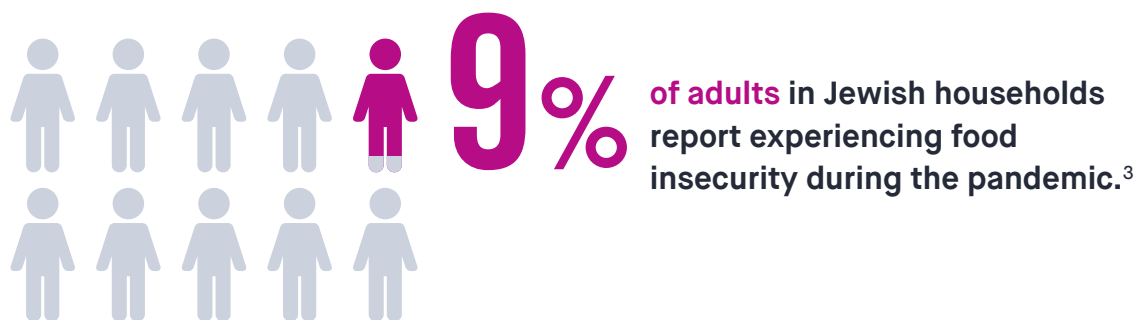
- 1** Nine percent of adults in Jewish households report experiencing food insecurity over the course of the pandemic
- 2** Adults who identify with a race or ethnic group other than white experience high levels of food insecurity  
While just 7% of non-Hispanic whites are food-insecure, 29% of adults who are either Hispanic, Asian, Black or some other non-white race report experiencing food insecurity.

- 3** Many food-insecure adults are not seeking help  
Six in ten food-insecure adults are not seeking food assistance from social service organizations, and most cite embarrassment as the major reason.

## SECTION 1

# OVERALL FOOD INSECURITY

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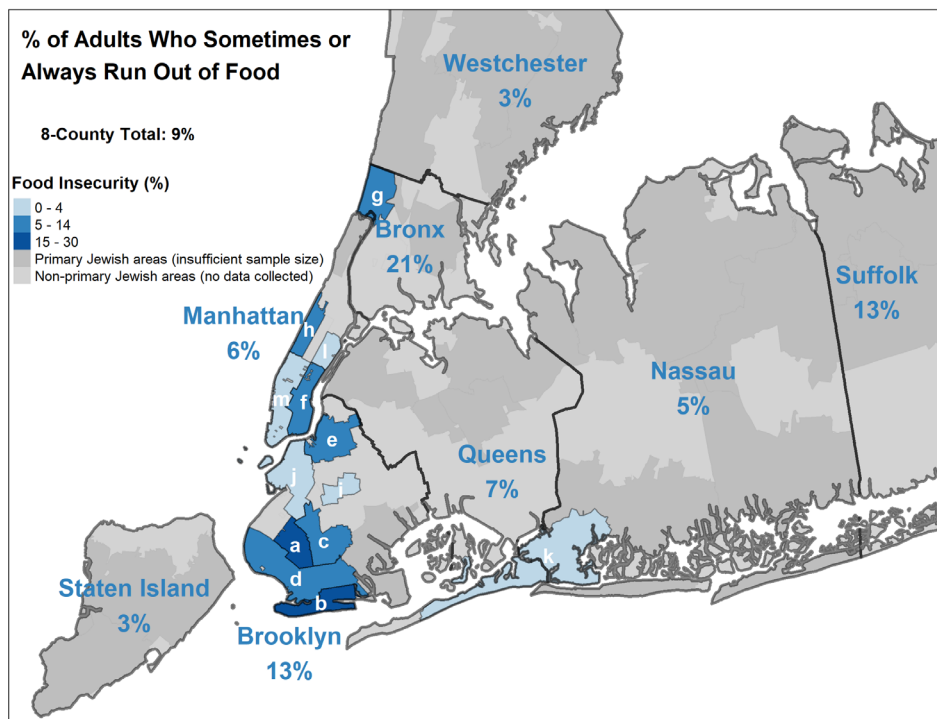


## SECTION 1: OVERALL FOOD INSECURITY

### Regional Differences

On average, **New York City counties have a slightly higher rate of adults in Jewish households experiencing food insecurity (10%)** when compared to suburban counties (6%).

The city's rate of food insecurity is driven by the high rates in the Bronx and Brooklyn. About 20% **of adults in the Bronx** and 13% of **adults in Brooklyn** report sometimes or always running out of food before having money to buy more. The high levels of food insecurity in these two boroughs reflect the high rate of Jewish households living in poverty in these areas. About 25% of Jewish adults in Brooklyn live in poor households according to this study's guidelines, and 12% are in near-poor households (see our report on [Poverty During Covid-19](#) for more information on poverty rates and the distinction between the poor and the near poor). In the Bronx, a little over 20% are poor or near poor. The near-poor households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity because they may not qualify for the same assistance and benefits as the poor, yet also may not have enough money to feed all members of their household.



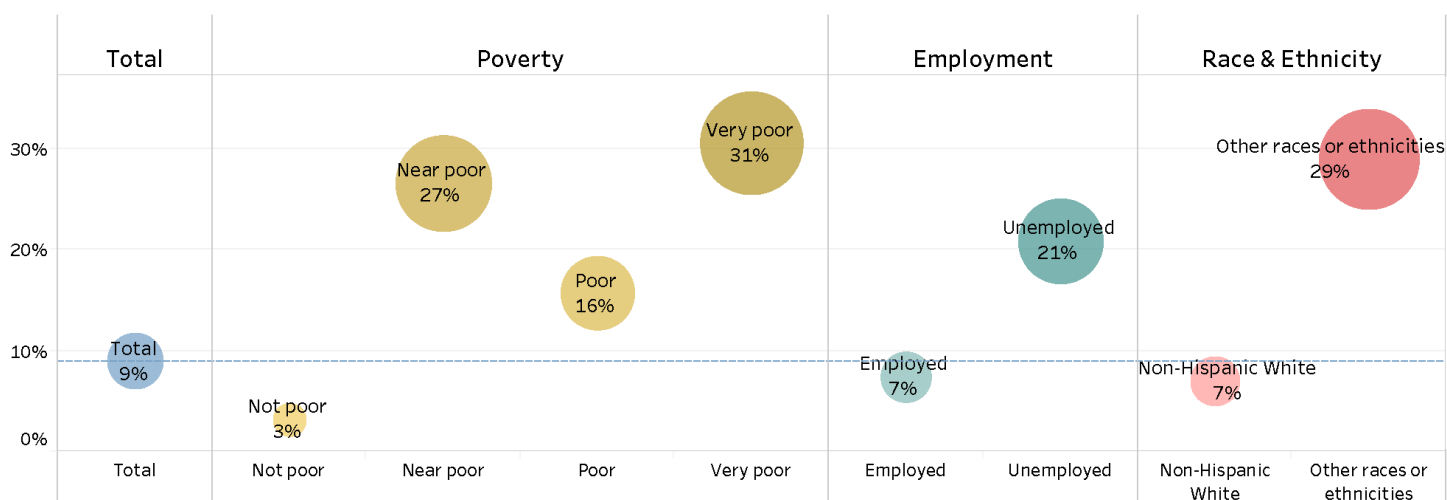
## SECTION 1: OVERALL FOOD INSECURITY

Neighborhood identifier	Neighborhood name	Percent
a	Borough Park	28%
b	Coney Island/Brighton Beach/Sheepshead Bay	22%
c	Flatbush/Midwood/Kensington	11%
d	Bensonhurst/Gravesend/Bay Ridge/Kings Bay/Madison	10%
e	Williamsburg	8%
f	Lower Manhattan East	6%
g	Riverdale/Kingsbridge	5%
h	Upper West Side	5%
i	Crown Heights	4%
j	Brownstone Brooklyn	2%
k	The Rockaways/Five Towns	2%
l	Upper East Side	1%
m	Lower Manhattan West	0%

## Social and Demographic Patterns

Hispanic or non-white adults, adults living in poverty, and unemployed adults report food insecurity at high rates.

FIGURE 1. % of Adults in Jewish Households Who Sometimes or Always Run Out of Food





SECTION 1: OVERALL FOOD INSECURITY

Ethnicity and race are important factors impacting food insecurity. **Non-white or Hispanic adults in Jewish households** report being food insecure at a rate more than four **times higher** than non-Hispanic white adults in Jewish households. One explanation is that poverty is much lower among non-Hispanic whites: while 22% of non-Hispanic whites are poor or near poor, 36% of other races or ethnicities are poor or near poor. In a similar vein, only one in ten non-Hispanic white adults is unemployed, while almost one in three non-white or Hispanic adults is. Finally, adults who are not U.S.-born are less likely to have local relatives whom they can depend on and thus will experience greater food insecurity.

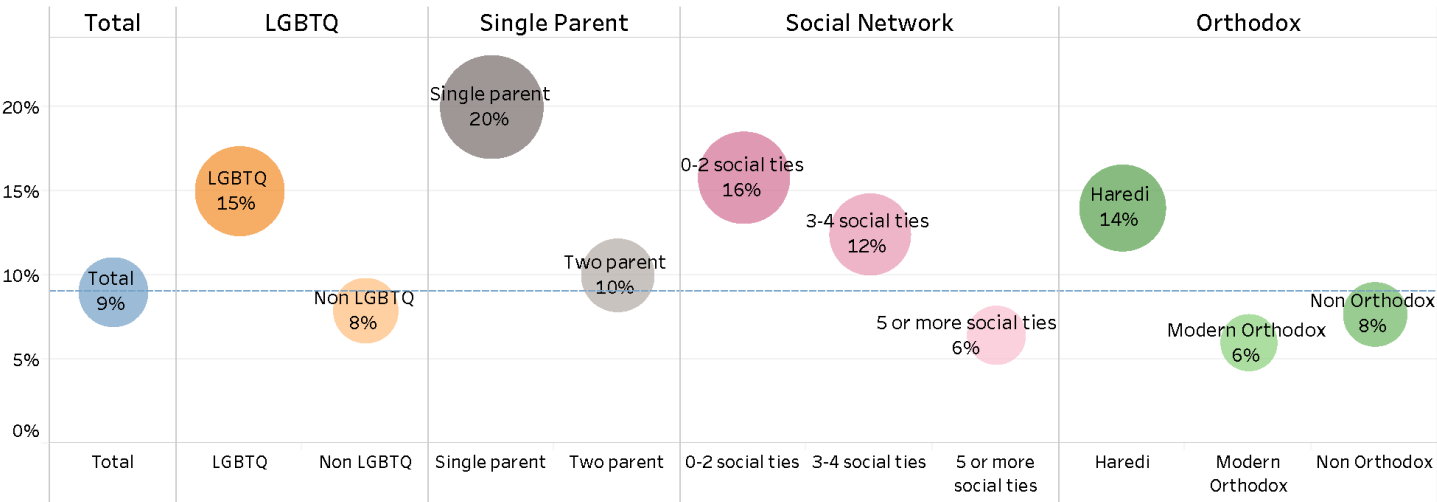
Not surprisingly, poverty also affects food insecurity. About **31% of adults in Jewish households who are very poor** according to the guidelines of this study report sometimes or always running out of food before they have money to purchase more. **About 27% of adults in near-poor households** report being food insecure compared to **16% of adults in poor households**. The higher percentage of near-poor households reporting food insecurity may reflect the fact that the near-poor often do not qualify for food benefit programs, making these households especially vulnerable to food insecurity.

Employment is another important factor that affects food insecurity. **Unemployed adults** report food insecurity at a rate **three times higher** than employed adults.

This study found a few other groups were notably vulnerable to food insecurity. **Adults in Jewish households who identify as LGBTQ (15%)** report sometimes or always running out of food at a higher rate than non-LGBTQ adults (**8%**). Also, **single-parent households (20%)** report sometimes or always running out of food at a higher rate than two-parent households (**10%**).

The survey indicates that those adults with few or no social ties (friends, family, or neighbors they can call on for help) are particularly at risk for food insecurity. About **16% of those with just a few social ties** experience food insecurity, compared to **only 6%** of those with large social networks.

FIGURE 2. % of Adults in Jewish Households Who Sometimes or Always Run Out of Food

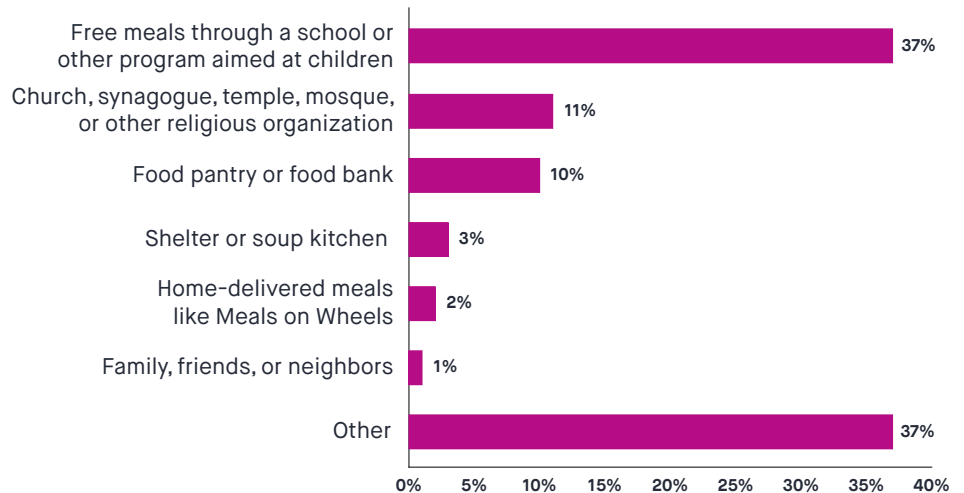


# FREE FOOD

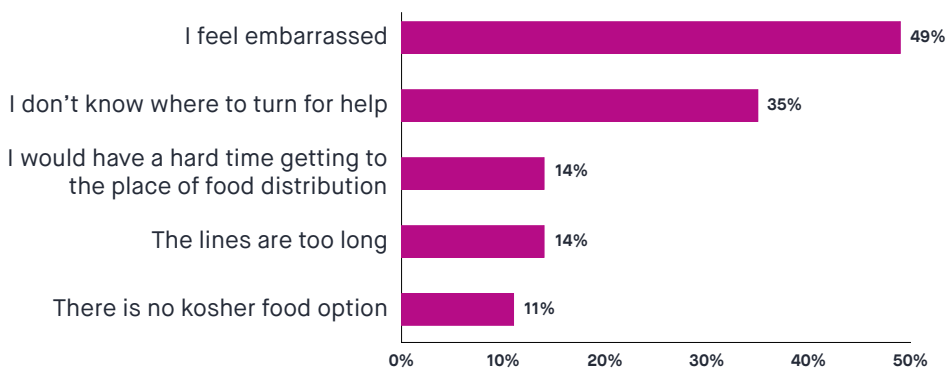
**Four in ten adults who report experiencing food insecurity were able to get free food at least twice through a social service organization. Over one-third (37%) received free meals through a school or other program aimed at children.**

Other significant sources of free food include religious organizations (11%) and food pantries or food banks (10%).

**FIGURE 3. Organizations Where Respondents Received Free Food**



**FIGURE 4. Reasons Respondents Are Not Seeking Help with Food**



**60% of food-insecure adults report not seeking help to get food. Almost half of respondents (49%) who did not seek help cite embarrassment as a reason for not seeking help.**

**Over one-third (35%) report that they do not know where to turn for help.**



# NOTES

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1. Wolfson, Julia A., and Cindy W. Leung. "Food Insecurity during Covid-19: An Acute Crisis with Long-Term Health Implications." *American Journal of Public Health* 110, no. 12 (December 2020): 1763–65. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.2020.305953>.
2. Morello, Paul. "The Food Bank Response to Covid, by the Numbers." *Feeding America* Blog. Accessed 31/8/21. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-blog/food-bank-response-covid-numbers>.
3. To determine if respondents are food insecure, they were asked the following question:  
**Since the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020**, how often, if at all, have you run out of food before you had money to buy more?
  1. Never
  2. Sometimes
  3. Always

Respondents who answered "Sometimes" or "Always" are considered food insecure.