

COVID-19 DATA SPOTLIGHT

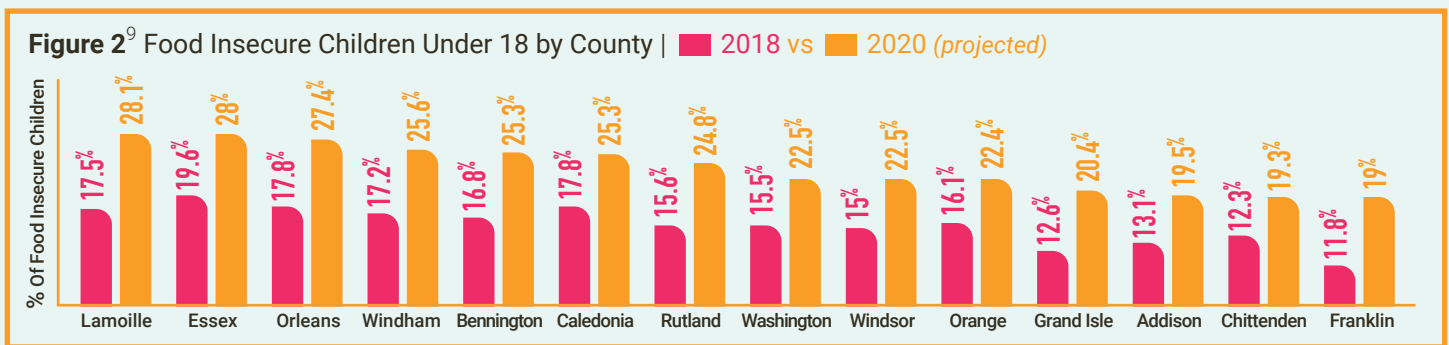
Recognizing that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the Early Childhood data landscape, this section shines a light on the most up to date data and how the EC system has responded to meet the evolving needs of children and families. The decision to separate COVID-19 related data from the main chapter content was intentional as 2020 data will be an outlier and may not be comparable to previous years.



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted needs and gaps across the Early Childhood system including access to housing, health, nutrition, transportation, income, child care, mental health, and education, especially for children and families of color, those for whom English is a second language, those with lesser incomes, children with special health care needs (CSHCN) and those in more rural geographic locations.

Food Security

As can be seen in **Figure 2**, the percent of food insecure children under 18 has risen from 2018 in every Vermont County due to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁹ Vermont has been quick to act in adapting school meal programs to meet the needs of all children under 18 regardless of income or school enrollment in accordance with the USDA out of school time meal program guidelines from the start of the pandemic in March 2020 through June 2021.



Housing

To reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19 in congregate settings, Vermont families staying in group shelters were moved to motels. As a result, **the number of children under 18 staying in Vermont’s Publicly Funded Homeless Shelters decreased sharply from 1,102 in 2018 to 682 in 2020.**¹⁰

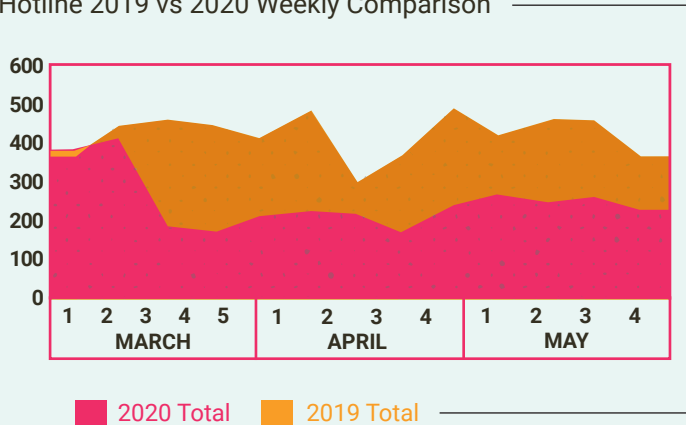
Families seeking services

In addition to local and regional mutual aid efforts connecting community members in need of resources to services and individuals, Help Me Grow Vermont reported that **calls from families seeking support increased by 600% during the period from March 15 through June.**¹¹

Child Protection

The number of children under 9 in out-of-home custody fell from 659 in 2019 to 541 in 2020 as of the September 30th point in time count.¹² As can be seen in **Figure 3**, the number of calls to the Child Protection Hotline fell month over month during the stay home stay safe order.¹³ Anecdotally, with many children not participating in their traditional care and community settings, mandated reporters may not have had contact or ‘eyes on’ children to monitor their safety or to report potential abuse or neglect.

Figure 3¹³ Number of Calls to the Child Protection Hotline 2019 vs 2020 Weekly Comparison



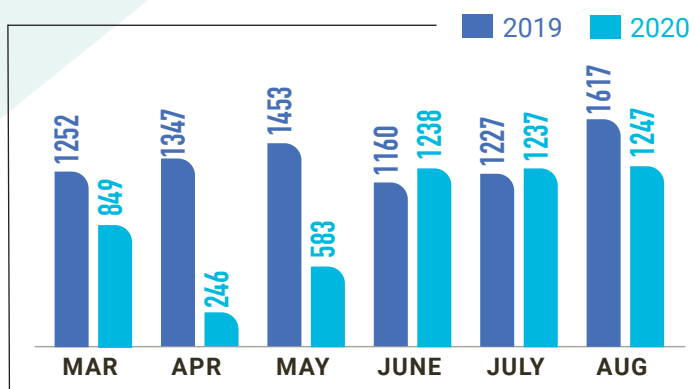
Early Childhood & Family Mental Health

As can be seen in **Figures 17 and 18 on page 22**, both the number of children served by Designated Agencies (DAs) and those receiving crisis services went down in 2020. These rates are not reflective of the need described by communities and families across Vermont or the availability of support through DAs. Results of an August survey from the Child Development Division (CDD)¹⁴ from 559 of 1,096 child care programs found that several of the following **challenging behaviors have emerged in young children: struggling with problem solving; increased sensory sensitivity; struggling with transitions; regression in toileting; struggle following directions; and trouble getting along with peers.**

Immunizations

As can be seen in **Figure 4**, in March, April, May and August of 2020, there were far fewer vaccine doses given to children between 4 and 6 years than in the corresponding months of 2019.¹⁵ Routine care and immunizations are a key strategy for prevention of disease and promotion of well-being.

Figure 4¹⁵ Vaccine Doses Reported by Month: Children 4-6 Yrs



Child Care

The COVID-19 pandemic has only complicated the already dire struggle to secure high-quality, affordable child care for Vermont’s youngest and most vulnerable children and their families. The August CDD survey found that:¹⁴

- **76% of the programs were already open while 2% responded that they were closed and not reopening.**
- **70% of the children attending programs had been enrolled before, 18% had never attended any child care program before, and 12% had attended a different program.**

In response to Governor Scott’s directive to set up school-age child care hubs in order for families to be able to return to work, Vermont Afterschool and the Department for Children and Families were able to identify and support **40 hub programs with 84 sites for a total capacity of almost 5,000 students** during remote learning days and out of school hours.¹⁶

Schools

In September 2020, 58% of schools operated in a hybrid model with both in person and remote instruction, 15% were fully remote, and 27% were fully in person.¹⁷ Disparities in digital connectivity while previously a hardship, have meant limited or disrupted access to education.

Vermont’s Commitment to Supporting Children, Families & the Early Childhood System

While the long-term effects of this pandemic are unknown, the disruption to regular schedules of health, education, and developmental services may have lasting effects on child outcomes; as will the economic impact on families, communities and the State. Vermont’s children, families, and professionals across sectors have demonstrated strength and resilience through this public health crisis. Vermont is committed to supporting each and every child and family using the Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) as a vision and guide.

“ There truly is no area that the COVID-19 pandemic has not touched for children and families.