

## **In U.S. Households COVID Pandemic Boosted Food Diversity and Diet Quality**

Study investigates the impact of the [coronavirus disease 2019](#) (COVID-19) pandemic on food quality and diversity in households in the United States of America.



### **Study**

The current study investigates the overall dietary changes that occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic using household-level purchase data from the NielsenIQ consumer panel. Two diet quality indicators, including the Berry Index and USDA Score, were used to measure changes in food diversity and adherence to [dietary guidelines](#), respectively, after the pandemic.

The Berry Index, which ranges between zero for the least diverse and one for the most diverse, is based on household-level expenditure shares for the 24 food categories used by the [Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion](#) (CNPP).

The USDA Score system also uses household-level expenditure shares for the same CNPP food categories. Each share is a portion of category expenditure relative to total household food purchase expenditures. In contrast to the Berry Index, the USDA Score system involves comparing each household's expenditure share to the recommended expenditure shares of the USDA [Thrifty Food Plan](#).

Based on the two indicators, event-study differences were constructed. Events that occurred when the [American schools](#) were closed were considered as pandemic-induced events.

Event-scale differences were assessed using the two indicators for one month, which was extended to six months before (leads) and after (lags) the school closure date in each [household's state](#). The seasonality factor in the diet was considered by comparing the purchasing behavior of the current study month with exactly one year earlier for the same household.

### **Results**

Consistent with previous reports, the current study confirmed that the COVID-19 [pandemic](#) significantly influenced the food-purchasing behavior of American households. The Berry Index data observed modest temporary increases in food diversity of up to 2.6% compared to the previous year.

USDA Score data indicated temporary increases in [diet quality](#) of up to 8.5% compared to the previous year's estimates. These findings were based on 41,579 households.

Even after six months of school closure, higher scores above normal levels were observed, which implied overall [good maintenance](#) of dietary diversity and quality.

Although households with different demographic characteristics had similar dietary patterns, minor changes were observed in certain households. For example, households with young children, households that did not own a vehicle, and [low-income](#) households exhibited smaller increases in USDA Score and Berry Index scores.

### **Conclusion**

The current study highlights an increase in household-level [food diversity](#) and healthfulness during the lag phase, which occurs six months after the pandemic.

Based on the Berry Index, food diversity increased for a few months during the school closure period, followed by a marginal increase that eventually stabilized. [Food healthfulness](#) measured by the USDA Score indicated a rise of 8.5% in the first months of the closure period, followed by a steady decline.

### **Source:**

<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20240721/COVID-pandemic-boosted-food-diversity-and-diet-quality-in-US-households-study-finds.aspx>