



Policy
Collaboratory

COVID-19 RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Mobility and Health Impacts Study



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Can you explain the goal of your research and how the project is structured?

"COVID-19 is affecting the health of communities large and small across North Carolina, and we are interested in understanding how the pandemic is impacting people's travel in the state. Our goal is to research the interrelationships between public health policies, executive actions, mobility changes, traffic safety, and the transmission and impacts of COVID-19 to inform policy decisions and decision makers in North Carolina. This project is led by the UNC Highway Safety Research Center and brings together a team of multidisciplinary research partners from across the UNC System, including UNC-CH's Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research, Gillings School of Global Public Health, Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, and the NC State University Department of Statistics."

Can you summarize some of the main points from your Technical Briefs?

"Our Technical Brief from September provided initial findings related to mobility and health trends in the state due to the pandemic. For mobility trends, we found a significant reduction in vehicle travel in North Carolina following the March 10, 2020, State of Emergency Declaration. Rural vehicle travel decreased by 62% compared with urban travel, which decreased by 46%. We also found significant decrease in works trips overall with the largest drop in urban areas. We attribute these differences to the higher likelihood of people in rural areas being essential workers, as well as lacking broadband access, thus cannot work remotely and were not able to reduce their travel as much. We now have another Technical Brief (November 6, 2020) which outlines research to assess potential safety implications of recent legislation introduced or passed in North Carolina to relax licensing requirements currently in place for new teenage drivers. The closure of schools and the statewide stay-at-home order clearly had a substantial effect on young drivers in North Carolina. New permits and licenses dropped off sharply beginning March 2020. Crashes involving young drivers also decreased, likely reflecting fewer trips by young drivers since schools and other activities were cancelled."