

# COVID Impacts

June 2021

## IMPACT OF COVID-19 IN THE MIGRANT COMMUNITY OF SOUTHERN ARIZONA

The Southern Arizona region has been the stage of massive COVID-19 spikes that have disproportionately affected the migrant community that inhabit it. By June of 2020, 40% of COVID-19 cases in Arizona were coming from Yuma and Santa Cruz County, counties that border Mexico and where large migrant communities reside. In April 2020, the United States reached agreements with Mexico to limit all non-essential travel to the country. These measures have since then been extended on multiple occasions and remain as of June of 2021. Tourism and commerce have been affected, impacting the economies of the Southern border, which greatly depend on its dynamic relationship with the border communities of Mexico. The Migrant Protection Protocols have created a surge of migrants stuck at the border in their request for asylum given rise to health and sanitary concern on both sides of the border.

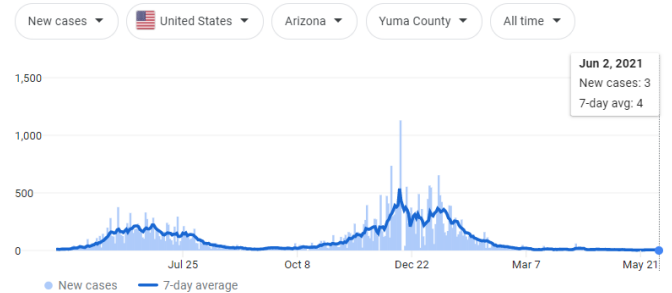
### COVID-19 IN SOUTHERN ARIZONA

In January of 2021, Arizona had the highest COVID-19 positivity rate in the world. Trends such as this one has disproportionately affected counties that border Mexico and the immigrant communities that inhabit them. These communities are characterized by a floating composition, made up of individuals with constant mobility between Mexico and the United States.

COVID-19 is an extremely communicable virus, and this presented very particular challenges in areas of high mobility such as the U.S. – Mexico border region. In order to flatten the infection curve, coordination between authorities on either side of the border has been crucial. Communication between the Ministry of Health of Mexico and the Arizona Department of Health was paramount to identify the social determinants of health that played crucial roles in the pandemic, such as the distribution of health resources, social class, work conditions, immigrant status, gender, and health history. For example, many households in the border are multigenerational, which often made it extremely difficult to properly quarantine when needed. Furthermore, the population of the border region has a high incidence of chronic illnesses that increased the risk for COVID-19 complications.

#### New cases and deaths

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Yuma County became a hotspot during December of 2020 and January of 2021, when the positivity rate rose to 33%, with approximately 400 to 500 cases every day.

In addition to coordinating efforts between authorities on both sides of the border, the Department of Health led a massive effort to work with the migrant farmworkers of the area. Approximately 75% of farmworkers in the United States are Latino Immigrants, and 50% of them do not have authorization to work in the United States. Farmworkers face particular vulnerabilities due to their mobility between countries, their immigration status and their work conditions. In response, efforts to raise COVID-19 awareness and better health practices were paramount, as is the prompt distribution of vaccines.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT OF BORDER CLOSURE

On March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, in order to stop the spread of the coronavirus, the United States reached an agreement with Mexico and Canada to stop all non-essential travel and close the borders. The closure of the southern border continues as of today, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, with no known end date.

The border closure has had a significant impact in the lives of the people who live in the region. Families and friends have been separated, and the constant influx of people has stopped, negatively affecting many of the businesses that depend on the constant mobility of the border.

Traffic in the border has been reduced. In March of 2020, only 187,404 pedestrians crossed at the border in Nogales, in comparison with 285,601 in 2019. While there is still some movement between the regions, the reduced influx of people has resulted in a number of businesses closing their doors and massive economic losses for the border.

## SURGE OF ASYLUM SEEKERS

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the Southern border of Arizona and Mexico has been witness of a surge of immigrants and asylum seekers who wish to cross into the United States.

In February of 2021, Customs and Border Patrol agents in the Tucson Sector apprehended 12,300 adults, while the Yuma Sector arrested additional 3000. This is a significant increase from January, when 9,500 and 850 were apprehended respectively. Additionally, there has also been an increase of the families stopped, rising from 400 in January to 1000 in February in the Tucson sector, and 560 to over 1,700 in Yuma. Moreover, unaccompanied minors crossing the border increased from 870 to 1400 in the Tucson sector, while Yuma saw an increase from 210 to 370.

The families apprehended at the border have been transported in buses to shelters operating in Tucson and Phoenix, such as Casa Alitas, led by Catholic Community Services, or the Welcome Center in Phoenix. These shelters have undertaken considerable efforts to promote social distance, hand hygiene, and masking as well as other measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 such as accessibility to diagnostic tests and health care.

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The researchers: A cross-national team of over 30 researchers led by Dr. Lori Wilkinson, Dr. Kiera Ladner and Dr. Jack Jedwab, received funding from CIHR for this study COVID-19's differential impact on the mental and emotional health of Indigenous Peoples and Newcomers: A socioeconomic analysis of Canada, US and Mexico.

The study: The team has been collecting data in Canada since March 9 and the United States since March 27, 2020. Ongoing survey waves now include Mexico. Our goal is to measure and follow the changes in attitudes, behaviours, health and socioeconomic outcomes among persons living in all three countries using a mixed methodology of surveys and unstructured interviews.

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