

COVID-19, Latino Working-Age Adults, and Citizenship

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Since 1992, the UCLA Health Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture (CESLAC) has provided cutting-edge, fact-based research, education, and public information about Latinos, their health, their history, and their roles in California society and economy.

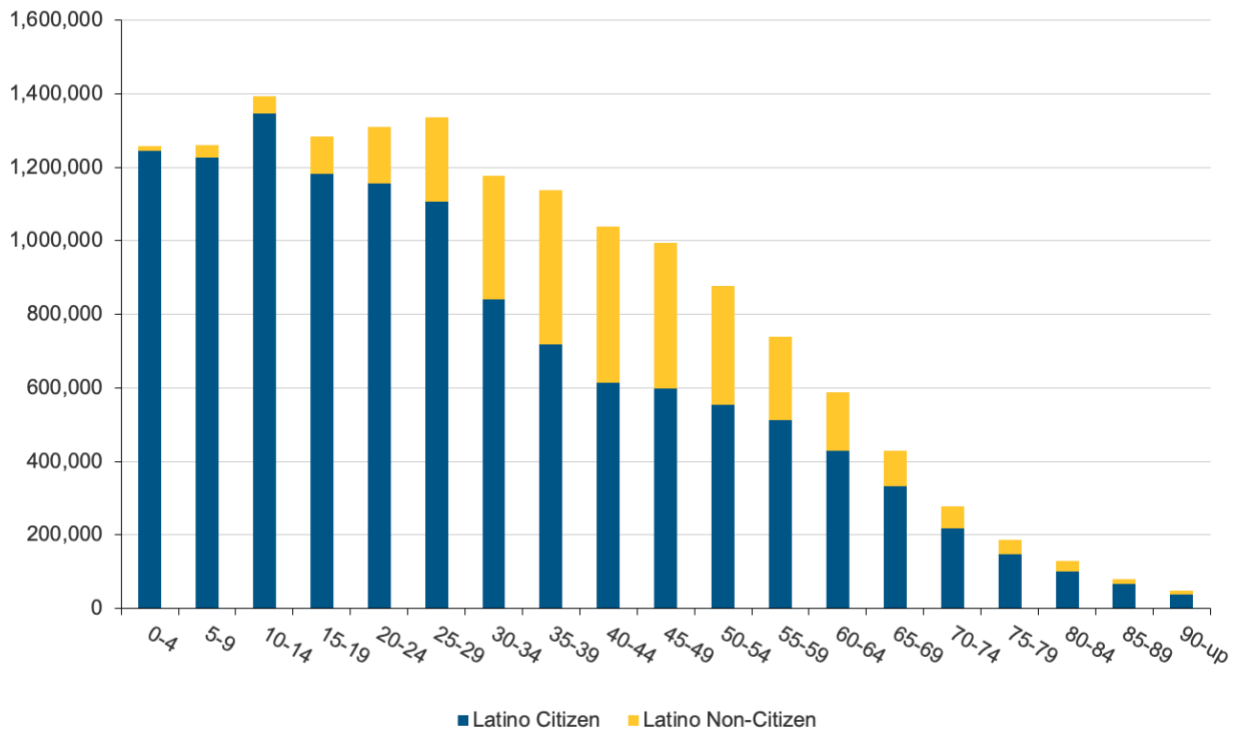
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The coronavirus is an opportunistic predator, striking essential workers who keep California’s society functioning, doing jobs that cannot be done from home. These essential jobs usually require employees to work in close proximity or to interact with customers face-to-face. The data show that many of these jobs are filled by Latinos who have not yet become citizens.

Figure 1, below, is a cross-section of California’s Latino population by five-year age cohorts: 0-4 years, 5-9, 10-14, and so on. The height of the column indicates the total number of Latinos in the corresponding age group. For example, there are over 1,200,000 Latinos ages 0-4 (first column), but fewer than 50,000 ages 90 and up (last column). The blue portion of each age group’s column shows the number who are United States citizens, and the yellow portion shows the number of non-citizens.

When it comes to children aged 0-17, 97% are U.S. citizens. By contrast, of Latinos in their prime working years, only 68% of those aged 50-64 and 61% of those aged 35-49 are citizens. Because these two adult age groups are the ones most likely to be working essential jobs, this means that non-citizens are being exposed disproportionately to the coronavirus. Hence, they are more likely to become infected, and therefore have a higher chance of dying, compared to younger and older age groups, who are also more likely to be U.S. citizens.

Figure 1. Latino Citizenship by 5-Year Age Cohort, California, 2018



Data provided by the California Department of Public Health on COVID-19–associated deaths do not provide information about decedents’ immigration or citizenship status. We provide this demographic profile to give context showing how Latino non-citizens are concentrated in the age groups 35-49 and 50-64. They are more likely to be employed as essential workers, and therefore are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19.

Farm workers provide a good example of how age, citizenship, essential jobs, and COVID-19 intersect to deadly effect. The recent COVID-19 Farmworker Study (COFS) estimated that over 90% of California’s farm workers were born in Mexico. Their median age was 38. Farm workers have an annual average income of \$18,000, earned at jobs in which nearly half of them were not provided with personal protective equipment (PPE). More than two-thirds of these workers do not have health insurance. The combination of these factors makes California’s farm workers a natural target for the coronavirus.

Many construction workers, packing house workers, truck drivers, auto mechanics, gardeners, and people in similar occupations are also non-citizens, working low-wage jobs that provide neither PPE nor health insurance.

The average American thinks most Latinos are recently arrived immigrants, but the truth is that 80% of California’s 15 million Latinos are U.S. citizens. The 20% who are not yet citizens are concentrated in occupations and industries that expose them to the coronavirus. Their work providing the state’s food and doing other essential jobs needs to be supported by adequate access to PPE, testing, public health education, and access to health care services.

Methods

Data on COVID-19 cases, stratified by race/ethnicity and by age group, were furnished by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) on August 11, 2020. Population denominators to calculate the rate of cases per 100,000 were tabulated from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), the latest available.

Reference. COVID-19 Farmworker Study. Preliminary Data Brief, July 27, 2020. Available at: <http://covid19farmworkerstudy.org>. Accessed August 11, 2020.

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