

EMORY

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SCHOOL OF  
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HEALTH



# The State of *Child Health* and Well-Being in Georgia 2025

## Methodology

Report results are from a survey of parents living in Georgia with at least one child under the age of 18 who lives in their household. Emory Center for Child Health Policy conducted the poll with Ipsos Public Affairs using KnowledgePanel, a probability-based web panel, supplemented with external online opt-in. Hispanic parents were oversampled.

The survey was available in English and Spanish and was fielded between January 27 and March 4, 2025. There were 987 qualified responses and a 75% qualification rate.

Survey weights were developed using American Community Survey 2023 benchmark data to ensure results are representative of all Georgia parents with children ages 0-17 years. Survey weighted results are presented. For the overall sample, the margin of error is  $\pm 4.8$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level for a point estimate equal to 50%.

Using self-reported race and ethnicity, stratified groups included Black non-Hispanic, Hispanic, and white non-Hispanic and are abbreviated as Black, Hispanic, and white in this report. Rural/non-rural stratification was done using rural county designation from the Georgia State Office of Rural Health.<sup>1</sup>

\*non-Hispanic white hereafter “white,” non-Hispanic Black, hereafter “Black”



## Introduction

Georgia's children face a complex and growing number of challenges that impact their health. Social media is ever-present, mental health is declining, and opioids are readily available. These issues unfold against the backdrop of economic instability, educational inequities, and safety concerns.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly 3 million children live in Georgia.<sup>3</sup> That's 25% of the state's population. Georgia's children are unequally affected by poverty, with rates almost twice as high as those of adults and seniors.<sup>4-6</sup> This economic vulnerability magnifies the impact of other challenges, limiting access to opportunity, stability, and overall well-being.

**This report provides a comprehensive look at the status of Georgia's children in 2025 from the perspective of parents surveyed statewide.** It is the first report from the Rollins School of Public Health to track the well-being of Georgia's children over time. The report separates data by race and by geography—specifically comparing urban and rural communities—highlighting where disparities persist and where progress is needed the most.

This initiative elevates the lived experiences of real families and aims to inform the public, guide legislators, and help set a clear, shared agenda to improve outcomes for Georgia's next generation.



## Top Five Concerns for Georgia Parents

Parents were asked to rank their top three concerns for their children. This list provides what is top of mind for parents as they think about their children’s health and safety.

Overall, education and school quality emerged as the top concern for Georgia parents, with nearly two out of five parents ranking it among their top three. This was closely followed by social media use and experience (34%) and bullying (32%). Gun violence and mental health and suicide were ranked fourth and fifth, with about 25% of parents selecting them as top three concerns.

## Top 5 Concerns Georgia Parents Have for Children

	Concern	Overall , %
1	Education and school quality	39
2	Social media use/experiences on social media	34
3	Bullying, including cyber bullying	32
4	Gun violence	27
5	Mental health and suicide	25

When broken down by race and ethnicity, notable differences emerge in the top concerns of Georgia parents. Gun violence ranks highest among Hispanic (47%) and Black (38%) parents, while social media is the leading concern for white parents (41%). Racism is also a prominent concern, cited by 32% of Black parents and 24% of Hispanic parents. White parents more frequently identified physical activity and healthy eating (28%) as a top concern, whereas drug and alcohol use (28%) ranked highly among Hispanic parents.





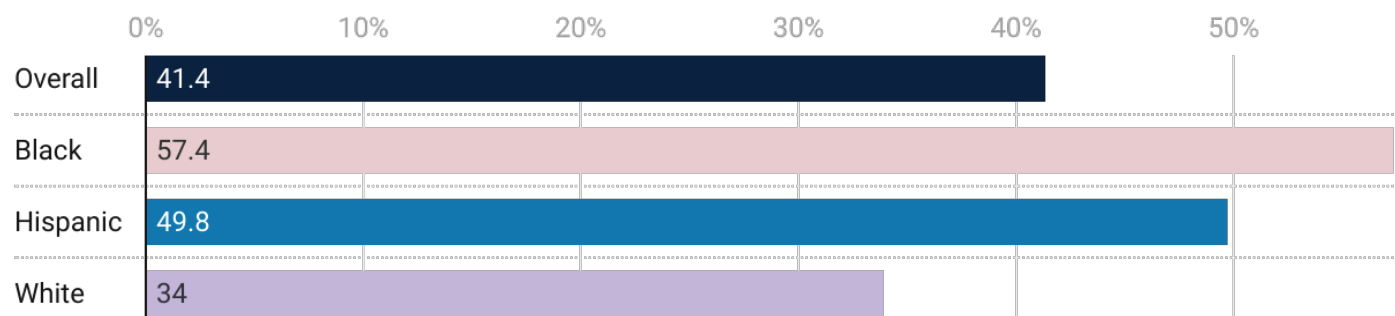
# Top 5 Concerns Georgia Parents Have for Children by Race/ Ethnicity

Concern	Race/ethnicity, %
<b>Black</b>	
Gun violence	38
Education and school quality	35
Racism	32
Bullying, including cyber bullying	29
Mental health and suicide	24
<b>Hispanic</b>	
Gun violence	47
Bullying, including cyber bullying	41
Drug and alohol use	28
Education and school quality	28
Racism	24
<b>White</b>	
Social media use/experiences on social media	41
Education and school quality	41
Mental health and suicide	28
Physical activity and healthy eating	28
Bullying, including cyber bullying	28

## Who Insures Georgia's Children?

Rates of uninsured children in Georgia are similar to national estimates,<sup>7</sup> with about 5% of parents reporting their children are not covered. The remainder of Georgia parents report their children have private insurance (56%) and PeachCare/Medicaid (41%). Sources of insurance vary by race. Fifty-seven percent of Black children are covered by PeachCare for Kids, compared to 50% for Hispanic and 34% of white children.

## Georgia Children with Medicaid/PeachCare Coverage, %



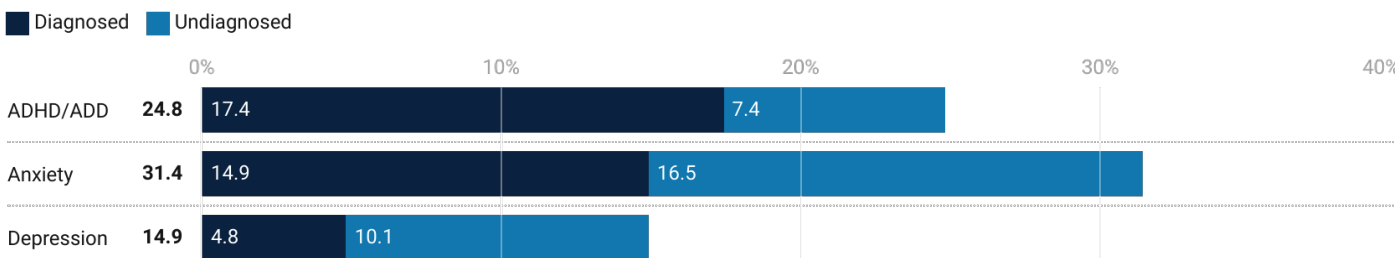
Among all children with Medicaid or PeachCare for Kids coverage in the past year, 13% lost coverage for a period. The most reported reasons for coverage changes were: family income was too high (31%), issues with paperwork (31%), switched to insurance from parent's employer (23%), and never received a renewal notice (21%).

## Parents are Worried About Opioids and Mental Health

Georgia parents reported attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD, 17%), anxiety (15%), and depression (5%) as the top mental and behavioral health diagnoses for their child or oldest child ages 6-17 years. Additionally, parents were asked if they are concerned their child might have a mental or behavioral health condition that has not yet been diagnosed. Taking diagnosed and undiagnosed conditions together, 31% of Georgia children may be managing anxiety, 25% ADHD/ADD, and 15% depression.

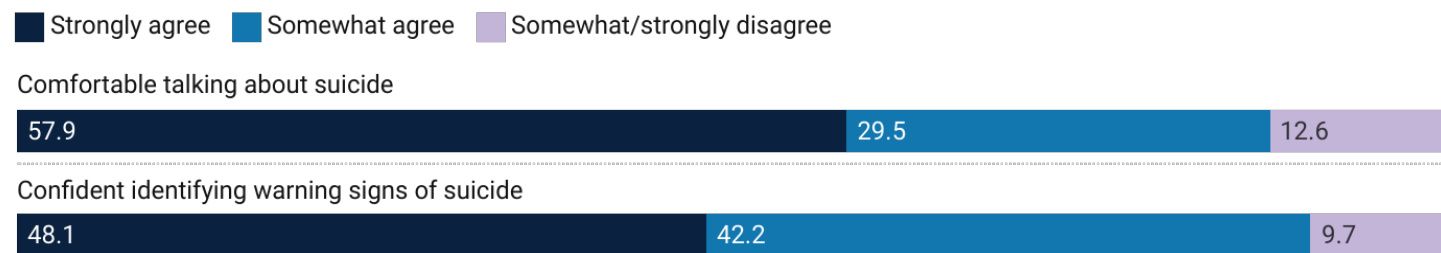
More than three out of five children (63%) in Georgia who have been diagnosed with mental or behavioral conditions are not receiving mental health services, according to their parents.

## Georgia Children with Diagnosed and Undiagnosed Mental and Behavioral Health Conditions Reported by Parents, %



Most parents strongly/somewhat agree they are comfortable talking to their child about suicide (87%) and are confident in identifying the warning signs of suicide in their child (90%). Despite parents feeling prepared to address suicide with their children, many believe common myths about suicide. For example, one in five parents report they worry that if they talk with their child about suicide, it could cause their child to think about suicide. Research shows conversations about suicide do not lead to suicide.<sup>8</sup> This common fear could prevent a parent from having a critical conversation with their child.

## Georgia Parents Prepared to Address Suicide with Their Children, %

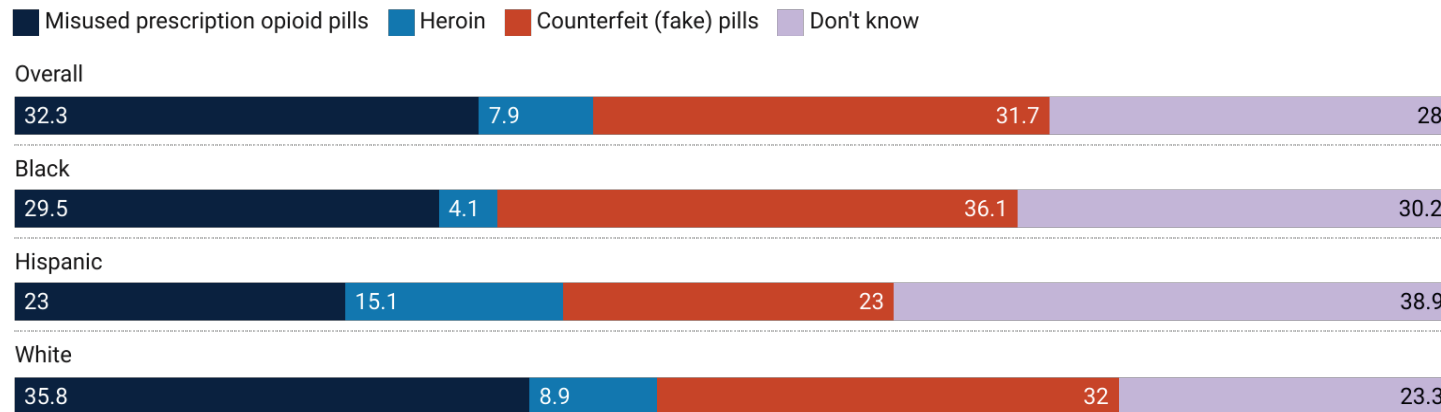


The leading cause of overdose deaths among children is counterfeit pills that contain fentanyl.<sup>9</sup> The Georgia Department of Public Health reported an increase in the number of adolescent deaths from overdose from 19 in 2019 to 46 in 2021 and an increase in the number involving fentanyl from 4 to 36 in the same period.<sup>10</sup>

When asked what they believe to be the main cause of opioid overdose death, 32% of parents polled cite counterfeit pills. Broken down by race and ethnicity, fewer Hispanic parents (23%) believe counterfeit pills to be the main risk for adolescent overdose deaths compared to white (32%) and Black (36%) parents. Despite the risk of counterfeit pills and overdose, only 44% of Georgia parents overall have discussed the danger of counterfeit pills with their child and just 35% are very confident in their ability to identify the signs of an opioid overdose.

## Substances Georgia Parents Believe Cause Adolescent Overdose Death, %

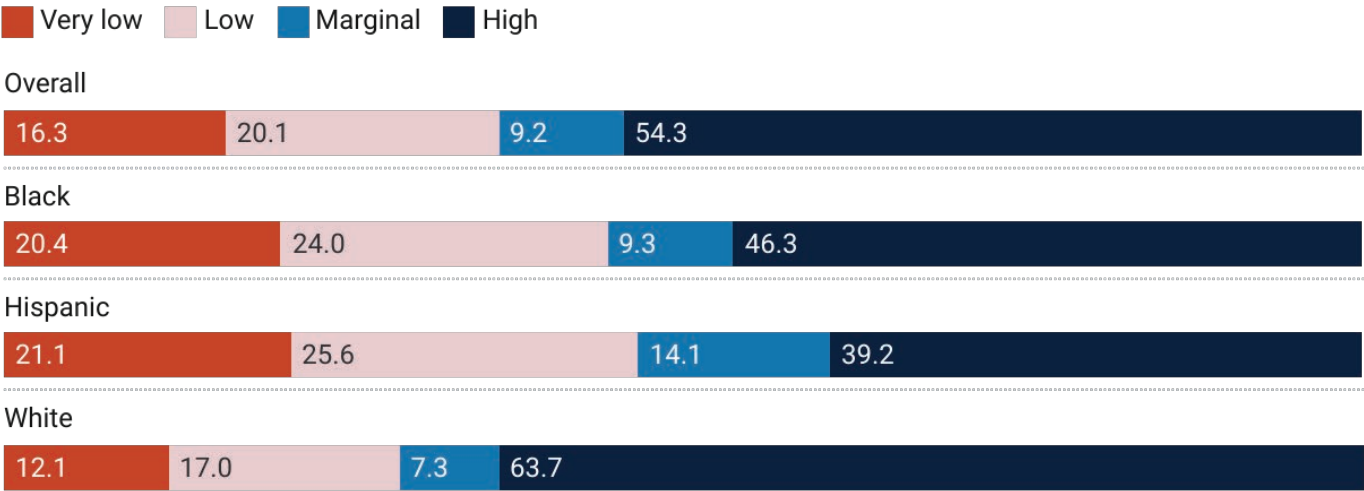
Among teens and adolescents who die of opiod overdose, which of these do you think is the main cause?



# Hunger and Food Access Impact Georgia's Children

More than 36% of Georgia households with children – or about 1 million Georgia children – are food insecure, using the USDA’s definition that includes households reporting low and very low food security. This is more than double the national rate of food insecurity among households with children reported in 2023 by the USDA – 17.9%.<sup>11</sup> Rates of food insecurity in Georgia are higher among Hispanic (47%) and Black households (44%) and lower among white households (29%).

## Food Security of Georgia Households with Children, %



USDA definition of food security: High - Households had no problems, or anxiety about, consistently accessing adequate food; Marginal - Households had problems at times, or anxiety about, accessing adequate food, but the quality, variety, and quantity of food intake were not substantially reduced; Low - Households reduced the quality, variety, and desirability of their diets, but the quantity of food intake and normal eating patterns were not substantially disrupted; Very low - At times during the year, eating patterns of one or more household members were disrupted and food intake reduced because the household lacked money and other resources for food.

More than half of all parents (53%) report that their family changed food spending habits in the past 12 months. The top ways that parents reduced food spending include 69% stopping or reducing eating out, 57% changing the types of food they eat and cook, 49% changing where they buy groceries, and 23% of parents skipping meals.

Between 2020 and 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, all children could get meals at school for free through a USDA waiver.<sup>12</sup> Since the end of federal waivers, access to free school meals varies, yet schools remain a primary source of nutrition for many children. When polled about free school meals, 91% of parents support free breakfast and lunch for all children in Georgia public schools.



# Vaccine Hesitancy: An Issue to Watch

When asked about perceived safety of routine childhood vaccines, 86% of parents say vaccines are very or somewhat safe. Of those, 37% believe vaccines are somewhat safe, suggesting a level of uncertainty. More Hispanic parents (92%) said vaccines are very or somewhat safe compared to other groups while slightly more white parents (6%) believe they are not at all safe. Parents said their children’s doctors are the most trusted source for accurate vaccine safety information with nearly three out of five parents trusting them a great deal followed by one-third of parents trusting the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Since the pandemic, the number of kindergarten students in Georgia fully vaccinated against measles has dropped from 93% in the 2019-2020 school year to 88% in 2023-2024.<sup>13</sup> This rate falls below the level needed for herd immunity.<sup>14</sup>

We asked parents their thoughts about school vaccine requirements. Most Georgia parents (55%) believe childhood vaccines should be required with exemptions for medical reasons (35%) or with exemptions for medical and religious reasons (20%), with slight differences in beliefs by race. Like other states in the Southeast, the current state policy for all children in any public or private childcare facility, pre-kindergarten, Head Start, nursery, or school requires vaccines but provides for medical and religious exemptions.<sup>15</sup>

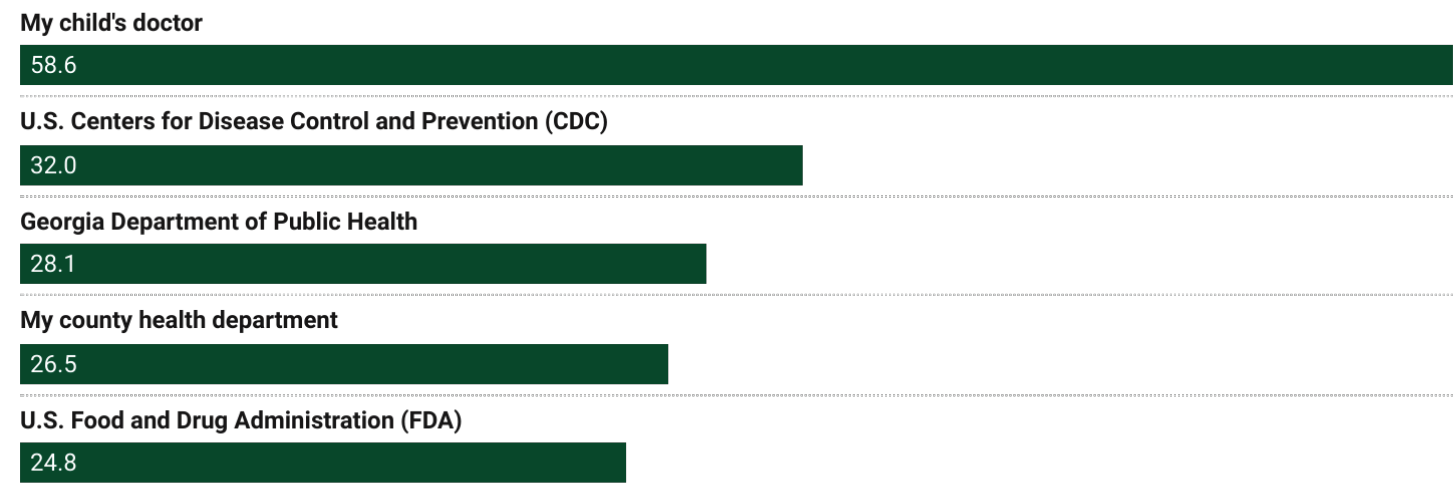
## Georgia Parents’ Beliefs About Routine Childhood Vaccine Safety, %

How safe do you think routine childhood vaccines for preventable diseases like measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and tetanus are?



# Vaccine Information Sources Trusted a Great Deal by Georgia Parents, %

How much do you trust the following individuals or agencies to provide accurate safety information about routine childhood vaccines?



## Parents Agree: Safe Gun Storage and School Safety are Critical

Forty-eight percent of Georgia parents report keeping firearms in their home or garage. The American Academy of Pediatrics, the largest national professional organization for pediatricians, recommends counseling families on firearm safety, including safe storage practices.<sup>16</sup> However, only about a quarter (27%) of Georgia parents report that their child’s health care provider asked them about safe gun storage in the past year. White parents reported a higher rate of gun ownership (57%) than Black (44%) and Hispanic (28%) parents.

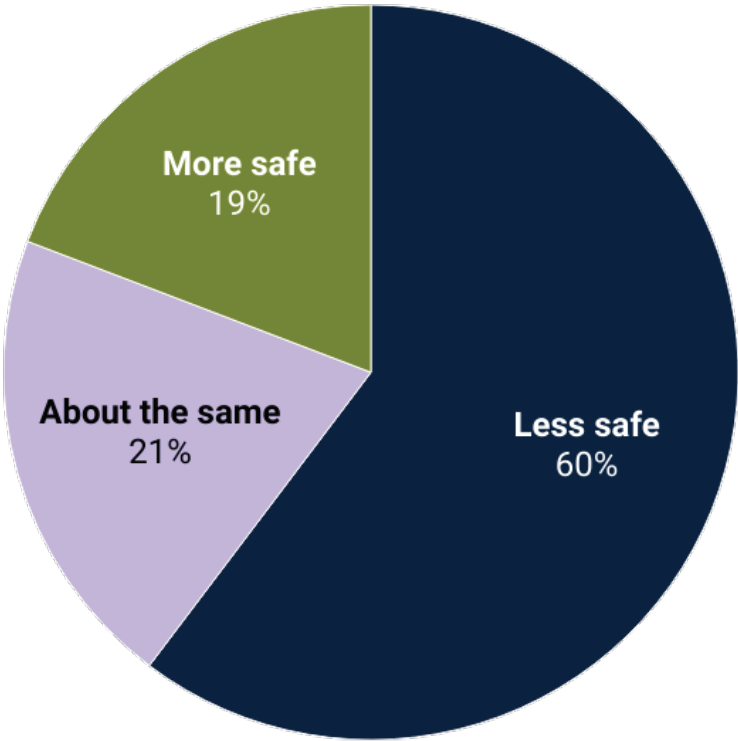
Georgia parents overwhelmingly support school safety measures included in HB268 that was recently signed into law.<sup>17</sup> These include a statewide alert protocol between schools for transferring students who have been flagged for potentially dangerous behavior (82% support/strongly support) and addressing mental health issues and promoting awareness (87% support/strongly support). There is also parental support for firearm safe storage legislation recommended by the Georgia Senate Safe Firearm Storage Study Committee including insurance and tax incentives for safe storage (80% support/strongly support) and child access prevention laws including civil and criminal penalties (77% support/strongly support).

By late January 2025 when the poll was fielded, 30% of parents said their child’s school had gone into lockdown in the current school year. Only 23% of parents said they were not at all worried about their children’s safety at school. Sixty percent of parents say they think schools are less safe now than they were 10 years ago.



# Georgia Parents’ Beliefs About School Safety

Compared to 10 years ago, do you think schools are safer now?



## Rural Health

While many indicators of child health addressed in this report were similar across geographic lines, differences in top concerns, beliefs about vaccines, and insurance coverage were notable. Across geographic lines, parents’ top concerns are largely aligned, with one key distinction: Parents in rural counties rank drug and alcohol use as their fourth-highest concern, while parents in urban and suburban areas place gun violence in that spot.

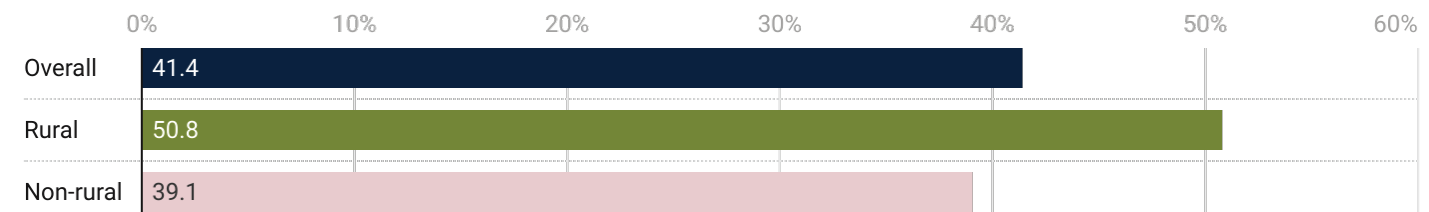
# Top 5 Concerns Parents Have for Children by Rurality

Concern	Rurality, %
Rural	
Education and school quality	36
Social media use/experiences on social media	35
Bullying, including cyberbullying	35
Drug and alcohol use	27
Mental health and suicide	25
Non-rural	
Education and school quality	39
Social media use/experiences on social media	34
Bullying, including cyberbullying	31
Gun violence	28
Mental health and suicide	25

When asked about vaccine requirements for school attendance, nearly 23% of parents in rural counties believe that vaccines should not be required for school compared to 13% in non-rural counties. While their child’s doctor was the top trusted source of vaccine information for both rural (59%) and non-rural (59%) parents, parents in rural counties place a greater level of trust in state and local public health officials compared to non-rural parents. More parents in rural counties trust the Georgia Department of Public Health (36%) and county health departments (35%) a great deal for accurate vaccine safety information compared to 26% and 25% among parents in non-rural areas, respectively.

Children living in rural areas are more likely to report being covered by Medicaid/PeachCare compared to children from non-rural areas (51% vs. 39%).

## Georgia Children with Medicaid / PeachCare Coverage, by Rurality, %











**For more information on this poll and others please visit [childpolicy.org](https://childpolicy.org).**

**For specific questions please email [childpolicy@emory.edu](mailto:childpolicy@emory.edu).**

1 <https://dch.georgia.gov/divisionsoffices/state-office-rural-health/sorh-maps-georgia>

2 <https://datacenter.aecf.org/>

3 <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/GA/PST045224>

4 <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2024/09/acs-child-poverty.html>

5 <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/PPU18GA13000A156NCEN>

6 [https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/poverty\\_sr/GA](https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/measures/poverty_sr/GA)

7 <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2024/demo/p60-284.html>

8 <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/suicide-faq>

9 Overdose Deaths Among Adolescents, Georgia, 2019-2021. Drug Surveillance Unit, Epidemiology Section, Division of Health Protection, Georgia Department of Public Health, September 1, 2022. <https://dph.georgia.gov/epidemiology/drug-surveillance>

10 <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-us/key-statistics-graphics#children>

11 <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/child-nutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program>

12 <https://www.healthbeat.org/atlanta/2025/04/16/georgia-measles-virus-low-vaccination-rate-response/>

13 <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/measles/measles-vaccine/>

14 <https://dph.georgia.gov/schoolvaccines>

15 Lois K. Lee, Eric W. Fleegler, Monika K. Goyal, Kiesha Fraser Doh, Danielle Laraque-Arena, Benjamin D. Hoffman, THE COUNCIL ON INJURY, VIOLENCE, AND POISON PREVENTION; Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth: Injury Prevention and Harm Reduction. Pediatrics December 2022; 150 (6): e2022060070. 10.1542/peds.2022-060070. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2022-060070>

16 <https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/legislation/document/20252026/238529>

17 <https://www.legis.ga.gov/api/legislation/document/20252026/238529>



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