

Estimated impact of COVID-19 on Washington state's health coverage

July 9, 2021

(Final update and for status as of June 26, 2021)

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented lockdowns throughout the world in early 2020. Washington, the first state in the U.S. to report COVID-19 infection, implemented measures to lessen the pandemic's effect on public health and to minimize loss of life. Non-essential businesses statewide were ordered to close temporarily or, condition permitting, allow workers to work from home. Many workers lost their employment as a result. In the first 10 weeks starting on March 15, 2020, more than 1 million workers in Washington filed unemployment insurance claims.¹ Almost as quickly as the number of unemployed went up, the number of people remaining unemployed came down with the lifting of the lockdowns that started around mid-May of 2020. At the time of this report, slightly more people remained unemployed than before the pandemic broke out.

When workers lose their employment, many also lose their employment-based health insurance, or EBI. Family members who have health coverage through the worker's EBI lose their coverage as well. In this analysis, we simulated the weekly changes in employment as of the week ending June 26, 2021, using the 2019 American Community Survey.² The purpose of the analysis is to assess COVID-19's effect on (1) the state's uninsured rate, (2) health coverage changes of newly unemployed workers, and (3) changes in uninsured rates at the county level. Our first report of estimates from this analysis was made available in April 2020. We have since provided initially weekly and later monthly updates throughout the pandemic. Governor Jay Inslee recently ordered all restrictions placed during the pandemic to be lifted on June 30, 2021. This marks the closure of the major battle against the COVID-19 pandemic in Washington, though efforts to completely end the pandemic are expected to continue. This occasion also marks the final update of our analysis on COVID-19's effect on Washington's health coverage.

¹ See Washington State Employment Security Department's Unemployment Insurance Initial Claims Weekly Dashboard at: https://public.tableau.com/profile/jeff.robinson#!/vizhome/InitialClaimsapplicationsforUnemploymentInsurance-WA_ETAS39-/Story1.

² Updates of this report published prior to December 2020 used the 2018 American Community Survey as the base. Beginning with the December 2020 update, all uninsured rates are calculated using the 2019 ACS as the base. Therefore, corresponding estimates between this update and updates published prior to December 2020 may not match. However, the trends in the uninsured rates remained same with the rebasing from ACS 2018 to ACS 2019.

Main findings

Weekly changes of uninsured in total population and among adults age 18-64. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, Washington’s overall uninsured rate was 6.1% in 2019 and was projected to be 6.2% in pre-pandemic 2020. The corresponding rates for adults age 18-64 were 8.6% and 8.8%, respectively. The uninsured rates more than doubled (12.6% overall and 18.6% for adults age 18-64) in May 2020 when unemployment claims surged due to the pandemic lockdowns. However, in the ensuing four weeks, the uninsured rates quickly declined with the lifting of lockdowns and have since continued to decline at a more gradual pace. In the latest week of data (ending June 26, 2021), the overall uninsured rate was 5.2% (or 403,900), and for adults age 18-64 it was 7.4% (354,900). Both rates are significantly lower than the corresponding rates before the pandemic. (Figure 1 and Figure 2)

FIGURE 1. ESTIMATED UNINSURED IN WASHINGTON (PERCENTAGE)
2019, PRE-COVID19 2020, AND WEEKLY SINCE APRIL 2020 THROUGH JUNE 2021

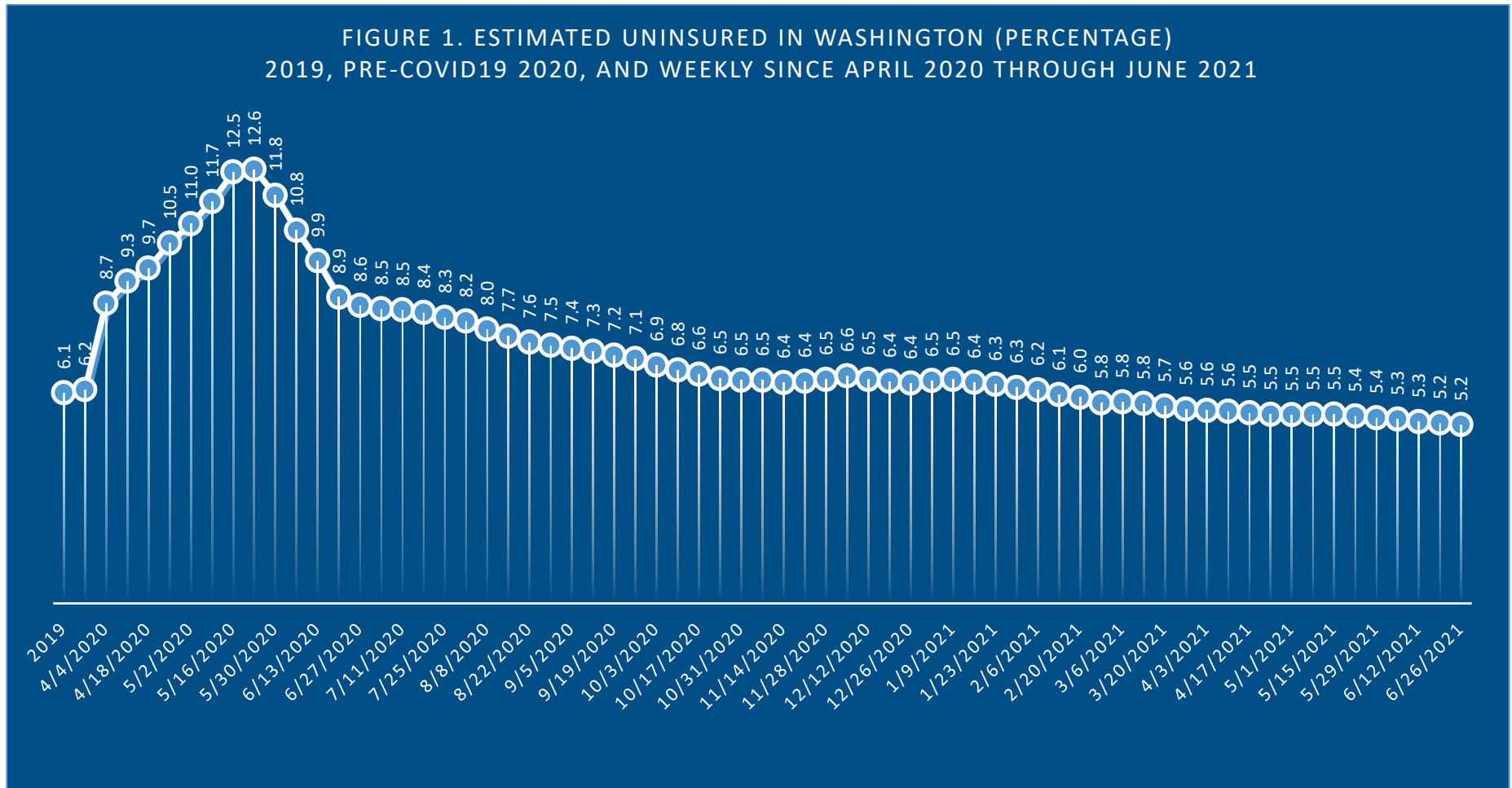
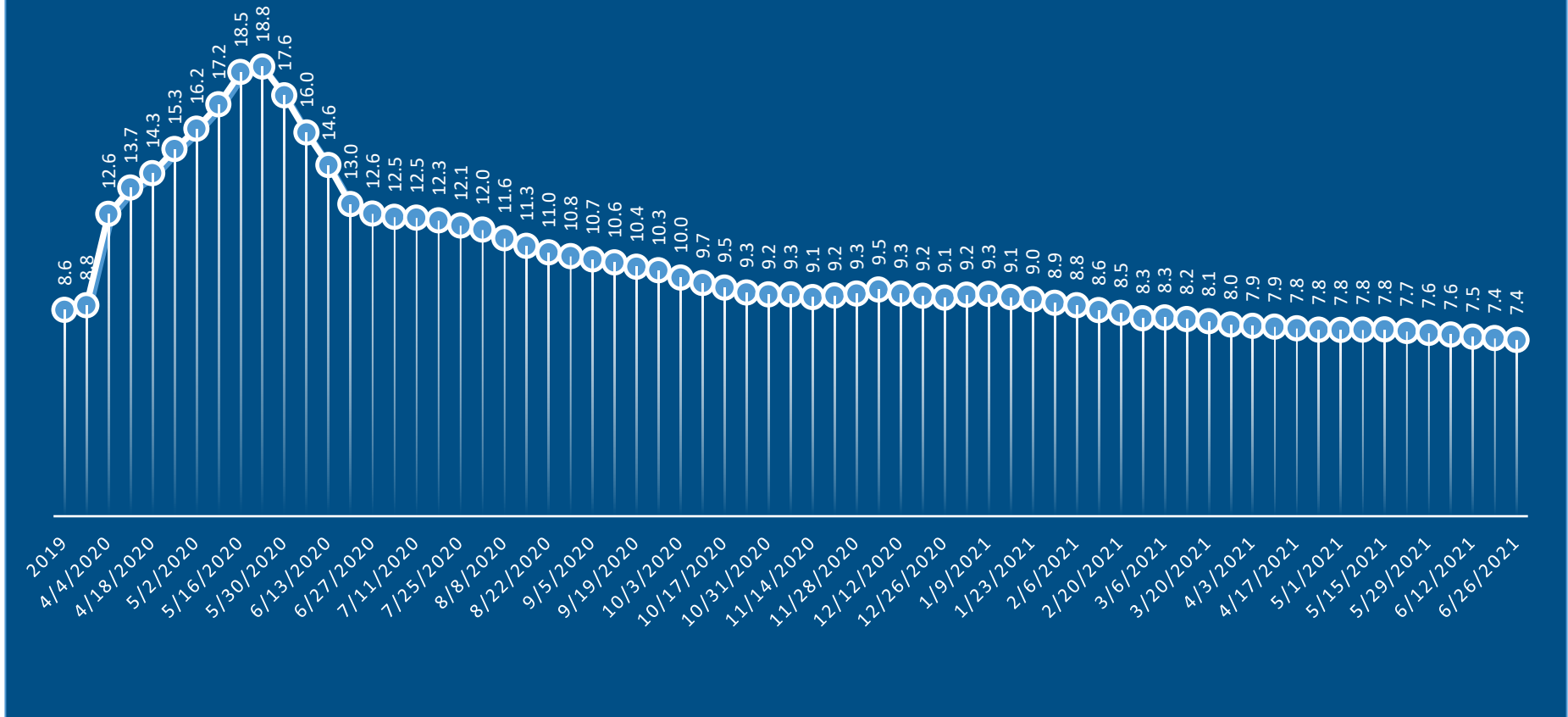
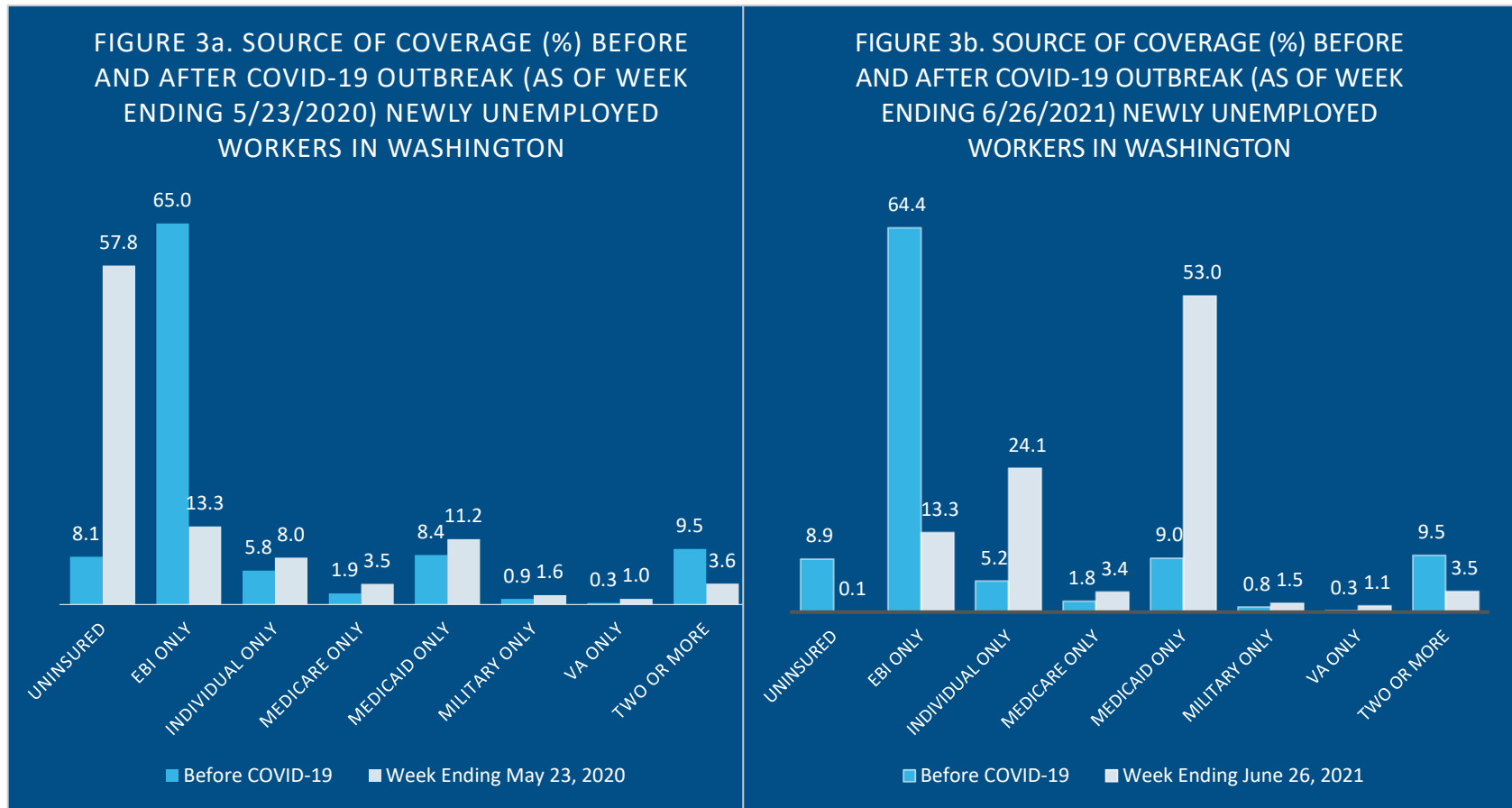


FIGURE 2. ESTIMATED UNINSURED AMONG ADULTS 18-64 IN WASHINGTON (PERCENTAGE)
2019, PRE-COVID19 2020, AND WEEKLY SINCE APRIL 2020 THROUGH JUNE 2021

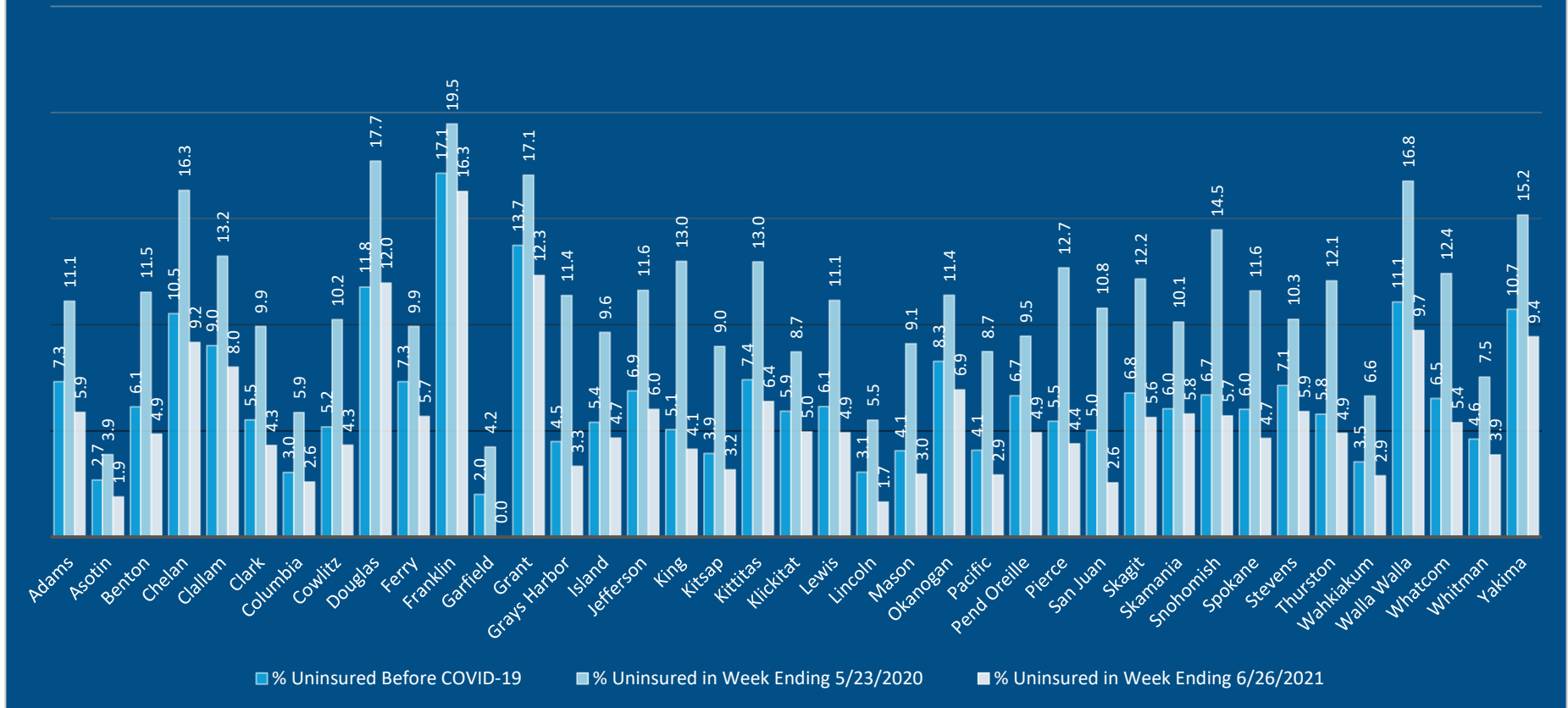


Coverage changes among newly unemployed as of May 23, 2020 and as of June 26, 2021. The health coverage of newly unemployed workers was affected disproportionately during the early months of the pandemic. At the peak of unemployment claims during the pandemic, the uninsured rate of the cohort who were unemployed as of May 23, 2020 reached 58%, from 8% before the pandemic outbreak. However, current cohort who were unemployed as of June 26, 2021, are estimated to have a much lower uninsured rate, at less than 1%, which represents a decrease from their uninsured rate of 8.9% before the pandemic outbreak (when they were employed). The high uninsured rate for the May 2020 cohort is the result of a sudden surge in unemployment claims, while the increases in the coverage sources of Medicaid and individual coverage (mostly through the qualified health plans provided by the Washington Health Benefit Exchange) were small. On the other hand, the low uninsured rate for the June 2021 cohort is the result of a much smaller number of unemployment claims and a continued growth in Medicaid and individual coverage. (Figure 3a and Figure 3b)



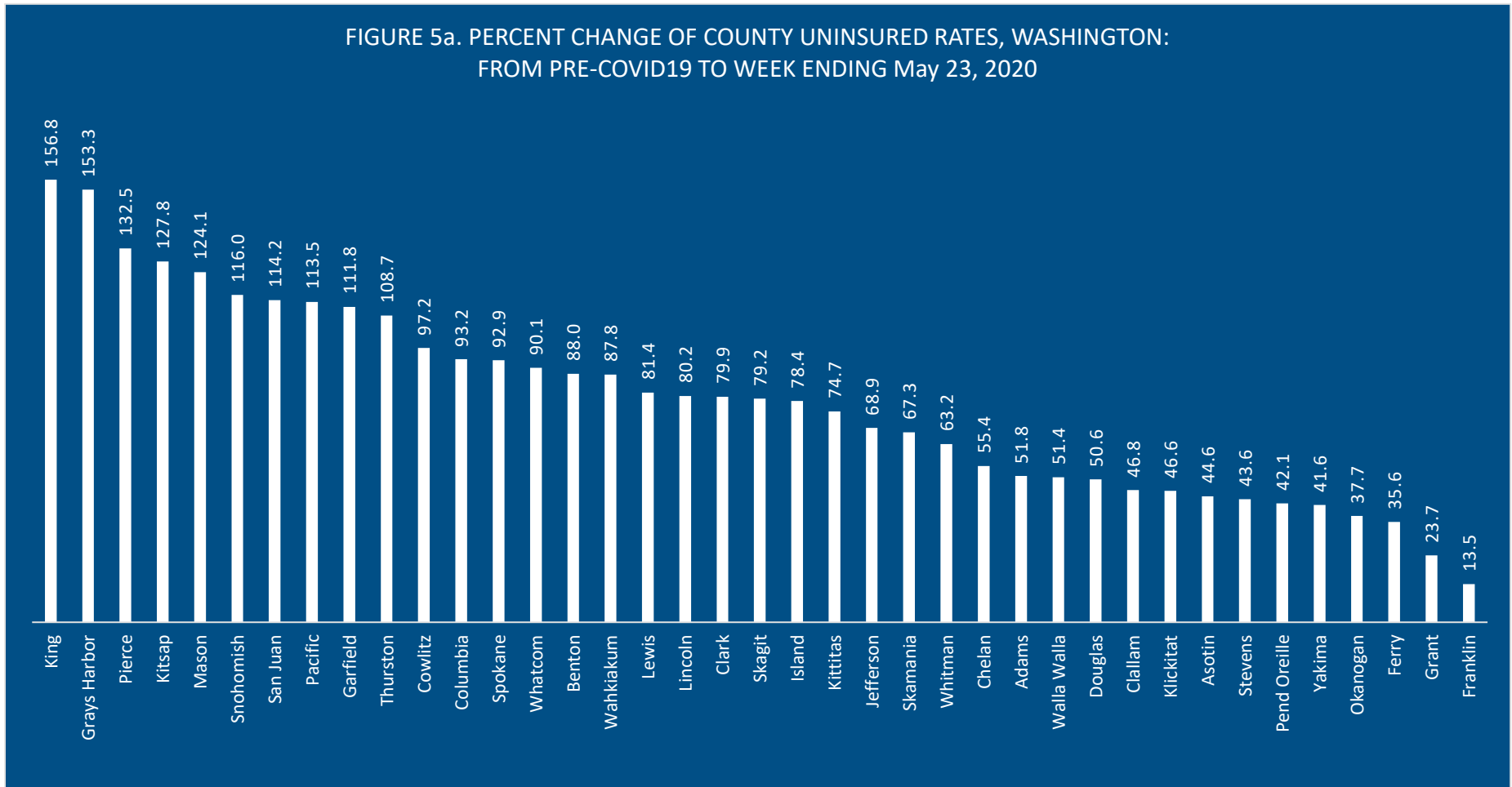
County uninsured rates from pre-pandemic to May 23, 2020 and to June 26, 2021. There was a lot of variation in the uninsured rates among the counties before COVID-19 broke out in the state. The rates before the pandemic ranged from 2% in Garfield County to 17.1% in Franklin County. When the state’s uninsured rate reached the highest level during the pandemic in the week ending May 23, 2020, the county-level uninsured rates ranged from 3.9% in Asotin to 19.5% in Franklin. The current range, for the week ending June 26, 2021, is between 0% in Garfield and 16.3% in Franklin. (Figure 4)

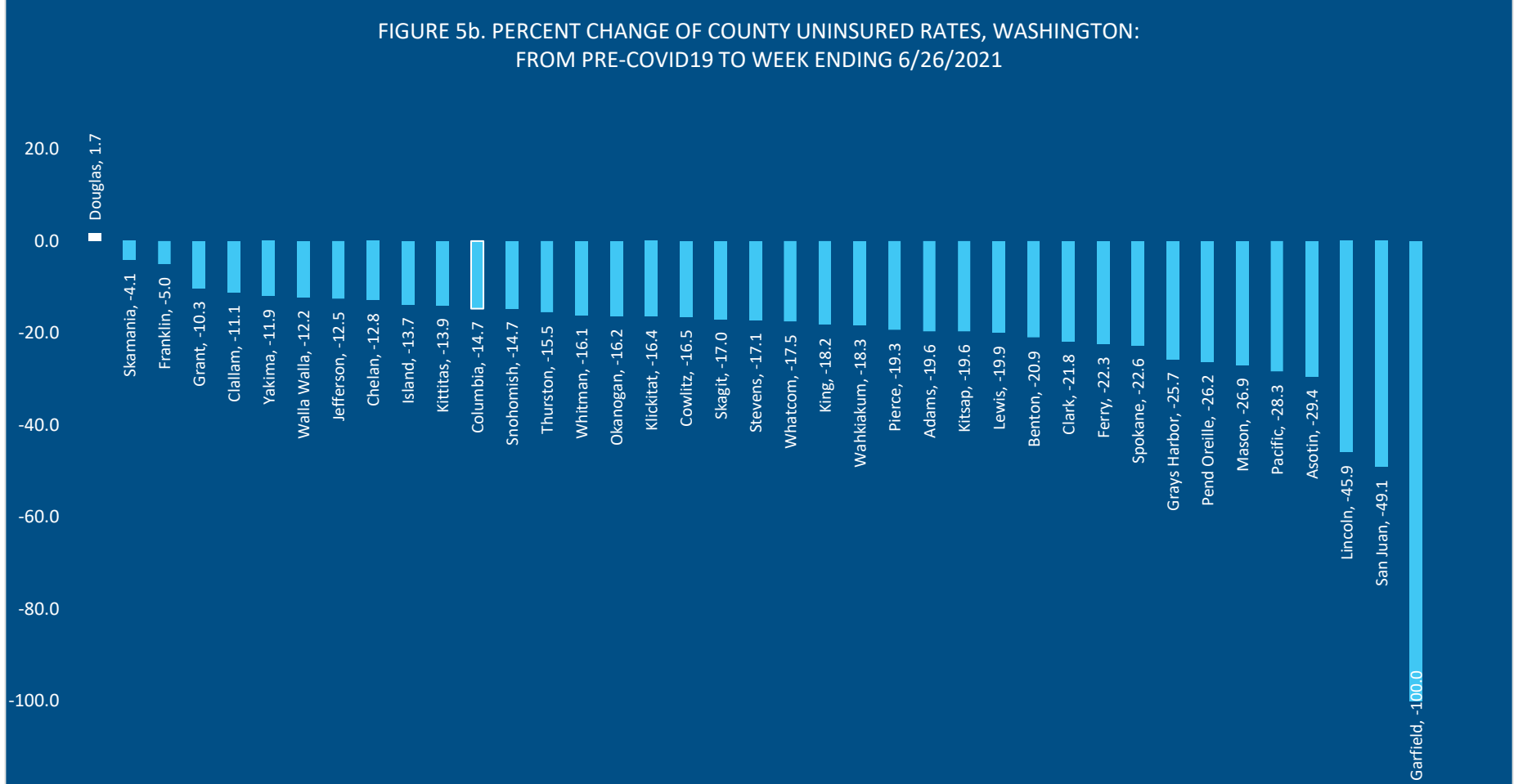
FIGURE 4. COUNTY UNINSURED RATES (%) IN 2020, WASHINGTON: PRE-COVID19 , WEEK ENDING ON 5/23/2020 AND WEEK ENDING ON 6/26/2021



Percent change in county uninsured rates from pre-pandemic to May 23, 2020 and to June 26, 2021. The shifts in the high and low of county uninsured rates during the pandemic were modest when compared to the percent changes in the uninsured rates of individual counties. From pre-pandemic to the week ending May 23, 2020, the uninsured rate increased in all counties and 10 counties had uninsured rates that more than doubled over the pre-pandemic rates. King County’s uninsured rate increased by 156.8%, the largest increase of all counties. Since May 23, 2020, uninsured rates dropped in all counties. Currently, only Douglas County’s rate (for the week ending June 26, 2021) is higher, though slightly, than its pre-pandemic rate. (Figure 5a and Figure 5b)

FIGURE 5a. PERCENT CHANGE OF COUNTY UNINSURED RATES, WASHINGTON:
FROM PRE-COVID19 TO WEEK ENDING May 23, 2020





Potential factors in geographic variation of the pandemic’s impact. Several factors at the county level could have contributed to the volatile changes in uninsured rates among the counties. These factors include the number of people becoming unemployed, the occupations the workers were in before becoming unemployed, whether the workers had access to coverage from spouse’s employment-based insurance, and variations in enrolling in other eligible coverage sources (e.g., Medicaid and qualified health plan through the Exchange) both before and after the COVID-19 outbreak.

Method and data

Estimates reported above were generated using an Office of Financial Management simulation file based on the recently released 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Public Use Microdata Sample file. Key data sources contributing to the simulation file include, in addition to ACS, detailed OFM population projections for 2020 and 2021 and weekly reports of unemployment insurance claims,³ qualified health plans (i.e., the Exchange) and Medicaid enrollment. The simulation also involves several assumptions, such as proportions of new enrollees in Exchange and Medicaid who were previously uninsured and proportions of UI claimants whose EBI continued through leave without pay or COBRA (a coverage program for former and retired employees). Changes in the assumptions can affect the resultant estimates of coverage changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Note that updates of this report published prior to December 2020 were based on the 2018 ACS. The rebasing of the simulation model from 2018 ACS to 2019 ACS resulted in slight differences in the corresponding health coverage estimates before and after the rebasing.

³ Starting the week ending on May 23, the UI claims data used in the simulation included the current week's continued (paid) claims in addition to past month's initial claims assumed being processed for payment. Previously, the UI claims data used in the simulation included only initial claims.

Appendix

Table A1. Number and Percent of Uninsured in 2019, Pre-COVID 2020, Weekly between April 4, 2020 and June 26, 2021: Washington State

Year or Week	Total Population		Adults 18-64		Year or Week	Total Population		Adults 18-64	
	N	%	N	%		N	%	N	%
2019	465,198	6.1%	408,290	8.6%	11/14/2020	494,765	6.4%	435,345	9.1%
2020 Pre-COVID-19	479,110	6.2%	419,362	8.8%	11/21/2020	497,887	6.4%	438,319	9.2%
4/4/2020	672,934	8.7%	600,927	12.6%	11/28/2020	502,033	6.5%	442,333	9.3%
4/11/2020	722,622	9.3%	653,179	13.7%	12/5/2020	510,266	6.6%	450,466	9.5%
4/18/2020	752,036	9.7%	681,989	14.3%	12/12/2020	502,290	6.5%	442,545	9.3%
4/25/2020	808,020	10.5%	729,648	15.3%	12/19/2020	497,837	6.4%	438,112	9.2%
5/2/2020	851,493	11.0%	770,617	16.2%	12/26/2020	493,883	6.4%	434,196	9.1%
5/9/2020	901,243	11.7%	818,843	17.2%	1/2/2021	499,765	6.5%	440,044	9.2%
5/16/2020	967,574	12.5%	883,057	18.5%	1/9/2021	506,037	6.5%	447,331	9.3%
5/23/2020	973,329	12.6%	894,063	18.8%	1/16/2021	499,513	6.4%	440,841	9.1%
5/30/2020	915,304	11.8%	836,710	17.6%	1/23/2021	494,987	6.3%	436,411	9.0%
6/6/2020	836,747	10.8%	762,897	16.0%	1/30/2021	487,834	6.3%	429,419	8.9%
6/13/2020	767,967	9.9%	697,950	14.6%	2/6/2021	482,914	6.2%	424,590	8.8%
6/20/2020	686,564	8.9%	620,423	13.0%	2/13/2021	471,919	6.1%	414,722	8.6%
6/27/2020	668,355	8.6%	601,536	12.6%	2/20/2021	465,677	6.0%	409,226	8.5%
7/4/2020	660,632	8.5%	594,843	12.5%	2/27/2021	453,240	5.8%	398,290	8.3%
7/11/2020	658,437	8.5%	593,319	12.5%	3/6/2021	455,464	5.8%	400,238	8.3%
7/18/2020	652,542	8.4%	588,246	12.3%	3/13/2021	451,820	5.8%	396,998	8.2%
7/25/2020	641,250	8.3%	577,991	12.1%	3/20/2021	446,347	5.7%	392,211	8.1%
8/1/2020	633,032	8.2%	569,413	12.0%	3/27/2021	439,125	5.6%	385,815	8.0%
8/8/2020	614,768	8.0%	552,341	11.6%	4/3/2021	436,251	5.6%	383,289	7.9%
8/15/2020	598,868	7.7%	537,158	11.3%	4/10/2021	434,354	5.6%	381,634	7.9%
8/22/2020	585,423	7.6%	524,247	11.0%	4/17/2021	430,566	5.5%	378,295	7.8%
8/29/2020	578,617	7.5%	516,847	10.8%	4/24/2021	427,269	5.5%	375,410	7.8%
9/5/2020	571,577	7.4%	510,241	10.7%	5/1/2021	426,429	5.5%	374,715	7.8%
9/12/2020	565,291	7.3%	504,301	10.6%	5/8/2021	427,395	5.5%	375,517	7.8%
9/19/2020	556,482	7.2%	495,933	10.4%	5/15/2021	427,642	5.5%	375,794	7.8%
9/26/2020	549,040	7.1%	488,927	10.3%	5/22/2021	423,815	5.4%	372,449	7.7%
10/3/2020	534,484	6.9%	474,304	10.0%	5/29/2021	419,762	5.4%	368,886	7.6%
10/10/2020	522,957	6.8%	463,238	9.7%	6/5/2021	416,335	5.3%	365,875	7.6%
10/17/2020	513,817	6.6%	454,180	9.5%	6/12/2021	410,938	5.3%	361,160	7.5%
10/24/2020	503,926	6.5%	444,479	9.3%	6/19/2021	407,712	5.2%	358,309	7.4%
10/31/2020	500,185	6.5%	440,702	9.2%	6/26/2021	403,897	5.2%	354,915	7.4%
11/7/2020	500,244	6.5%	440,738	9.3%					

Table A2. County Uninsured Rates (%) and Percent Change, Pre-COVID-19, and Weeks Ending on May 23, 2020 and June26, 2021: Washington State

County	% Uninsured		Percent Change		County	% Uninsured		Percent Change			
	% Uninsured Pre-COVID	Week Ending 5/23/20	Week Ending 6/26/21	Pre-COVID to 5/23/20		Pre-COVID to 6/26/21	% Uninsured Pre-COVID	Week Ending 5/23/20	Week Ending 6/26/21	Pre-COVID to 5/23/20	Pre-COVID to 6/26/21
Adams	7.3%	11.1%	5.9%	51.8%	-19.6%	Lewis	6.1%	11.1%	4.9%	81.5%	-19.9%
Asotin	2.7%	3.9%	1.9%	44.6%	-29.4%	Lincoln	3.1%	5.5%	1.7%	80.2%	-45.9%
Benton	6.1%	11.5%	4.9%	88.0%	-20.9%	Mason	4.1%	9.1%	3.0%	124.2%	-26.9%
Chelan	10.5%	16.3%	9.2%	55.2%	-12.8%	Okanogan	8.3%	11.4%	6.9%	37.6%	-16.2%
Clallam	9.0%	13.2%	8.0%	46.8%	-11.1%	Pacific	4.1%	8.7%	2.9%	113.4%	-28.3%
Clark	5.5%	9.9%	4.3%	79.8%	-21.8%	Pend Oreille	6.7%	9.5%	4.9%	42.1%	-26.2%
Columbia	3.0%	5.9%	2.6%	93.2%	-14.7%	Pierce	5.5%	12.7%	4.4%	132.4%	-19.3%
Cowlitz	5.2%	10.2%	4.3%	97.2%	-16.5%	San Juan	5.0%	10.8%	2.6%	114.1%	-49.1%
Douglas	11.8%	17.7%	12.0%	50.4%	1.7%	Skagit	6.8%	12.2%	5.6%	79.2%	-17.0%
Ferry	7.3%	9.9%	5.7%	35.5%	-22.3%	Skamania	6.0%	10.1%	5.8%	67.6%	-4.1%
Franklin	17.1%	19.5%	16.3%	13.5%	-5.0%	Snohomish	6.7%	14.5%	5.7%	116.0%	-14.7%
Garfield	2.0%	4.2%	0.0%	111.8%	-100.0%	Spokane	6.0%	11.6%	4.7%	92.9%	-22.6%
Grant	13.7%	17.1%	12.3%	24.1%	-10.3%	Stevens	7.1%	10.3%	5.9%	43.6%	-17.1%
Grays Harbor	4.5%	11.4%	3.3%	153.4%	-25.7%	Thurston	5.8%	12.1%	4.9%	108.6%	-15.5%
Island	5.4%	9.6%	4.7%	78.4%	-13.7%	Wahkiakum	3.5%	6.6%	2.9%	87.8%	-18.3%
Jefferson	6.9%	11.6%	6.0%	68.8%	-12.5%	Walla Walla	11.1%	16.8%	9.7%	51.4%	-12.2%
King	5.1%	13.0%	4.1%	156.8%	-18.2%	Whatcom	6.5%	12.4%	5.4%	90.0%	-17.5%
Kitsap	3.9%	9.0%	3.2%	127.8%	-19.6%	Whitman	4.6%	7.5%	3.9%	63.2%	-16.1%
Kittitas	7.4%	13.0%	6.4%	74.8%	-13.9%	Yakima	10.7%	15.2%	9.4%	41.5%	-11.9%
Klickitat	5.9%	8.7%	5.0%	47.0%	-16.4%	State	6.2%	12.6%	5.2%	103.2%	-16.4%