**CHANGES TO THE FOOD RETAIL ENVIRONMENT DUE TO COVID-19 IN NEW YORK CITY, MAY TO JULY 2020**

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**BACKGROUND:** Numerous media reports have revealed the troubling effect that COVID-19 has had on restaurants, food retail stores, and other small businesses, particularly in ethnic neighborhoods such as Manhattan’s Chinatown. The objective of this project was to assess the impact of COVID-19 on the food retail environment in 6 neighborhoods in New York City (NYC). We hypothesized that closures would be differential across higher vs. lower resourced neighborhoods, and given COVID-related stigma and discrimination, that Chinese ethnic neighborhoods would be particularly affected.

**METHODS:** Cross -sectional study conducted in May-July 2020 following the peak of COVID-19 in NYC. Two Chinese ethnic neighborhoods (Chinatown, Sunset Park) and 4 higher/lower resourced comparison neighborhoods were selected *a priori* based on 14 sociodemographic indicators. The primary outcome was probable permanent/temporary closures or absence (i.e., fresh produce vendor) of food businesses using online data scraping, calls and in-person checks.

**RESULTS:** Of the 2,720 food businesses identified (753 food retail stores, 1,832 restaurants, 135 fresh produce vendors) a higher proportion closed in Chinese ethnic neighborhoods vs. comparison neighborhoods. In Manhattan, 27%, 21% and 9% of food businesses closed in Chinatown, the Upper East Side and East Harlem (p=0.03, p<0.01 vs. Chinatown); and in Brooklyn, 16%, 10% and 6% of food businesses closed in Sunset Park, Park Slope and Brownsville (p<0.01 both vs. Sunset Park), respectively. A total of 233 food businesses in Chinatown and 88 in Sunset Park were probable permanent/temporary closures or absent during this time period.

**CONCLUSIONS:** To the author’s knowledge, this is the first systematic assessment of the impact that COVID-19 has had on the food retail environment. COVID-19 impacted food businesses in the 6 NYC neighborhoods examined in this time period, with the greatest effect observed for Chinese ethnic neighborhoods.

**CONTENT CATEGORY:** epidemiology

**KEYWORDS:** *food retail environment, neighborhoods, xenophobia*