

Women's Health Awareness

Transforming Communities by Enhancing Women's Health



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The Environment Plays a Major Role in Minorities' Susceptibility to COVID-19



We have long understood that the environment where we live, work, and play has a great impact on our overall health; however, it has taken a pandemic to expose the underlying truth of this statement. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the under-addressed societal ill of health inequity in America, as is now seen in many vulnerable populations (Blacks, Hispanics, the elderly and the underserved) who are more susceptible to the health effects of COVID-19. Recent data from the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#) indicate that an over representation of Blacks have been hospitalized for causes related to COVID-19 and that Blacks and Hispanics are more likely to die as a result of COVID-19. We are only 3 months into this pandemic in the US and several states have already released shocking statistics concerning death rates among Blacks due to this pandemic.

Louisiana released data indicating that while Blacks make up roughly 32% of the population, they account for 70% of the COVID-19 deaths in the state. Michigan reported that Blacks are dying more than eight times the rate of Whites despite making up only 14% of the state's population. 72% of Chicago deaths were Black patients though the city is 32% Black. In our own state, North Carolina, Blacks make up 22% of the overall population but currently account for 39% of the COVID-19 cases and 40% of all COVID-19 deaths.

The BIG Question is: Why are Blacks and Hispanics more susceptible to worse outcomes of COVID-19? The full story as to why minority populations are affected more by COVID-19 has not been uncovered; however, we can speculate based on existing nationwide data. Dr. Fauci, Director, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) stated, “It is not that African Americans are getting infected [with COVID-19] more often, it’s when they do get infected the underlying medical conditions wind them up in ICU and therefore giving them a higher death rate.”

Black and Hispanic communities are burdened with underlying medical conditions and chronic disease such as high blood pressure, heart conditions, diabetes, asthma, chronic lung disease, weakened immune systems, obesity, etc. more than any other racial groups. These disparities in health conditions are often due to neighborhood and built environment conditions, which include economic and social factors. Some of these factors include accessibility to healthcare and racial and/or ethnic bias in the healthcare system. For example, it has been observed that Blacks and Hispanics have not had equal access to COVID-19 testing due to the costs associated with testing, testing centers being predominately located in affluent areas and the testing center hours conflicting with service-oriented front-line work hours.

Environmental inequities and/or environmental injustices also play a major role in COVID-19-related health consequences and deaths of minorities. According to a recent [nationwide study](#) by the Harvard University T. H. Chan School of Public Health, links air pollution to higher COVID-19 death rates. Their analysis of 3,080 counties in the United States, found that cities with air pollution containing the higher levels of the tiny, dangerous particles in air, known as Particulate Matter 2.5 (PM 2.5), were associated with higher death rates from the disease. This finding is particularly relevant to people of color as they tend to live in the inner city, near highways and environmentally hazardous facilities ultimately resulting in long-term exposure to fine particulate matter. This long-term exposure may cause chronic lung conditions and thereby makes them more susceptible to COVID-19.

For example, the inner city of the District of Columbia, is likely to have a higher death rate than the adjacent suburban Montgomery County, MD, and Cook County, IL, which includes Chicago, is worse than nearby suburban Lake County, IL. Each of these examples indicate the importance of how the environment and where people live impact their COVID-19 related health outcomes.

How Do We Protect Vulnerable Populations? Through **Awareness, Communication, and Testing!!**

- **Awareness** and Education are key to prevention and survival from COVID-19:
 - Blacks and Hispanics should be aware of the deadly impact coronavirus is having on minority communities.
 - Pre-existing conditions make individuals more susceptible to COVID-19, therefore, practicing physical distancing and staying at home as much as possible, is the best preventative measure.
 - Everyone should follow the [CDC Guidelines](#) for proper hand washing and use of personal protective equipment (face masks, gloves, etc.).
 - Special safety considerations should be given to those who are or care for the elderly or persons with chronic disease.
- **Communication:** Spread accurate knowledge about COVID-19 within your social support groups. *“Each one, teach one!”*
 - Use only reliable sources of information ([CDC](#), [NIH](#), [NC DHHS](#), and your local health departments).
- **Testing:** Early detection is very important in surviving this disease. If you are experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms (fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, chills, repeated shaking with chills, muscle pain, headache, sore throat, new loss of taste or smell or new state of confusion) contact your doctor to get testing immediately! If you do not have a primary care physician, go to your local emergency

room and urgently request testing.

- North Carolina COVID-19 Hotline: **866-462-3821** (open 24 hours, seven days a week). For non-emergency COVID-19 questions: Call **211** or text “**COVIDNC**” to **898211**. Durham residents should contact the Duke Health COVID-19 Hotline: **919-385-0429**, option 2 (8:00 am to 8:00 pm, seven days a week).

Fast Facts!!!



This week we celebrate Earth Day and National Environmental Education Week! Physical distancing and global stay at home orders have decreased air pollution across the globe. Reductions in traffic and industry have lowered nitrogen dioxide levels, slashing pollution. Nitrogen dioxide is produced by car engines, power plants, and other industrial processes.

[Click Here for More Information](#)

Even during a pandemic people are littering!

News reports are showing that people are not properly disposing their face mask and gloves. In addition to the general sanitation concerns of littering this presents an opportunity for exposure and the spread of COVID-19. **DON'T BE A LITTERBUG!** After use of face mask and gloves be sure to dispose them properly by tossing them into a lined trash bin.



We're Better Together

A New COVID 19 Crisis: Domestic Violence

In the mist of the COVID-19 pandemic, domestic violence is on the rise. If you or someone you know is experiencing domestic violence and need support call **1-800-799-7233** or **1-800-787-3224** for TTY.

If you're unable to speak safely there is an online chat. You can visit <https://thehotline.org> or text **LOVEIS to **22522**.**

PLEASE NOTE: If you are in a domestic violence crisis go to a safe place and **CALL 911**

During this time of physical distancing, if you or someone you care about is in a crisis and feels overwhelmed with emotions like

Front-line workers learn to protect yourselves! The

sadness, depression or anxiety, there is help.

For support or help, contact the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#) at **800-985-5990**, or the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at **800-273-8255**

CALL 911, if you or others you know want to harm themselves

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) has a training site for front-line workers to learn how to protect themselves from exposure to COVID-19 during this pandemic.



[**Click Here for Training**](#)

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For additional information regarding Women's Health Awareness,
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