

Racial disparities & COVID-19: Why it matters in healthcare

Gabrielle Masson – Becker Hospitals June 1, 2020

Racial disparities in the U.S. affect every aspect of life, including healthcare. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, individuals of color have been disproportionately affected by the virus. Below are eight key findings revealing the connection between race and healthcare.

Editor's note: This is not an exhaustive compilation.

Who: People of color have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19

1. About 26 percent of COVID-19 patients in the U.S. have been black, while white people account for 52.2 percent and Asian people account for 4.6 percent, according to CDC [data](#) updated June 1. The data is based on 718,254 COVID-19 cases in which race was specified. According to U.S. Census [estimates](#) from 2019, white people account for 76.5 percent of the nation's population, while black individuals account for 13.4 percent and Asian people account for 5.9 percent.

2. Nationwide, 26 percent of Latino adults said they know someone who has died from COVID-19, compared to just 10 percent of white adults, according to an ABC News-Ipsos [survey](#) published May 22. In Maryland, Virginia and Washington, D.C., Latinos represent about 10 percent of the population but account for one-third of cases, according to an [analysis](#) by *The Washington Post*.

What: COVID-19 infection, hospitalization and death rates within communities of color

3. Majority-black counties have reported triple the infection rate and nearly six times the rate of deaths as majority-white counties, according to an [analysis](#) published April 7 by *The Washington Post*.

4. Black COVID-19 patients are nearly three times as likely to be hospitalized as their white counterparts, according to a [study](#) published May 21 in *Health Affairs*. Researchers examined 1,052 COVID-19 patients at Sacramento, Calif.-based Sutter Health from Jan. 1 to April 8. Of black patients with COVID-19, 52.5 percent were hospitalized, compared to 25.7 percent of white patients, which "may indicate that African Americans have more advanced or severe illness at the time of presenting for COVID-19 testing and medical care," researchers said. Also, a higher proportion of black patients (24.6 percent) were transferred to intensive care units than white patients (10.7 percent).

Where: While racial disparities occur everywhere in the U.S. and beyond, three specific studies have documented the disparity in nursing homes and two Southern states.

5. Nursing homes with a large proportion of black or Latino residents are twice as likely to experience a COVID-19 outbreak as facilities with mostly white residents, according to an [analysis](#) from *The New York Times*. The analysis of internal data on COVID-19 cases and data from the CMS Nursing Home Compare site found about 60 percent of nursing homes where at least a quarter of the population is black or Latino have had at least one COVID-19 case. In comparison, just 32 percent of facilities with a predominantly white population reported at least one infection. The racial disparity persisted regardless of nursing home size and location.

6. Over 80 percent of hospitalized COVID-19 patients in Georgia are black, according to a [study](#) conducted by the CDC, Georgia Department of Public Health and eight Georgia hospitals. Data from hospitalized adults with COVID-19 admitted in March revealed about 83 percent of 297 patients with known race/ethnicity were non-Hispanic black, while nearly 11 percent were non-Hispanic white, 3.4 percent were Hispanic and 2.7 percent were non-Hispanic Asian or Pacific Islander.

7. Nearly 77 percent of the COVID-19 patients hospitalized from March to early April in New Orleans-based Ochsner Health's network were black, according to a [study](#) published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. Researchers examined data from 3,481 COVID-19 patients seen at an Ochsner facility between March 1 and April 11. Ochsner's total patient population is about 31 percent black, according to data on 522,679 patients who received care within the system in the last year. Nearly 40 percent of the patients with COVID-19 were hospitalized, and of those hospitalized, 76.9 percent were black. Of the 326 COVID-19 patients who died, 70.6 percent were black.

Why: Racial injustice affects every aspect of life, but here are four reasons black Americans are disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

8. There are four main reasons black Americans are dying at a faster rate than other groups, as explained by *The Washington Post*. Black Americans have higher rates of underlying health conditions and less access to care; they are more likely to work in "essential" jobs; black communities receive insufficient and inconsistent information from government leaders; and housing disparities put black residents at a greater risk for contracting illnesses.