Transcript Details

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Uncovering Racial Disparities in COVID-19 Cases & Deaths

Dr. Turck:
Coming to you from the ReachMD Studios, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines.* I'm Dr. Charles Turck.

The following is a brief news summary on a recent report that explores the shocking racial disparities that have become prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as reported by NPR News. Visit the site at NPR.org.

To find out how different racial and ethnic groups are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, a recent report analyzed COVID-19 demographic data that was collected by the COVID Racial Tracker, a joint project of the Antiracist Research & Policy Center and the COVID Tracking Project. This analysis compares each racial or ethnic group's share of infections or deaths—where race and ethnicity are known, that is.

A significant gap in the data shows 48 percent of cases and 9 percent of deaths had no race recorded, and researchers are concerned this data gap could hamper our response to the crisis across the U.S.

"Data is the only way that we can see the virus," says Thomas LaVeist, dean of Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and co-chair of Louisiana's COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. Which is why these gaps in the data are so concerning.

But despite these gaps, however, the pattern is clear: Communities of color are being hit disproportionately by COVID-19.

In 32 states plus Washington D.C., African Americans are dying at rates higher than their proportion of the population. In Wisconsin, for example, at least 141 African Americans have died, representing 27 percent of all deaths in a state where just 6 percent of the state's population is black.

There are a few reasons why this pattern may exist.

African Americans have higher rates of underlying conditions, including diabetes, heart disease, and lung disease, that are linked to more severe cases of COVID-19. In addition, they often have less access to quality healthcare and are disproportionately represented in essential frontline jobs, which increases their exposure to the virus.

Latinos and Hispanics also test positive for the coronavirus at rates higher than would be expected for their share of the population in all but one of the 44 jurisdictions that report Hispanic ethnicity. The analysis cites that like African-Americans, Latinos are over-represented in essential jobs that increase their exposure to the virus.

While data for smaller minority populations is harder to come by, the data that we do have also shows glaring disparities across Native American, Asian American, Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities.

Christopher Petrella, director of engagement for the Antiracist Research and Policy Center at American University, says there are still concerns about how states are collecting data due to the fact that the available data significantly undercounts the disparity observed in communities of color and the variation in how states report cases.

Concerns were also raised about the fact that testing sites are often disproportionately located in whiter communities, creating gaps in testing access.

Based on all of these findings, the analysis concluded that given the pandemic's disparate toll on communities of color, the public health response should include helping to meet basic needs like providing food, wage supports, and even temporary housing for people who get sick or exposed to the virus.

For ReachMD, this is *COVID-19: On the Frontlines.* To access more details on this news report, visit NPR.org. And as always, to add your perspectives toward the fight against this global pandemic, visit us at ReachMD.com and become Part of the Knowledge. Thank you for listening.