

COVID-19 and African American* Communities

Some say when America catches a cold, the African American community gets pneumonia. African Americans, and possibly other communities of color, appear to be at greater risk of serious illness and death from COVID-19 due to social and economic injustices that create differences in health and access to care and other resources necessary for good health. Working together, we can improve what the data are showing. Here's what you need to know.



1. What is a coronavirus?

Coronaviruses are a large family of viruses. Many of them infect animals, but some coronaviruses from animals can evolve (change) into a new human coronavirus that can spread from person to person.

This is what happened with the new coronavirus known as SARS-CoV-2, which causes the disease known as COVID-19.

COVID-19 typically causes mild to moderate illness, like the common cold, but sometimes progresses to cause severe disease and even death. There is currently no vaccine or cure available for COVID-19.

2. I heard African Americans can't get COVID-19. Is this true?

Everyone is at risk of getting COVID-19, regardless of their race or ethnicity. Human coronaviruses most commonly spread to others from an infected person who has symptoms through:

- Droplets produced through coughing and sneezing
- Close personal contact, such as caring for an infected person
- Touching an object or surface with the virus on it, then touching your mouth, nose, or eyes before washing your hands

Smoking, vaping, obesity, and underlying health conditions are associated with worse health outcomes with COVID-19. Unfortunately, we are seeing some groups of people, like African Americans, becoming very sick and dying at a greater rate than other groups.

3. Why is COVID-19 more deadly for African Americans compared to the rest of the population?

COVID-19 is highlighting existing health disparities and a history of unequal access to healthy living conditions, as well as opportunities and resources needed for good health in communities of color. Living under such conditions can make it harder to prevent and control chronic conditions like high blood pressure, asthma, heart disease and diabetes. People with these underlying health conditions or those with cancer and uncontrolled HIV are at greater risk of serious illness and even death if they get COVID-19.

Key Points

- Novel coronavirus is a new virus that hasn't been identified before in humans.
- Novel coronavirus can be spread by coughing and sneezing, close personal contact, or by touching an object of surface with the virus on it.
- African Americans are at greater risk of complications and death due to social and economic injustices that create differences in access to care and other resources.
- Public Health is taking steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus in LA County.

For more information:

Los Angeles County
Department of Public Health

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention (CDC)

www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html

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4. What is Public Health doing to address the impact on the African American community?

Specifically, the Department of Public Health is working to:

- Improve the collection and reporting of race and ethnicity data by healthcare institutions and labs to better understand the impacts of COVID-19, including infection, hospitalization, and deaths, on different groups and areas in the County.
- Increase the places that can provide COVID-19 testing, including in under-resourced communities.
- Collaborate with community partners to educate (“Get the word out”) regarding COVID-19, how to slow its spread, and what the data show, including the high African American death rate.

5. What can I do to protect myself and my community from COVID-19?

The Department of Public Health is also actively working with community partners to remove the avoidable and unjust impact of COVID-19 on African American and other overly impacted communities. Some issues have taken hold over many generations and will take time to correct. However, here’s what you and others can do right now to protect yourself and your community from COVID-19:

- Stay at home unless you need to access essential services, like visits to the grocery store or to seek medical care, or if you are an essential worker and need to leave your home for work.
- Practice physical distancing – stay at least 6 feet away from others when you are out.
- Wear cloth face coverings when you are around others.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds frequently throughout the day.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you are caring for someone sick with COVID-19 at home, follow the Center for Disease Control’s [Caring for Someone at Home](#) guidance.
- Clean and disinfect frequently touched objects and surfaces using a regular household cleaning product.
- Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue; if a tissue is unavailable, use your elbow, not your hands.

When we do these things together, we can keep our community safe.

6. What should I do if I have symptoms of COVID-19?

Most people will have mild symptoms and should stay home at least 3 days (72 hours) after fever has resolved and symptoms, such as cough, have improved, AND at least 7 days have passed since your symptoms first appeared. See the [Home Care](#) guide on the Public Health website for information on how to take care of yourself if you are sick with COVID-19 symptoms.

Older adults, pregnant women, and those with underlying medical problems symptoms should talk with their health care provider early if they have symptoms. If you are ill, you may need to advocate for yourself by directly requesting that you get tested for COVID-19, especially if you have a chronic disease, such as diabetes, high blood pressure, lung, kidney or heart disease, or HIV. Free COVID-19 [drive-up mobile testing sites](#) are also available for people with symptoms in Los Angeles County and the City.

If you are having difficulty breathing or keeping fluids down, go to an emergency room or call 911.



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7. I've heard lots of rumors about where COVID-19 came from and how it's cured. How do I know what's true?

There have been many rumors about COVID-19 that are false. For example, there is currently a rumor that 5G radio waves cause COVID-19, but radio waves can't create a virus and the disease has spread in areas that do not currently have 5G service. The Department's Health Care Consumer Protection has information and resource on how to avoid health care scams. Visit: <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/hccp/scams.htm>

During times of crises, it is normal to try to make sense of things that are happening. It's a way to gain control over a situation that is disrupting our daily lives. Also, for individuals and communities who have historically experienced injustices from government institutions, there may be reluctance to trust information from or resources provided by those institutions during an emergency, and many may choose to ignore them completely. Before taking any action, always confirm the information is accurate. Remember to check the source, author and accuracy of the content of any information you receive and before you decide to share it with others. Some reliable sources of information are noted in the box below.

8. Where do I get tested for COVID-19?

It's best to get tested through a healthcare provider, so that you immediately get the care you need, whether you test positive or not. There are also free mobile testing sites for people with symptoms throughout the County. Call 2-1-1 or visit <https://covid19.lacounty.gov/testing> for more information. We do not recommend getting tested if you are asymptomatic because your results may not accurately reflect your status.



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Want to learn more about COVID-19?

For information about current cases and other resources, visit:

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/media/Coronavirus/>

This website contains the guidance documents below as well as many others.

[COVID FAQ](#)

[Home care Instructions for Those with Respiratory Symptoms](#)

[Social Distancing](#)

[Cloth Face Covering](#)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/novel-coronavirus-2019.html>

California Department of Public Health

<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/nCOV2019.aspx>

World Health Organization

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>

For information about health equity, visit:

Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Center for Health Equity

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/CenterForHealthEquity/>

*The US Census defines **Black or African American** as a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

