**COVID-19 Racial Disparity in the African-American Community**

Why do African Americans have higher infection and death rates from COVID-19?

All human beings are at risk of infection. There are several factors to consider related to the severity of infection and mortality in African Americans and the disproportionate number of African Americans impacted. Among the factors are:

Factor #1: African Americans are more likely to have pre-existing conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, lung disease and obesity. All of these conditions contribute to a more severe, and sometimes fatal, course of COVID-19.

Factor #2: African Americans have a history of health disparities including less access to healthcare and inadequate or no health insurance. Both lead to less preventive care, more hospitalizations and a higher morbidity and mortality rate.

Factor #3: African Americans are more likely to live in urban areas that are densely populated. It is more difficult to practice social distancing, quarantine and isolation when living in crowded conditions.

Factor #4: Only one out of five African American workers can telework.

Factor #5: African Americans are more likely to be essential workers in transportation, government, healthcare, and food supply services.

Factor #6: African Americans disproportionately occupy low wage or temporary jobs that may not provide paid sick leave.

Factor #7: African Americans are more likely to be without a car and reliant on public transportation.

How do I protect myself?

Stay at home. Practice good hygiene (wash hands for 20 seconds with soap and water or when available use hand sanitizer- 60% alcohol) and cleanse surfaces. Exercise respiratory etiquette (cough into your elbow or a tissue). Observe social distancing (stay at least 6 feet away from others).

Should I wear a mask?

Non-surgical masks and cloth face coverings, whether homemade or manufactured, do not protect people from getting COVID-19, but are effective in preventing you from infecting others. Non-surgical masks and face coverings also can prevent the virus from entering your system when you touch a common surface (e.g, shopping cart handle, door handle, etc.) and then touch your face, mouth or eyes. Only first responders and some other essential workers should wear N95 masks. N95 masks are surgical masks which are required and in demand for healthcare professionals. The goal of covering your nose and mouth with a cloth mask, scarf, bandana, etcetera is to prevent the spread of COVID -19 from asymptomatic carriers. Non-surgical masks and face coverings also signal heightened awareness to the community that we are actively protecting ourselves and helping to slow the spread of the virus when we wear masks and face coverings in public.

What are the states hardest hit by COVID-19?

The United States eclipsed Italy with the highest number of coronavirus cases and deaths earlier this month making the U.S. the world leader with one-third of all reported COVID-19 cases in the world. The top five (5) states with the highest numbers of reported cases in order are: New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, California and Pennsylvania. Counties in major urban cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Detroit, Miami, and New Orleans have been the hardest hit with significantly more reported COVID-19 cases. Not coincidentally, these cities collectively represent the nation’s most significant economic centers to the tune of approximately 20% of the nation’s economic activity.

Should I continue to stay at home if my Governor has lifted the Stay-At-Home Order?

Medical experts have expressed grave reservations about returning to life as we once knew it at this time. Moreover, the racial disparities that have been exposed should be alarming to us all. Urban areas are suffering the most during this pandemic where the spread of the virus is occurring at higher rates than other areas. There also is growing concern about the transmission of the virus by asymptomatic carriers. Significantly, there is still work to be done in order to flatten the curve. Carefully consider whether it is safe for you and your family to return to work and to non-essential activities like hair and nail salons and gymnasiums. Elected officials are concerned about economic impact, and that is certainly important. But the most important consideration during this global health crisis is the health and safety of people. Do not feel compelled to go out simply because the restrictions have been relaxed. Proceed with great care and continue to observe the CDC-recommended precautions including aggressive social distancing; frequent, thorough hand washing and good overall hygiene; and wearing a non-surgical mask or face covering. Our communities are vulnerable and it is up to us to protect one another and our loved ones by slowing the spread and, ultimately, flattening the curve.