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1. [*Mayors Move to Address Racial Disparity in Covid-19 Deaths; Divide is caused by more pre-existing medical conditions, less access to health care, jobs requiring physical contact*](#)

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[Mayors Move to Address Racial Disparity in Covid-19 Deaths; Divide is caused by more pre-existing medical conditions, less access to health care, jobs requiring physical contact](#)

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Body

Big city **mayors** are scrambling to adopt measures to **address racial disparities** emerging **in** data this week on new coronavirus cases.

New York City, Los Angeles and Chicago, the country's largest cities, released figures showing the virus is having a disproportionate impact on **racial** minorities, particularly those who are poor. Epidemiologists say people who live **in** poverty can often be at higher risk of contracting the virus and suffering more severe complications, since they often can't afford to adhere to social-distancing guidelines and have higher rates of underlying medical conditions than white people.

On Wednesday, New York City said that Hispanic coronavirus victims make up 34% of all fatalities from **Covid-19**, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, while comprising 29% of the city's population of 8.4 million people, the data showed. Black residents account for 28% of the city's **deaths**, while making up 22% of the population.

"There are clear inequalities, clear **disparities** on how this disease is affecting the people of this city," **Mayor** Bill de Blasio said during a press conference Wednesday, although he noted the virus has affected every neighborhood **in** the city. "We have to come up with new strategies to **address** what is now a documented **disparity**."

On Tuesday, officials **in** Los Angeles County said that black people accounted for 17% of **Covid-19 deaths** where race was known. African-Americans make up about 9% of the county's population.

In Chicago, city leaders said earlier this week the gap is even more stark, with 71% of **deaths** from the virus occurring among black people, who make up about 29% of the city's population.

"Those numbers take your breath away," said Chicago **Mayor** Lori Lightfoot. "This is a call to action."

Cities like Detroit, New Orleans and Kansas City, Mo., are also seeing signs that their black residents are being disproportionately impacted by the virus.

Jessica Haller

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"A variety of factors contribute to the **disparities** we see, whether they be pre-existing health conditions, or structural inadequacy **in** health care, or even lack of internet access," said Spencer Overton, president of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank specializing **in** African-American issues **in** Washington, D.C.

City leaders promised to **address** the **disparity** but offered limited solutions.

Chicago's transit authority is shifting larger buses into its predominantly black south and west sides to allow people who still need to go to work to social-distance more easily, Ms. Lightfoot said. The larger buses are normally used to ferry workers to downtown along Lake Shore Drive, but those routes are mostly empty now.

Ms. Lightfoot ordered health-care workers to double down on efforts to include race and ethnicity **in** their reporting to get a sharper picture of the emerging pattern. She also announced a new **Racial** Equity Rapid Response Team, working with a group that focuses on reducing the life-expectancy gap between minority and predominantly white neighborhoods.

Detroit **Mayor** Mike Duggan created a program to coordinate \$2 rides for people who want to be tested but lack vehicles to get to the city's drive-through test site. The \$2 fee can also be waived for those who need it.

Mr. de Blasio said **in** the coming days that New York would have a plan to engage health clinics **in** hard-hit neighborhoods, and to do more grass roots education about the virus. Community-based outreach has been difficult with social-distancing rules, he said.

The limited solutions point to the underlying challenges facing poorer, minority communities contending with generations of poverty, systemic racism and a high incidence of pre-existing health conditions that can put them at greater risk during a pandemic.

Anthony Fauci, the nation's leading epidemiologist, said **in** a press conference Tuesday that African-Americans face higher rates of hypertension, diabetes and asthma. Underlying health conditions put people at a higher risk of a severe form of **Covid-19**.

"Unfortunately, it's nothing we can do about it right now, except for giving them the best care possible," he said.

In New York, the neighborhoods impacted tended to be poorer and below the median household income for the city, according to data from the Census Bureau.

Poverty and health are closely connected, experts say. Poorer residents have less access to preventive health care and often must resort to using emergency rooms for primary care.

Rev. Branden Mims, who leads Greater Metropolitan Church of Christ **in** Kansas City, said many people **in** his community don't have primary care doctors.

"We wait until it's absolutely necessary to go to the doctor and then we go to the emergency room," he said.

Brandon McCray, a 52-year old gospel saxophonist, is on a ventilator at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

His brother, Jarius Jones, said Mr. McCray is underinsured and that treating him is a financial strain.

"I don't know how we will pay the bills," he said. "At this point we are trying to keep him alive. It will be a financial burden, as it will be for many others who are underinsured."

Social distancing is a challenge for poorer communities, where many residents live **in** cramped conditions with multiple families often sharing one unit. Many don't have cars and must rely on public transit to get to work. And jobs among lower-income minority workers tend to be **in** roles that don't allow working from home or where job duties make such arrangements infeasible.

Experts say having as complete a data picture as possible is critical **in** slowing the spread of a pandemic.

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The data being collected could be incomplete, since it remains unknown if there is a ***disparity*** between blacks and whites when it comes to testing.

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"We might make a mistake that could have devastating consequences simply because we don't know what we're looking at," said Rebecca Lee Smith, an assistant professor of pathobiology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Veterinary Medicine.

Katie Honan and Alan Cullison contributed to this article.

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