

DC Black Church Initiative

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For immediate release
PRESS RELEASE

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District of Columbia Black Church Initiative Decries the Department of Health's Decision Not to Work with Them, Why?

*H1N1 Flu virus is now a pandemic and this action will leave
District residents exposed*

Washington, DC – The DC Black Church Initiative developed a Health Note to educate residents of the District around the issue of H1N1 Flu virus. Everyone is aware that the world health organization has declared that H1N1 has become a pandemic. This simply means that this virus can spiral out of control if not properly controlled through education, vaccines and personal precautions. The virus itself is highly contagious, and can easily spread. There have been 37,246 cases of the virus recorded to date in the US and of them 211 deaths have occurred. Worldwide there has been over a million cases reported. It is natural that the church is concerned by this rapidly spreading virus and wants to ready itself and its congregants to safeguard themselves against the H1N1 virus.

The DC Black Church Initiative developed an eight page guide that explained the ABCs of the virus and simply wanted to work with the DC Department of Health to distribute the literature to its congregants and the neighborhoods that surround DCBCI's 800 church network here in the District of Columbia. We petitioned the Department of Health and they denied our help. We found their answer disturbing, unintelligible and baffling. CDC regulations indicate that the community should be educated. Here we were offering to work with the Department of Health to begin the first leg of public health education through the DCBCI Health Note. Why would they say no to an organization that represents the better part of 50 percent of the residents of the district. This is what we find so troubling. We are calling a news conference to discuss this matter:

**First Adventist Church, 810 Randolph Street, NW – Wednesday, July 15 at 10:30 a.m.
Contact number: 202-829-2075**

They wrote in their explanation that they are closely monitoring the situation locally and throughout the country and world and are working very closely with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and sister health agencies. They claim to be “comfortable with the measures (they) have taken and are taking to ensure the city is prepared for any local outbreak.” What measure is this that they have been taking and are these measures top secret that they should not inform the public so that they can adequately prepare themselves against this virus? These actions are what is unintelligible to the citizens of the District of Columbia. The burning question that we have, given the fact that we are a month away from the flu season, which CDC and the World Health Organization has indicated will be the barometer of whether or not this pandemic grows worse, why is it that we have not heard from our Health Department about these “measures” that they have supposedly taken. We have not known the Department of Health to manage an effective health promotion initiative in the past 20 years. It gives us little confidence that they will be able to handle this health emergency.

The Rev. Anthony Evans, President of the DC Black Church Initiative, said, “My organization has been around for 15 years and this is the first time that our local government, through the Department of Health, has told us ‘Thanks, but no thanks’ and this is on the eve of the deadliest flu virus in recent history. I am extremely disappointed as a cleric and as head of a preventive health organization that they would turn down 800 African American churches that are willing to help. We believe this is a deadly move by the Department of Health. The literature is clear that those who have existing chronic health conditions need to take extreme caution during this period. Whereby we have time to educate that population and safeguard the rest of us, we see no activities on the ground that demonstrate that the department of health is “taking (measures) to assure the city is prepared” in our congregations and neighborhoods. This is outrageous. I hope and pray that this particular act of silence and inactivity on behalf of the Department of Health is not intentional, and doesn’t represent a pattern of racial neglect. This is a clear example how local Departments of Health exasperate the already terrible health disparities in the District of Columbia. The African American community here is most vulnerable given its level of chronic health disease and health literacy.”

About DCBCI

The District of Columbia Black Church Initiative (DCBCI) is a coalition of 800 African-American and Latino member churches works to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare. DCBCI is a faith-based health organization dedicated to providing critical wellness information and preventive health screening to all of its members. The African-American community ranks first in eleven different health risk categories. DCBCI’s purpose is to partner with national health officials to provide health education, reduce racial health disparities, and increase access to quality healthcare.