

Majority Black Counties See Triple the Covid Death Rate

By [Jeff Green](#) and [Jackie Gu](#)
May 11, 2020



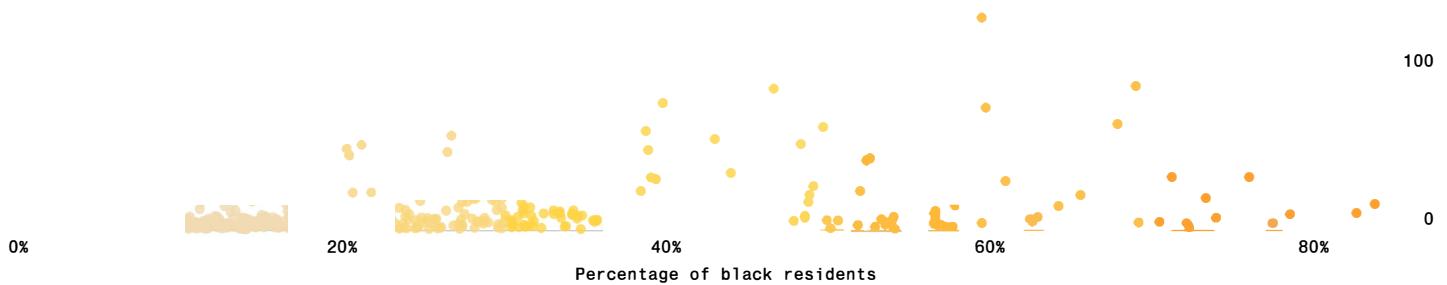
It has become increasingly clear that black Americans are dying at alarmingly high rates of Covid-19. But absent national statistics, the picture remains incomplete. Piecemeal data trickling out of cities and states have shown disproportionate death rates among African Americans, with an [analysis](#) of available state-provided figures by APM Research Lab putting the black death rate at 2.6 times higher than that of whites.

A look at countrywide data adds another troubling statistic to the growing pile of evidence that the virus is ravaging black communities. Counties with the highest proportion of black residents are also seeing the highest death rates. The larger the share of black residents, the worse the health outcomes get.

In places where African Americans exceed 13.4% of the population, the proportion they make up of the U.S., the death rate is roughly double the national average, an analysis of Johns Hopkins University and Census Bureau data by Bloomberg News found. In majority black counties, deaths from coronavirus are more than triple. The disparities have only grown as the death toll has climbed to more than 70,000 over the last 10 weeks.

April 16, 2020

<10% African-American population 10-20% 20-30% 30-50% 50-70% >70%



This analysis can only infer the deadliness of the virus among black Americans. In this data set, which covers all deaths from March 23 to May 8, the race of those dying in counties with a large share of black residents is unknown.

A solid understanding of who is most at risk from the virus is needed to best deploy scarce resources where they can have the most effect on stopping the spread of the virus and saving lives.

President Donald Trump in April said federal level racial outcomes were coming in “probably two to three days.” The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services later pushed that deadline to “early May.” The Trump administration said initial findings suggest more testing is needed in black neighborhoods, and initiatives are already underway in hotspots like Detroit and New Orleans.

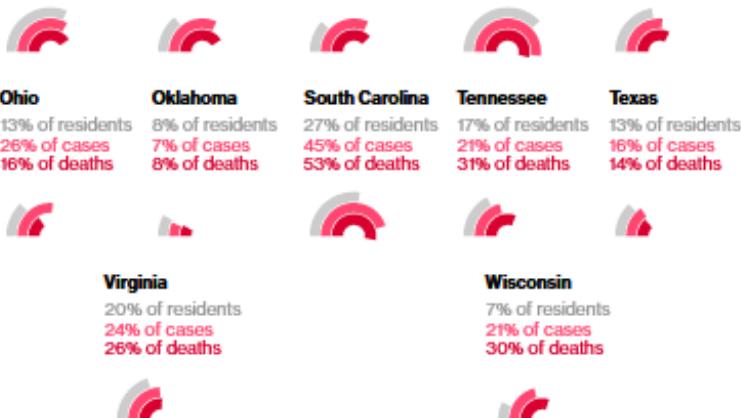
While some cities, counties and states have broken out cases and deaths by race, that information often has gaps. Among the 50 states and Washington, D.C., only 28 had racial breakdowns for both confirmed cases and deaths. In six of those states, race was unknown in 30% or more of reported cases.

Of the remaining 22 states and Washington, D.C., the death rate for black residents exceeds their share of the population, in some cases by more than double.

African-Americans and COVID-19 Death Rates

African-American percentage of population ■ COVID-19 cases ■ COVID-19 deaths

Alabama	Arkansas	Colorado	D.C.	Florida
27% of residents	16% of residents	4% of residents	46% of residents	17% of residents
38% of cases	33% of cases	7% of cases	47% of cases	20% of cases
44% of deaths	34% of deaths	7% of deaths	79% of deaths	22% of deaths
Georgia	Iowa	Illinois	Indiana	Kansas
32% of residents	4% of residents	15% of residents	10% of residents	6% of residents
36% of cases	13% of cases	19% of cases	14% of cases	10% of cases
49% of deaths	6% of deaths	33% of deaths	16% of deaths	31% of deaths
Maryland	Michigan	Missouri	Mississippi	North Carolina
31% of residents	14% of residents	12% of residents	38% of residents	22% of residents
33% of cases	32% of cases	32% of cases	52% of cases	27% of cases
41% of deaths	41% of deaths	38% of deaths	54% of deaths	33% of deaths



Note: Data is not available for all states. States that have released racial data but reported that race was unknown in at least 30% of cases are not shown. For the remaining states, percentages calculated include cases that did not report race.

Sources: Various state websites, U.S. Census Bureau

There are multiple theories for the disparate racial health outcomes. Black Americans are about 30% more likely than white Americans to have health conditions that exacerbate the effects of the virus, such as hypertension and diabetes, a recent McKinsey report found. People of color also face bias from health-care providers and are less likely to have health insurance.

Minorities in the U.S. can have weakened immune systems because of a phenomenon called “weathering,” said Arline Geronimus, a professor of public health at the University of Michigan. The stress of poverty, crime, crowded living conditions, sleeplessness and other factors take a toll. In some cases, a 40-year-old will have the immune system of a 60-year-old, Geronimus said. Even people without diabetes or heart disease are more vulnerable to diseases.

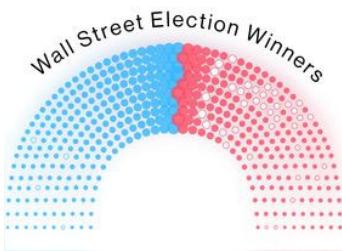
“These are populations that are subject, over years and decades, even generations, to a broad range of what I’ll just call stressors,” Geronimus said.

Black workers are also overrepresented in high-contact essential services still reporting for duty. Only 19.7% of black workers can work-from-home, compared to 29.9% of white workers. Those factors may help explain another trend: Early on in the pandemic, deaths were more equally spread across the country regardless of racial makeup. As time has gone on, however, deaths in counties with larger shares of black residents are continuing to shoot up.

“This is something that is not going away,” said Greg Millett, director of public policy at amFar, the Foundation for AIDS Research. The organization last week released a study finding that as of March 24th the absolute number of deaths in disproportionately black counties exceeded that of those elsewhere. “There’s a problem here. We really need to address it proactively.”

Source: Data compiled by Bloomberg
Note: All data updated through May 8, 2020

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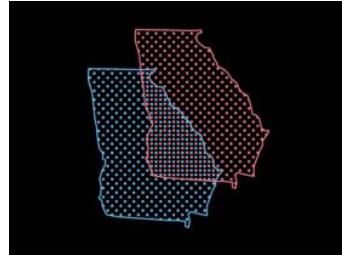
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