



South Carolina Institute of
Medicine & Public Health



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Newly Released DHEC Death Count Data Shows Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Black Residents in All Regions of South Carolina

S.C. Institute of Medicine and Public Health and DHEC analyze case and death data by race

COLUMBIA, S.C. (July 16, 2020) — The South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health (IMPH) and the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) released a data brief today examining the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black communities by region throughout South Carolina. View the brief [here](#) and additional COVID-19 updates and resources at imph.org/covid-19/.

Across the country, long-standing systemic health and social inequities have been highlighted by the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black Americans and other people of color. Nationally, Black people are dying from COVID-19 at three times the rate of white people. Case counts echo these disparities.

New Regional Demographic Data Shows that Black Communities are Disproportionately Impacted by COVID-19

IMPH has analyzed newly available DHEC data on deaths by race in the four regions of South Carolina. The full report and charts per region can be found at imph.org/covid-19/. Highlights include the following:

- In each region of South Carolina, Black people are being diagnosed with and dying from COVID-19 at disproportionately high rates compared to their percentage of the population.
- Although Black people account for only 27% of the population of South Carolina, they represent 49.1% of those who have been hospitalized because of the virus and 45% of those who have died.
- The biggest racial disparity in the state for deaths is in the Pee Dee region, where Black people have 2.43 times the rate of deaths compared to white people. This is followed by the Upstate [2.42], the Low Country [2.18] and the Midlands [1.67].

“COVID-19 has highlighted systematic disparities in how people of color receive care in the U.S. health system. To combat this virus, equity-focused solutions must be at the forefront,” says Maya Pack, executive director at IMPH. “We are committed to serving as an informed, nonpartisan convener. We are actively monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic and providing evidence-based analysis and updates to inform health policy decisions and improve South Carolina’s health and health care.”



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Addressing COVID-19 Disparities

To address COVID-19 disparities, public health leaders have suggested actions that should be considered by state government and health care providers, including the following:

- Continue to increase testing availability across the state, with a focus on Black communities and communities that lack access to care.
- Streamline access to care for vulnerable populations, including Black communities and low-income individuals.
- Promote face covering and social distancing (target messaging to vulnerable populations) and increase access to personal protective equipment like masks and sanitizers.

Since early in the pandemic when racial disparities were first identified through data, DHEC and state and community partners have taken extensive outreach efforts to ensure minority and at-risk populations receive the information, guidance and resources they need to protect themselves and others from COVID-19. These efforts include partnerships with the Commission of Minority Affairs, Office of Rural Health, PASOS, Department on Aging, and local housing authorities; statewide telebriefings with members of the Legislative Black Caucus, faith-based leaders, AARP members, Tribal Leaders, and representatives from the state's African American publications; public service announcements on radio and television stations that are targeted to African American audiences; outreach to sororities and fraternities; educational materials to Women, Infant, Children (WIC) clients; social media influencer campaigns; billboards and print advertisements; information for public transportation riders, and 15 interviews with Hispanic radio and digital platforms, to name a few.

DHEC and partners have hosted 443 free testing events across the state since May, focusing on rural, minority and underserved areas of the state.

"The number of new positive cases each week are continuing to increase, as is the number of people currently hospitalized due to COVID-19 complications," says Dr. Joan Duwve, DHEC public health director. "In order to interrupt the rapid spread of the virus across the state, including within the Black, Hispanic and Native American communities in South Carolina, we must all commit to wearing face masks, staying six feet apart and washing our hands often to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and save lives."

To read the full data brief or for more information compiled by IMPH regarding COVID-19 response, visit imph.org/covid-19/.

About IMPH

The South Carolina Institute of Medicine and Public Health (IMPH) is an independent, nonprofit organization with the mission to collectively inform policy to improve health and health care. IMPH serves as an informed, nonpartisan convener and provider of evidence-based information relevant to policy decisions and other actions impacting the health and well-being of all South Carolinians. IMPH



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