



## **INEQUITABLE VACCINE ACCESS AND DISPARITIES IN VACCINATION RATES IN FLORIDA**

**October 13, 2021**

Every aspect of the COVID-19 crisis has been characterized by stark racial and ethnic disparities. Vaccination rates are just the latest outcome to follow this pattern. As one of the most racially and ethnically diverse states, disparities in vaccination rates in Florida require urgent action.

Black and LatinX residents are being hit hardest by COVID-19. Black Floridians have the state's lowest vaccination rate, regardless of ethnicity: 27% for Non-Hispanic Black residents and 28% for Hispanic Black residents, as compared to 39% for both Non-Hispanic and Hispanic White residents.<sup>1</sup>

Black Floridians continue to experience a disparately high case positivity rate: 26.9%, as compared to 25% among White residents. Similarly, Black residents are suffering higher COVID-19 death rates: 253.8 deaths per 100,000 population, as compared to 241.5 per 100,000 among White residents.<sup>2</sup> This reflects the disproportionate risk of COVID-19 exposure faced by Black residents (as captured by the case positivity rates), as well as the disproportionate risk of unfavorable outcomes once exposed to COVID-19 (as captured by the rate of death).<sup>3</sup>

Hispanic residents have also been disparately hit by the pandemic. Compared to non-Hispanic residents, case positivity rates are higher among Hispanic residents within every racial group: 30.9% among Hispanic White residents as compared to 24.9% among non-Hispanic White residents; 29.7% versus 28.8% among Hispanic and non-Hispanic

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report: State Overview. DOH Florida. (October 8, 2021). Retrieved October 11, 2021, from

[http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/\\_partners/covid19\\_report\\_archive/covid19-data/covid19\\_data\\_latest.pdf](http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/_partners/covid19_report_archive/covid19-data/covid19_data_latest.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report: State Overview. DOH Florida. (October 8, 2021). Retrieved October 11, 2021, from

[http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/\\_partners/covid19\\_report\\_archive/covid19-data/covid19\\_data\\_latest.pdf](http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/_partners/covid19_report_archive/covid19-data/covid19_data_latest.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> *The state of COVID-19 in Florida and South Florida*. Florida Health Justice Project. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2021, from

<https://www.floridahealthjustice.org/the-state-of-covid-19-in-florida-and-south-florida.html>.

Black residents, respectively; and 28.5% as compared to 22.1% among Hispanic and non-Hispanic residents of the “Other” racial group, respectively.<sup>4</sup>

The Florida Health Justice Project has been tracking monthly COVID-19 outcomes with a focus on disparities. Vaccination rates have increased among all race/ethnicity groups from September to October, (NH White: 38% to 39%; NH Black: 24% to 27%; Hispanic White: 37% to 39%; Hispanic Black: 26% to 28%) with Non-Hispanic Blacks seeing the largest percentage increase.

Yet, this data tells an incomplete story as approximately 13% of the state’s vaccination data represents individuals of unknown race and an even higher percentage of vaccination data (31%) represents individuals of unknown ethnicity. With these high rates, Florida ranks an unfortunate 7th among the 50 states and Washington D.C. for the proportion of vaccination data with unknown race, and a distressing 2nd for the proportion of state vaccination data with unknown ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Florida must learn from our sister states who are collecting more complete data. States such as Delaware, Vermont, Indiana, Ohio and Tennessee, have less than 5% of vaccination data with unknown race, and Illinois has less than 5% of unknown data for both race and ethnicity data.

Robust vaccination data, by race and ethnicity groups, is not only key to assessing equitable access to vaccination, but also in setting forth a plan to appropriately address identified inequities. Despite the presence of incomplete data, the disparities in COVID-19 vaccination and outcomes are evident. While we may not have a complete picture of the extent of these disparities, we do know that the social determinants of health play a key role in vaccination access and willingness, and ultimately in COVID-19 outcomes. Access to accurate information from a trusted source, access to vaccination sites with extended hours, the use of non-traditional vaccination sites (such as pop-up sites within community centers and barbershops, as well as mobile clinics), subsidized transportation to and from vaccination sites and/or access to paid time off to receive a shot-- these are essential precursors to improving our vaccination rates; particularly, among people of color.

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<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 Weekly Situation Report: State Overview. DOH Florida. (October 8, 2021). Retrieved October 11, 2021, from [http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/\\_partners/covid19\\_report\\_archive/covid19-data/covid19\\_data\\_latest.pdf](http://ww11.doh.state.fl.us/comm/_partners/covid19_report_archive/covid19-data/covid19_data_latest.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> COVID-19 vaccinations by Race/Ethnicity. KFF. (2021, October 4). Retrieved October 12, 2021, from <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/covid-19-vaccinations-by-race-ethnicity>.