

COVID and Environmental Health Disparities

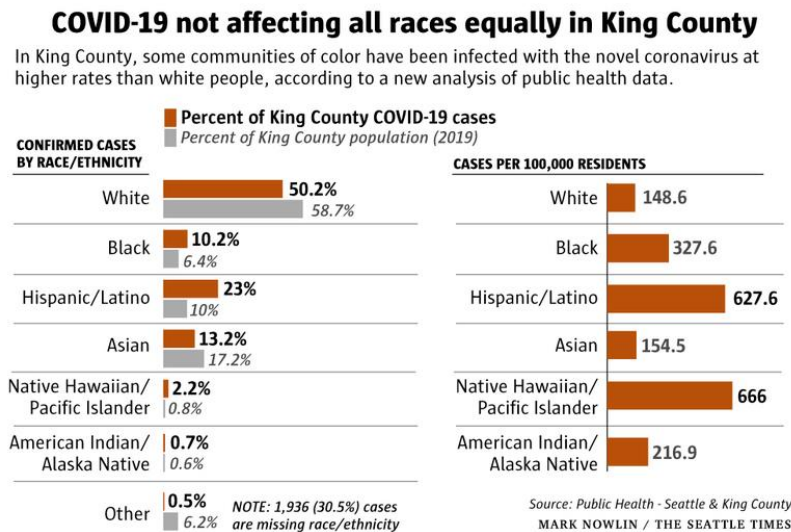
Research & Proposal Developed by David B. Mendoza, Environmental Justice Task Force Co-Chair

Recent Research

A recent [NY Times article](#) highlighted the connections between race, pollution and Coronavirus. A recent [Harvard study](#) suggests that poor air quality can increase COVID19 mortality – that, “a small increase in long-term exposure to PM2.5 leads to a large increase in COVID-19 death rate. The study results underscore the importance of continuing to enforce existing air pollution regulations to protect human health both during and after the COVID-19 crisis.”

Disparate Impacts on Communities

In addition, a recent [Crosscut article](#) stated, "When state officials released the first racial data on coronavirus on Friday night, they noted that race hasn't yet been reported in a third of the deaths. The Seattle-King County Department of Public Health [reports](#) that Hispanic, Black and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander groups have been infected and hospitalized at significantly higher rates in King County than white people. Further, "[confirmed cases statewide](#) show 31% of people with coronavirus are Hispanic or Latino. The percentage of COVID-19 patients who are Black is also slightly above that population's overall percentage and so are people who are multi-racial. At this point in data collection, white COVID-19 cases make up 48% of those sickened by the virus, but make up 68% of the state population."¹



Finally, the [WA Department of Health](#) is currently reporting that the ethnicity of 36% of confirmed cases (not just deaths as reported in Crosscut) is completely unknown. Meaning we

¹ Please note that many of these percentages will continue to change over time. [Please see here](#) for the most up-to-date confirmed case count by race/ethnicity.

may never have an accurate picture of the disproportionate impact that COVID has had among communities of color in WA State.

Using Environmental Health Disparity Mapping in COVID Response

Taken together, research shows that people of color are being disproportionately impacted nationally by COVID, while locally, hospitals and officials are not gathering enough demographic information to provide a comprehensive picture of the impacts of COVID on communities of color in Washington state.

Proposal for the EJ Task Force to Consider

To ensure that COVID relief/response funds and programs are effectively targeted to areas most impacted, should the Environmental Justice Task Force make a recommendation that COVID relief/response efforts should prioritize and be focused on areas in the Environmental Health Disparity mapping that show high levels of disparities?

This direction can take many of the same recommendations being considered by the Mapping Subcommittee such as policy development, project prioritization and service equity evaluation. One specific recommendation would be to mirror the spending requirements in Initiative 1631 and that are also found in CA for investing revenue from their Cap & Trade program. Essentially, this would be a direction that x% of revenue be invested in communities with high levels of impact from pollution. The language in 1631 said 35% but a strong case for COVID investments can be made to require more like 50%.