



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

Governor Larry Hogan
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401-1925

Dear Governor Hogan:

COVID-19 continues to reveal racial inequities and health disparities that are embedded in the fabric of our nation. In Montgomery County, we are being very intentional about applying a racial equity framework to our COVID-19 testing, care and now our vaccine distribution. Our Health Department has targeted specific zip codes that have the highest rates for COVID-19 and has stood up testing and vaccine distribution sites in hotspots like East County. Working in partnership with our African American and Latino Health Programs, our Department of Health and Human Services has been able to increase the number of people of color who are being tested; they are now working to increase the number of vaccinations.

We are beginning to receive age-related data and the impact of COVID-19 on life expectancy based on race. Data from the Brookings Institute shows that Black people are dying from COVID-19 at approximately the same rate as white people who are more than 10 years older. Age-specific death rates for Latino people fall in between. Among those aged 45-54, for example, Black and Latino death rates are at least six times higher than that for whites. People of color not only die from COVID-19 at the highest rates, they die younger.

The latest CDC data on COVID-19 deaths and projections from the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluations estimate that U.S. life expectancy has dropped by 1.1 years. However, life expectancy for Black people dropped 3.6 years and 2.5 years for Latino people. Dayna Bowen Matthew, author of *Just Medicine: A Cure for Racial Inequality in American Health Care*, stated: "What we politely call a 'health disparity' is killing people of color daily. It is causing people of color to live sicker and die quicker, because of the color of their skin."

Communities of color must be a priority when it comes to receiving the COVID-19 vaccine and we now know that it is also imperative that younger members of those communities get vaccinated sooner. Unfortunately, we are seeing the same trend of racial inequity in both the vaccine distributions and pre-registration system. As indicated in the chart below, disparities exist for pre-registration for the vaccine for Montgomery County residents who are Black or Latino.

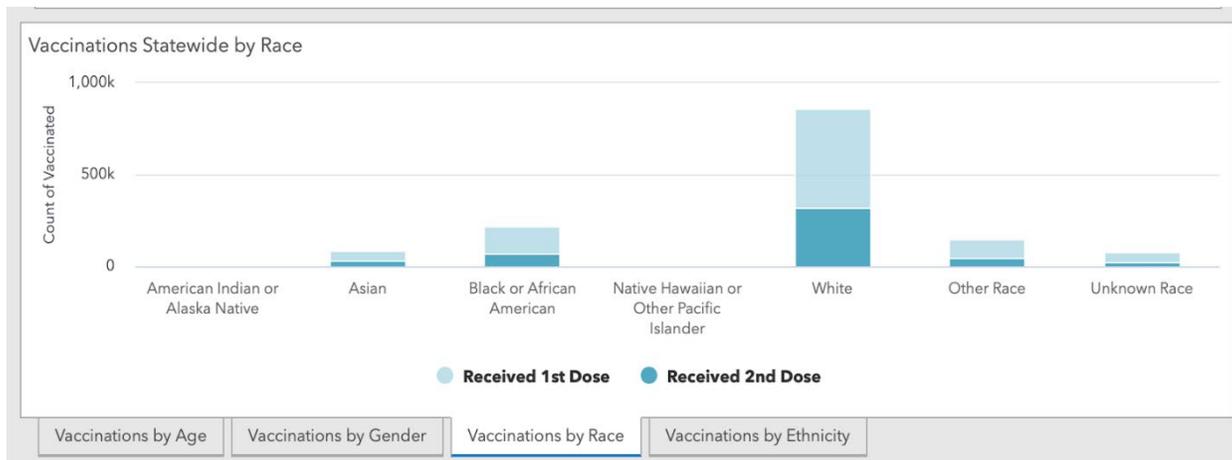
Disparities in COVID Vaccine Pre-registration

	White	Black	Latino
Percent of Population	43 Percent	19 Percent	20 percent
Percent of Pre-registrants for COVID-19 Vaccine	66 Percent	8 Percent	9 Percent

Source: Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

This is a result of several factors. The existing state-run registration system is difficult to navigate and requires people to have access to the internet and the flexibility to sit for long periods of time to register for the vaccine.

When reviewing actual distribution of the vaccine from the Maryland Department of Health COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard, the statewide data shows disparities are even worse.



Source: Maryland Department of Health COVID-19 Vaccination Dashboard

Additionally, many retail outlets and pharmacies have no protocol or accountability for racial equity in their distribution process. The first come, first serve system that is used is inherently tilted towards those with access.

Recently, the Council received a report of one retail outlet pulling vaccines from a location that served a more vulnerable population and giving them to another outlet in a more affluent area. It is clear that our vaccine registration systems must immediately be revised to include a prioritization based on race and ethnicity. We are glad to hear that you will be announcing a statewide plan for vaccine equity on Thursday and we encourage you to include the following components in that plan:

1. Make racial equity a priority for all vaccine distribution points across the state of Maryland. This should apply to retail locations, pharmacies, hospitals, and private providers, in addition to local health departments.
2. Require all vaccine distributors to be fully transparent and report their distributions on a weekly basis based on race, age, and zip code of recipients;
3. In partnership with our local DHHS and County government, coordinate on the selection of a mass vaccine site in Montgomery County;
4. Increase the number of vaccines to Montgomery County DHHS that reflects the size and needs of our population;
5. Make the vaccine available to younger people of color in all tiers, considering and adjusting for the disproportionality in death rates and age.

Accountability and effective leadership are the keys to putting an end to these disparities. It is imperative that our COVID-19 response provides equitable access to health care that includes a vaccine registration and distribution system that prioritizes our communities of color who are most negatively impacted. We cannot wait any longer; the time to act is now.

Yours truly,



At-Large Councilmember Will Jawando



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