

COVID Vaccine Disparities Worsen Even as Supply Outstrips Demand

The same people who have been most vulnerable to COVID-19 are the least likely to be vaccinated.

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Six months into the nation's largest vaccination drive in history, the same people who were most vulnerable to getting sick and dying when COVID-19 cases were surging last year remain the least likely to be protected from the disease.

A [new report](#) from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that the gap in vaccination rates between the poorest, most disadvantaged counties and healthier, wealthier counties has worsened since March, when the CDC last [reported](#) on the issue.

Using data on vaccine coverage from Dec. 14, 2020, to May 1, 2021, the CDC found that disparities were particularly severe in large metropolitan fringe and suburban areas and in rural counties.

Income was not the only factor separating counties with low vaccination rates from those with higher rates. Other variables pointed in the same direction. For example, vaccination rates were lower in counties with higher proportions of people with disabilities and single-parent households compared with counties with fewer people in those U.S. Census Bureau categories.

Similarly, counties where the percentage of mobile homes was at or above the national median had lower per capita vaccination rates compared with those where the number of such homes was lower than the median.

When the CDC found similar vaccine disparities among rich and poor counties in March, some public health experts speculated that the differences would narrow as eligibility broadened and vaccine supplies burgeoned. Increased community outreach and tailored vaccination efforts were expected to reduce the gap.

But as of May 1, the disparities had intensified.

“Improving COVID-19 vaccination coverage in communities with high proportions of racial/ethnic minority groups and persons who are economically and socially marginalized is critical because these populations have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19-related morbidity and

mortality,” the agency wrote in March.

In its most recent report, the CDC suggested that state and local public health officials investigate whether disparities continue because of inadequate access to vaccination clinics, or because vulnerable people were not prioritized in vaccine administration programs.

“Outreach efforts, including expanding public health messaging tailored to local populations and increasing vaccination access, could help increase vaccination coverage in counties with high social vulnerability,” the agency wrote.

As an example, the CDC suggested that states consider “opportunities to increase access by enrolling providers who are known and trusted in the community and partnering with [community- and faith-based organizations](#) to organize pop-up clinics.”

As of June 1, 168 million Americans, 60% of the U.S. population 12 or older, had received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. For White people, the proportion of the total was equal to their percentage of the population—61%. For Black people, who comprise 14% of the population, the proportion was 9%. For Hispanic people, who make up 17% of the population, the proportion was 14%.

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