

## MPH Student Insights on COVID-19

MPH students provided insightful perspectives when asked how social determinants could affect people's health and health disparities over the ongoing COVID-19 outbreak. They permitted us to share their comments:

*Student 1: Each day, there are thousands of people literally risking their lives to go to work. People with less education are more likely to suffer job loss or disruption due to coronavirus. We should provide mental health support for patients and health care workers. There should be more appreciation and provisions made for essential workers who are making minimum wage and still barely surviving during this pandemic.*

*Student 2: Individuals who must continue working during this time may be subject to greater exposure and therefore greater risk for contracting the virus. Shortages of supplies and barriers to accessing those supplies mean that these workers may not have access to proper personal protective equipment (PPE). In addition, testing for COVID-19 in most cases is only for those with symptoms or direct exposure, not based upon job type or level of risk (APHA, 2020). Another barrier to workers receiving testing for COVID-19 is the timing of COVID-19 testing.*

*Student 3: According to the APM (American Public Media) Research Lab's website, one of the few documenting death tolls by race, only twelve states are currently reporting data by race, so while the picture is incomplete, the disparity is staggering. "Across all the existing data, Black residents are 2.4 times more likely to die than we would expect based on their population. Most severely, in Wisconsin, Blacks are 5.5 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than their population share, followed by Michigan, where Blacks are 3.6 times more likely, and in Illinois, where they are 3.3 times more likely to die" (APM).*

*Student 4: It in fact widens the gaps already present and makes inequality worse. people of low socioeconomic status are often more impacted by COVID-19, access to health care, tend to suffer from other diseases, depression and anxiety, cardiovascular disease and many other comorbidities. To make matters worse, socioeconomic status also has an influence on our ability to social distance because of the difficult conditions of home, neighborhood, mode of transportation. Discrimination: However, concerns were quickly raised by racial minorities, especially blacks, who feared wearing a mask may put them at even higher risk of being targeted by police and seen as suspicious and untrustworthy.*

*Student 5: My aunt fell victim to the virus. She was 73 years old and lived in Brooklyn, New York. She began experiencing symptoms late March and was hospitalized on April 7th. Unfortunately, she lost her battle to COVID-19 on last Thursday, April 23rd which has left my entire family completely saddened and distraught. Older adults face an increased risk for severe disease after contracting and battling COVID-19. The results determined that older adults were disproportionately affected by the coronavirus due to potential preexisting health conditions and a gap in care as a result of the higher incidence of cases. Older adults especially are asked to remain at home and to practice a healthy lifestyle and consume nutritious meals. older adults have adequate access to healthy foods, supplies, medicine, and supplements to ensure support of their physical health.*

*Student 6: Older adults and people of any age who have serious underlying medical condition are at a higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19. For people that are homeless it is hard and almost*

*impossible to social distance when they have no place to self-quarantine themselves. Residents have to go to the grocery store because they live too far away from the grocery store for delivery. Rural residents also struggle with taking advantage of some healthcare options, such as telehealth, because of their struggles with Wi-Fi connections.*

*Student 7: One sub-group that is especially important to consider during the COVID-19 outbreak are individuals living in rural poverty areas. Although the number of COVID-19 cases in most rural areas is low compared to urban areas, it is only a matter of time before rural regions experience a surge in COVID-19 cases given the aggressive rise of incidence rates in recent weeks. It is also important to consider that about 18% of the population in rural areas is older than 65 years (United States Census Bureau, 2016) and rural areas have higher rates of co-morbidities, putting them at a greater risk for severe COVID-19. That is, many rural hospitals are under-equipped with limited healthcare personnel, limited ventilators, personal protective equipment, and testing kits. Another sub-group that is important to consider during the COVID-19 outbreak are race/ethnic minority groups, which have also been shown to experience greater poverty when compared to non-minority groups.*

*Student 8: Often patients of a lower socio-economic status work in jobs that are considered essential currently, such as transportation workers, grocery store employees, healthcare and hospital workers, sanitation workers, emergency services, fast food workers, or warehouse employees. These patients may feel forced to work due to their need for money or need for a job in this uncertain time. They are also often the most at-risk patients. Mental health has been on the forefront of many providers' minds, especially as many countries have been on nearly a month-long quarantine. The population has also seen an increase in anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors, due to the general public's growing concern about getting an infection or their loved ones getting an infection.*

*Student 9: Mental health due to overwhelming news, isolation. Part of mental health is financial security, and the pandemic is showing that the racial wealth gap has become more noticeable. Around 17% of students in America lack a computer at home, and 18% lack any internet access. Students who are unable to spend time online cannot access the needed materials to finish the school year and be prepared to start the next. Physically, persons of color are more likely to develop COVID-19 and to die from it. Native Americans share many of the same risks.*