PRESS RELEASE
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ADDRESSING COVID-19 RACE DISPARITIES IN WYANDOTTE COUNTY
Unified Government Public Health Department releases data on COVID-19 race and ethnicity

Following an intensive epidemiological investigation, the Unified Government has made Coronavirus impact data based on race and ethnicity available to the public on the County’s COVID-19 Dashboard at wycokck.org/COVID-19.

This data mirrors what is seen in the region and across the United States about African American communities being hit hardest by COVID-19. While black residents make up 22.5% of Wyandotte County’s population, more than half of all positive tests and more than two-thirds of COVID-19 deaths come from this population.

Dr. Allen Greiner, Chief Medical Officer with the Unified Government Public Health Department, emphasized the importance of addressing these health disparities in the community’s response to COVID-19.

“Protecting and supporting underserved communities that already suffer from inequitable health outcomes and higher than average levels of chronic disease is more important than ever in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Dr. Greiner.

The data on Hispanic populations in Wyandotte County differs – while 28% of the County’s population is Hispanic, only 15% of positive cases are among Hispanic community members. The Unified Government Public Health Department suspects that this does not reflect a lower proportion of COVID-19 illness, but rather a lower proportion of Hispanic residents being tested for COVID-19.

“We want to ensure that every individual in Wyandotte County, across every population in our diverse community is both capable of and comfortable with reporting symptoms and seeking out COVID-19 testing,” said Dr. Greiner. “We are and will continue working with partner organizations to connect all of our residents to the resources they need to stay healthy and protect their families.”

The Unified Government Public Health Department worked with partner organizations to form a Health Equity Task Force, which convened for the first time Tuesday evening. The Task Force is
made up of neighborhood leaders, members of organizations that primarily serve African American residents, Hispanic residents, faith leaders, and other leaders in the community.

At their first meeting, the team established the following goals and action steps in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Expanding testing accessibility, including providing additional testing sites at community locations
- Clarifying what the symptom reporting tool is used for and making it easier to use and understand
- Communicating the latest COVID-19 information through community leaders
- Creating a clearer follow-up plan for what happens after residents get tested

Mariana Ramírez, Director of JUNTOS Center for Advancing Latino Health and member of the Health Equity Task Force, acknowledged the value of this work in our community.

“Latinos and African Americans make up 28% and 22.5% of Wyandotte County's population respectively. Many of them are frontline workers whose jobs allow us to keep functioning as society. We can't fail them,” said Ramírez. “We appreciate the efforts of the health department to listen to leaders from these communities and work together to ensure that everyone in Wyandotte County has the opportunity to receive the help they need regardless of their language, ability to pay, or immigration status.”

This group will meet regularly to develop specific recommendations and action steps to help underserved communities through the coming weeks.

The race and ethnicity data is now available on the Wyandotte County COVID-19 dashboard, at wycokck.org/COVID-19. Additional health data as well as information on efforts to address health disparities, such as our local Community Health Improvement Plan, are available at wycokck.org/Health. General COVID-19 information is also available by calling 3-1-1.

**News Media Contact:**

Janell Friesen, Public Information Officer
Unified Government Public Health Department
jfriesen@wycokck.org
COVID-19 media requests: (913) 573-6727
All other Health Department media requests: (913) 573-6703

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