East Bay doctor weighs in on racial disparities, COVID-19
By Noelle Bellow | Kron4 | April 08, 2020

Health officials are now starting to release more detailed information about COVID-19 cases and deaths, including racial demographics.

In many of the country’s hardest hit communities, like New York, Detroit, New Orleans and Chicago, black residents are dying at a higher rate.

Here in California, the Department of Public Health sent out its expanded data and officials say it is roughly in line with the diversity of California overall.

The numbers sent out Wednesday are very preliminary and are reflective of less than 50% of COVID-19 cases and deaths in California so far:

- Latino’s accounting for 30% of cases
- Whites making up the most with 37 percent of cases
- Asians with 14%
- Blacks with 6%

Now, though African Americans are making up a smaller percentage of deaths and cases in California right now, doctors and health experts say that’s due to limited access for testing in their communities, even though underlying conditions generally put them at greater risk.

“It is very painful to see and I’ve seen it throughout my entire medical career that the health disparities in the minority community but particularly the African American community, puts them at risk for diseases much more so than the general population. The double whammy you suffer now is you have this terrible virus, which preys on people with those underlying conditions,” Dr. Anthony Fauci said.

The battle against COVID-19 is now bringing to light historic challenges.

Dr. Anthony Fauci and other health officials explained Wednesday the disparities when it comes to healthcare in African American communities.

“This is no different from any other health demographic,” Dr. Desmond Carson said.

Dr. Desmond Carson works with LifeLong Medical Care in the East Bay. He says African Americans are already more likely to fall victim to cancer, diabetes and chronic hypertension which would make a fight against COVID-19, a harder battle.

“It’s like breast cancer, black women die at higher death rates because they get diagnosed later. Our health seeking behavior, as well as the lack of facilities is gonna end up with us having the worst outcome,” Carson said.

Historical limited access to proper, affordable health care and the lack of testing in America is why Dr. Carson says we’ll continue to see African American communities hit harder.

“The problem in this country is we’re lacking testing. Where are we lacking testing? We’re lacking testing where it cannot be afforded so that typically excludes people in Compton, West Oakland, North Richmond. If you don’t have the test the data is already skewed,” Carson said.

The White House Task Force has requested the CDC assemble data on the unique impact being seen in minority communities across the country.
Health experts say now that states are releasing the ethnicity data, counties should use it to better allocate resources, such as testing and treatment in neglected communities.

Right now, experts say those in these communities should take this as a reminder to double down on the social distancing directives.

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