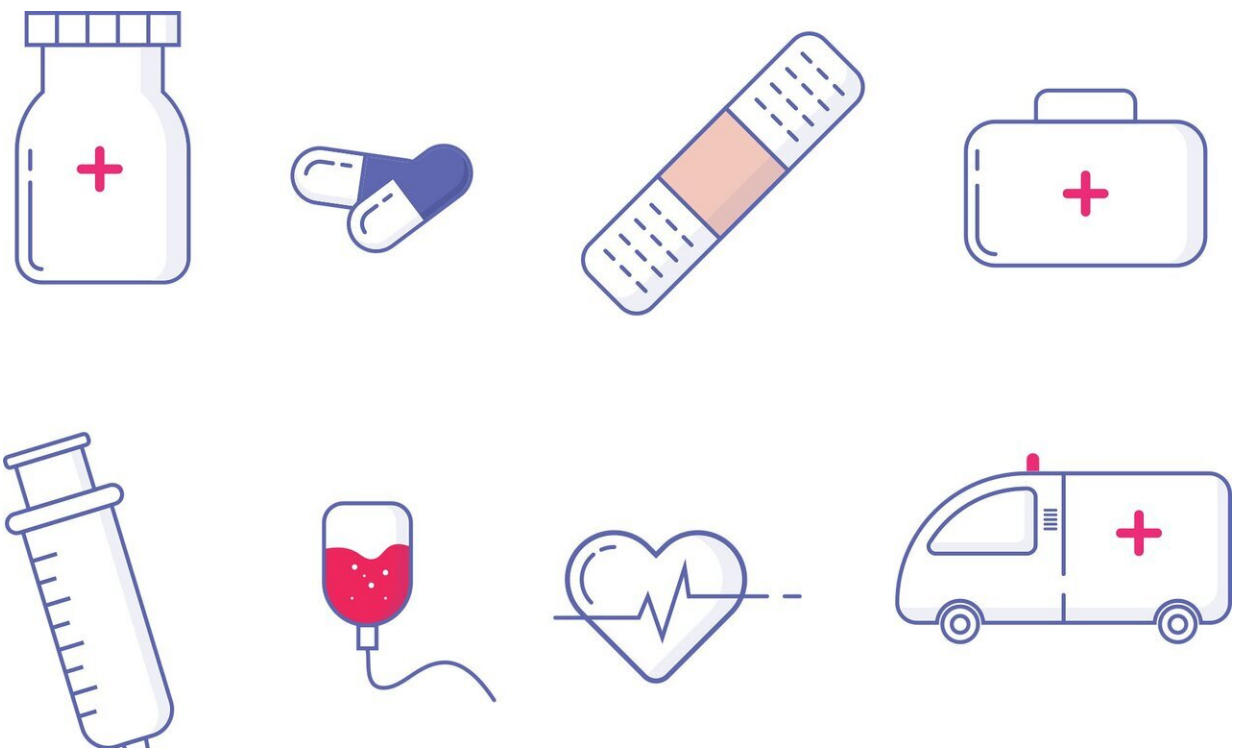


High COVID-19 risk among health care workers, especially those from minority backgrounds

July 31 2020



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New research indicates that at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. and the U.K., frontline healthcare workers—particularly those from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds—faced much

higher risks of testing positive for COVID-19 than individuals in the general community. The study, which was conducted by a team led by researchers at Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH), is published in *The Lancet Public Health*.

Among 2,035,395 individuals in the community and 99,795 frontline [healthcare](#) workers who voluntarily used the COVID Symptom Study smartphone app developed by Zoe Global Ltd with scientific input from MGH and Kings College London, 5,545 new reports of a positive COVID-19 test were documented between March 24 and April 23, 2020.

Frontline healthcare workers had at least a threefold increased risk of COVID-19, after accounting for differences in testing frequency between frontline healthcare workers and the general community. Black, Asian, and minority ethnic healthcare workers appeared to be disproportionately affected, with a nearly twofold higher risk compared with white healthcare workers.

Also, frontline healthcare workers who reported inadequate availability of personal protective equipment (PPE) such as masks, gloves, and gowns, had an especially elevated risk; however, adequate availability of PPE did not seem to completely reduce risk among healthcare workers caring for patients with COVID-19.

"Although it is clear that healthcare workers on the front line of the fight against COVID-19 have an increased risk of infection, our country continues to face vexing shortages of PPE," said senior author Andrew T. Chan, MD, Ph.D., chief of the Clinical and Translational Epidemiology Unit at MGH and director of Cancer Epidemiology at the MGH Cancer Center. "Our results underscore the importance of providing adequate access to PPE and also suggest that systemic racism associated with inequalities to access to PPE likely contribute to the

disproportionate risk of infection among minority frontline healthcare workers."

Dr. Chan hopes the study's findings bring greater awareness to the importance of ensuring an equitable supply chain of PPE and of developing additional strategies to protect all frontline healthcare workers. "This study demonstrates how the two major crises that the U.S. faces—the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism—are inextricably linked and need immediate attention," he added.

More information: Long H Nguyen et al, Risk of COVID-19 among front-line health-care workers and the general community: a prospective cohort study, *The Lancet Public Health* (2020). DOI: 10.1016/S2468-2667(20)30164-X

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