

# Children face racial disparities as COVID-19 infections rise

September 23 2021, by Margo Snipe

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COVID-19 is infecting more kids, and the racial disparities of who is falling ill is similar to those among adults, an analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation shows.

The age group 19 and younger saw nearly 4.9 million COVID-19 infections, over 39,000 hospitalizations, and 725 deaths nationwide through the end of August, according to the analysis.

While the [data](#) for young folks remains limited, it suggests [children](#) of color have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, which "may widen existing gaps in health and well-being between children of color and [white children](#)," wrote Nambi Ndugga, a policy analyst with the Kaiser Family Foundation who contributed to the report, in an email to the Tampa Bay Times.

Children of color are more likely than white children to be infected, hospitalized and die from the coronavirus, according to the Kaiser analysis. They may also be less likely to be vaccinated, leaving them particularly vulnerable.

Infection rates were highest for American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander children and Hispanic children.

For American Indian/Alaska Native children, the death rates were over 3 times that of white children and, for Black children, the [death rates](#) were over 2.5 times higher than their white counterparts.

"These data are not at all unsurprising," said Jason Salemi, an epidemiologist with the University of South Florida, in an email to the Times. "I hope we are not still so desensitized to certain subgroups in our population bearing the disproportionate brunt of many adverse health outcomes that it isn't an urgent call to action."

The gaps among children reflects the broader population trends that have persisted since the onset of the 18-month pandemic, which left adults of color at higher risk of infection, hospitalization and death.

These disparities "reflect underlying structural inequities," wrote Ndugga, "such as living in more densely populated areas, larger household sizes, and employment of household members in essential jobs that cannot be done from home."

And the impacts permeate beyond physical health. The analysis shows opportunities for academic growth were more likely to be hindered for Black and Hispanic children. Black and Hispanic parents were also more likely to suffer job loss, disrupting finances, elevating stress and interrupting child care.

As younger [age groups](#) become eligible for COVID-19 vaccines, experts say states should focus on thorough race and ethnicity data collection. Currently, that data is largely incomplete for all age groups, posing a challenge for researchers.

"There remain major gaps in data to identify and assess racial/ethnic disparities among youth," wrote Ndugga. "Increasing availability of data to understand vaccination rates among children by race/ethnicity will be key for identifying and assessing disparities and directing resources and efforts to address them."

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