

National experts stress importance of COVID-19 vaccination for Black community

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Credit: University of Connecticut

This week in the *New York Times* a national group of leading Black health experts shined a light on the critical importance of the Black community receiving the COVID-19 vaccination. Amongst the 60 elected members of the National Academy of Medicine were UConn Health Surgeon-Scientist Dr. Cato T. Laurencin and other top experts bringing the critical issue to the national forefront urging the Black community to protect themselves and get vaccinated once available.

Read UConn Today's Q & A on this important awareness topic with Laurencin who chairs the National Academies Roundtable on Black Men and Black Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine, and serves as the Albert and Wilda Van Dusen Distinguished Endowed Professor of Orthopaedic Surgery at UConn Health and University Professor at UConn.

Q: Are Blacks contracting the COVID-19 virus at higher rates?

A: Our research data show that yes, Blacks not only have higher rates of contracting COVID-19, but also are dying of COVID-19 at high rates. Our team at the University of Connecticut published the first paper in the peer-reviewed literature presenting data showing higher rates of cases and deaths involving COVID-19 in Blacks. Our paper is entitled The COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call to Action to Identify and Address Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities. Since the latest data show that Blacks are continuing to die from high rates of COVID-19, a team of Black members of the National Academy of Medicine are hoping as trusted, reputable medical faces in the community we have a positive impact on the Black community making the choice to get vaccinated.

Q: How may racism in the healthcare system influence medical mistrust in the Black Community?

A: Racism in the healthcare system, whether it be called conscious bias, unconscious bias, stereotyping, or prejudice, contributes to healthcare disparities and high rates of morbidity and deaths among the Black population, and is a driver of mistrust. In order to build trust within the Black community, The National Academies Roundtable on Black Men and Black Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine suggests increasing the number of Black men and women in Medicine and

Science. In 2018, the National Academies produced the landmark proceedings entitled *An American Crisis: The Growing Absence of Black Men in Medicine and Science*.

Q: How do we address medical mistrust right now and urge the Black community to get vaccinated?

A: Established in 2019, the Roundtable on Black Men and Black Women in Science, Engineering and Medicine convenes a broad array of stakeholders to tackle various issues facing the Black community. As a trusted source of information, Roundtable leadership and the COVID-19 Action Group of the Roundtable recorded an informational webinar video focused on addressing common questions and concerns around vaccine hesitation in the Black community. The hope is that this video will be a key resource for the Black community to learn more about the importance of being vaccinated.

Q: Where do we go from here?

A: We need to work to develop trustworthiness in medicine for Blacks in Connecticut, but also across the country. One way we are doing that in Connecticut is in relaunching the Imhotep Connecticut National Medical Association Society (CT NMA). The CT NMA will serve as a networking platform for Black physicians and play a role in the dissemination of health information to the Black Community. I have recently become President of this organization and I'm gratified to see that all the major health systems of the State of Connecticut have supported this relaunch.

Provided by University of Connecticut

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