

June 2, 2020

Dear Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition members and community,

The COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with the traumatic events of the past weeks have highlighted the need for increased compassion, respect and on-going honest and open communication. Health disparity is an undeniable public health crisis. These inequities are evident during the COVID-19 pandemic as communities of color face a greater burden of COVID-19 cases and poorer health outcomes when diagnosed with the disease.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is seen more acutely in communities of color in Howard County. Cases among Black and Hispanic individuals account for 35.4% of total cases although only accounting for an estimated 27.1% of the total population of the County. Additionally, 49.2% of the total deaths due to COVID-19 in Howard County have been among Black and Asian residents although only accounting for an estimated 39.1% of the total population. Among Howard County residents lost to COVID-19, 96% of these patients had at least one underlying condition or risk factor. Diabetes (40%), kidney disease (31%), heart disease (27%), and hypertension (58%) were the most common underlying conditions.

During this time, having difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations is necessary in order to promote, preserve and protect health for everyone. Whether the conversation is answering a call to help trace contacts and protect others from COVID-19 or the conversation is an honest conversation based in cultural humility, the key is to have the discussion. It is through honest and respectful communication that we will build a culture of respect and caring.

As the County re-opens and we begin to gather again as a resilient community, I continue to encourage those who can stay home to do so, not only to protect yourself, but to protect those who do not have that same opportunity. Wear facial coverings, wash hands frequently, and practice social distancing as an outward sign that you care about others and protecting the health of our community. The Howard County Health Department will continue to be here working with you toward our vision of a model community in which health equity and optimal wellness are accessible for all who live, work and visit Howard County.

Sincerely,



Maura J. Rossman, MD
Health Officer