



COVID-19 Vulnerability Varies by Race and Ethnicity

The effects of COVID-19 on public health and the economy are present for every member of the Johnson County community. Since March 2020, 887 Johnson County residents have tested positive for the virus and 67 have died. Unemployment claims have reached a record high across all industries. However, a closer look at available data indicates that some may be more vulnerable to the health and economic fallout of COVID-19.

Johnson County Dept. of Health and Environment’s [COVID-19 dashboard](#) indicates people of color comprise approximately 1 in 4 (20%) confirmed COVID-19 cases in Johnson County, even though residents who are people of color make up only 14% of the Johnson County population. Hispanic or Latino residents, collectively only 7% of the Johnson County population, represent 16% of confirmed COVID-19 cases.

These data represent a health disparity, whereby a higher burden of illness, injury, disability, or mortality is experienced by one group relative to another. A complex and interrelated set of individual, provider, health system, societal, and environmental factors contribute to disparities in health. In Johnson County, certain social and economic factors – occupation, health insurance status, and housing - may contribute to the COVID-19 health disparity.

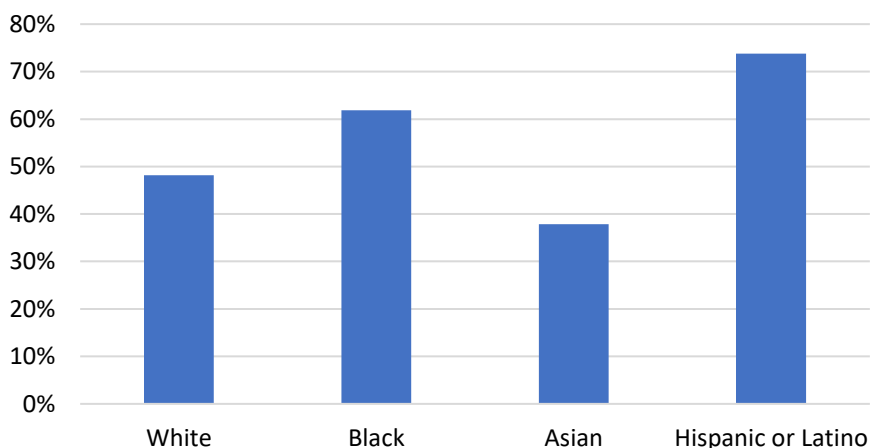
Most people of color work in “essential” occupations

As in many other parts of the U.S., Kansas residents were subject to “stay-at-home” orders as COVID-19 cases began increasing in early March 2020. Businesses were required to close unless states deemed certain occupations essential. Most “essential workers” fall into four categories:

- Service occupations, including healthcare, food preparation and service, and protective services such as police and emergency medical personnel
- Sales and office occupations including retail workers
- Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations
- Production, transportation, and material moving occupations which includes workers in meatpacking facilities and product delivery workers

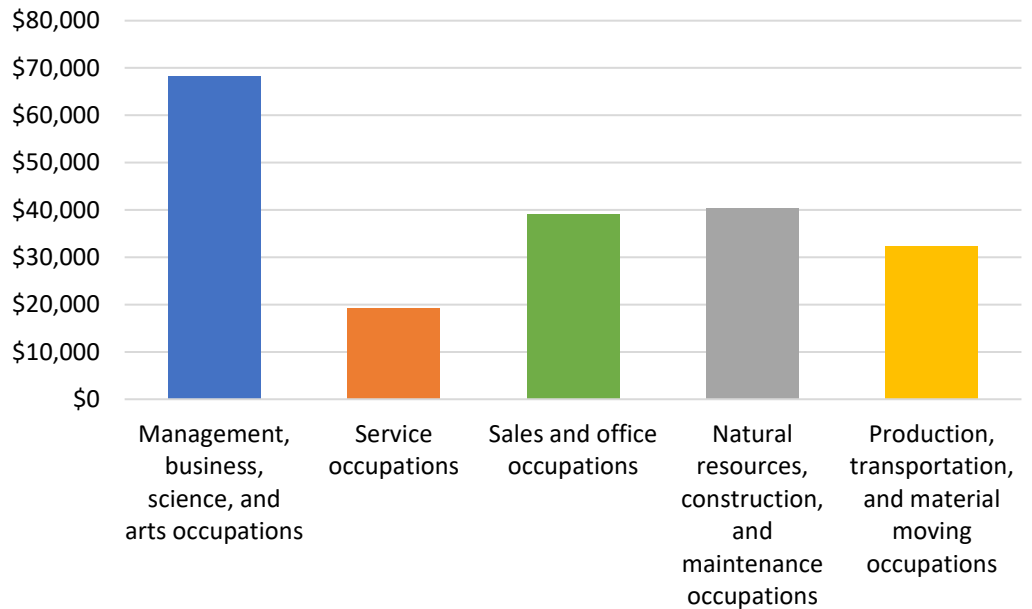
Essential workers are less likely to be able to work from home than workers in Management, Business, Science, and Arts occupations; they are more likely to encounter people outside their household and to contract COVID-19, a highly infectious disease that spreads from person-to-person through direct contact. According to 2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 3 in 5 of people of color on average are employed in essential occupations. Comparatively, more than 50% of those employed in Management, Business, Science, and Arts occupations are White.

"Essential Occupations" Workforce by Race/Ethnicity



Workers in essential occupations earn, on average, half of what workers in Management, Business, Science, and Arts occupations earn. Overall, essential workers are exposed to a higher degree of risk for significantly less pay than their counterparts in other occupational categories. The racial distribution of workers across income categories may explain some disparate trends in income and poverty: the per capita income for White residents is \$47,609, compared to \$29,774 for Black residents and \$21,608 for Hispanic and Latino residents. Black Johnson County residents are three times more likely to live in poverty than White Johnson County residents; the Black poverty rate is 13.9% compared to 4.7% for the White population. The poverty rate for Hispanic and Latino residents is 15.9%.

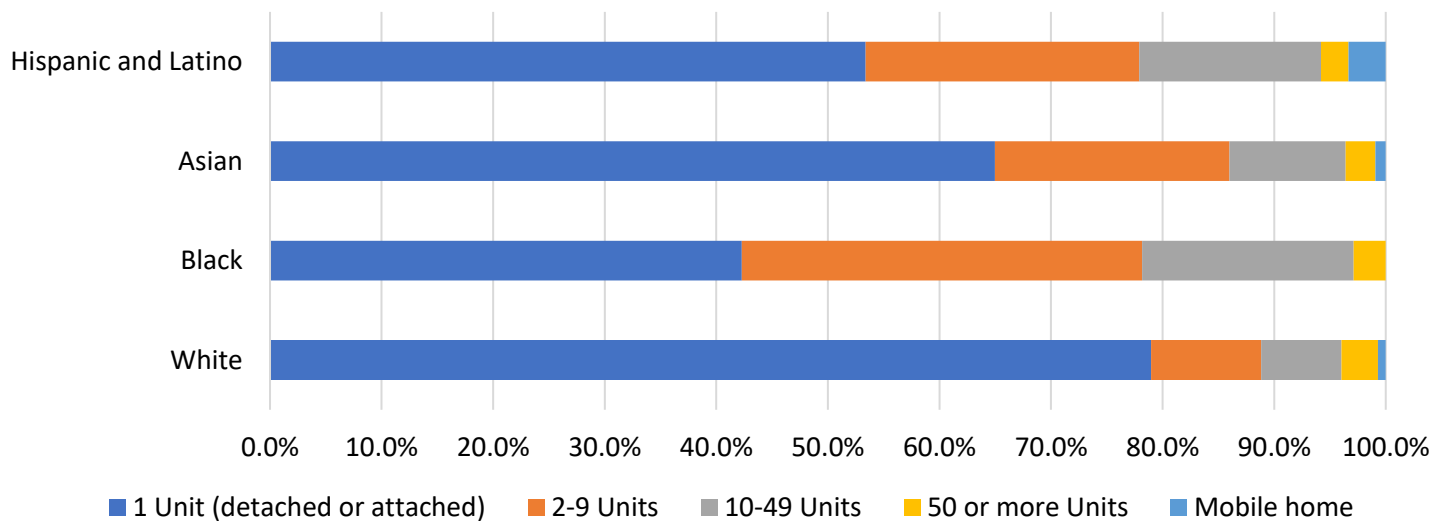
Median Income by Occupation Category



People of color more likely to live in densely populated housing

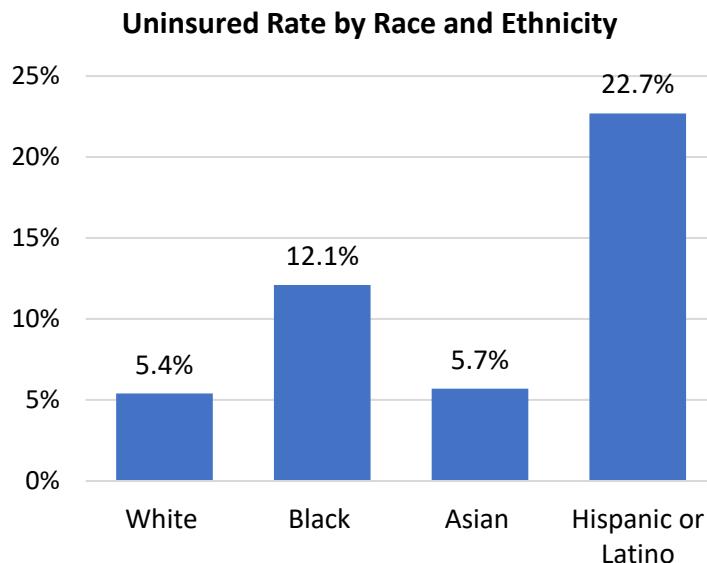
Residency in multi-family housing – most of which are rental property – may increase the risk of exposure to coronavirus because of the presence and use of common areas such as elevators, lobbies, leasing offices, and laundry facilities. More than 4 in 5 White and 3 in 5 Asian residents, respectively, live in single-unit housing structures. Half of Hispanic residents live in single-unit housing structures. By comparison, 2 in 5 Black residents live in single-unit housing structures, with the majority of the population residing in housing with two or more units. Overall, Black and Latino residents are more than twice as likely to be renters compared to White residents.

Units in Housing by Race and Ethnicity



People of color are more likely to be uninsured

Another factor that makes people of color more vulnerable to COVID-19 is access to health insurance. Residents without health insurance may delay coronavirus testing or treatment out of fear of incurring costly medical bills. Johnson County has a low uninsured rate overall and 94% of the population has some form of health insurance coverage. When we compare health insurance coverage rates across racial groups, disparities emerge. White residents are uninsured at a rate approximate to that of the general population (5.4%) while the Black uninsured rate is more than double (12.1%). Hispanic and Latino residents are more than four times as likely to be uninsured (22.7%) than White residents.



COVID-19 highlights the racial and ethnic disparities of our community in stark ways. In the U.S., racial discrimination is an underlying condition for COVID-19 infections and deaths, and profoundly impacts the social determinants of health – e.g., employment, housing, incarceration, income, and education, among others – by disproportionately burdening systemically disadvantaged communities, including communities of color. The various and intersecting dimensions of inequity make people of color in Johnson County more vulnerable to poor health outcomes, including those associated with COVID-19. A comprehensive response that includes multi-sector planning and targeted resource allocation is necessary to ensure that all Johnson County residents have the opportunity for a healthy life, especially those who are systematically disadvantaged.



Sources: U.S. Census American Family Survey 2018 5-year estimates
 Not all Census racial categories are included due to high margins of error.

