

**Background:** Black and Hispanic/Latino/Latinx communities are more affected by the COVID-19 pandemic compared to White communities. This study explored the experiences of Black and Latinx adults during the early part of the pandemic to understand their understanding of and response to COVID-19 public health strategies and their perspectives on the behaviors to prevent COVID-19, including testing and vaccines. Findings could inform public health messaging and strategies that can effectively support Black and Latinx communities through the pandemic and beyond.

### WHERE:

18 community-based organizations and 4 health care organizations in urban New Jersey counties severely affected by the pandemic



### WHEN?

November 2020 – February 2021



### WHO?

- 111 Black and Latinx individuals (61.3% Black, 38.7% Latinx)
- 78% were women
- Ages ranged from 18-93, with a median age of 43



### MEASURES & OBSERVATIONS

- A total of **13 group interviews** (90 minutes) and **8 individual interviews** (20-30 minutes) were conducted via Zoom.
- **Group interviews were organized by race/ethnicity and language:** 4 English-speaking groups with Black participants, 3 Spanish-speaking groups with Latinx participants, 4 English-speaking groups that included Black and Latinx participants
- **Facilitators followed a pre-scripted interview guide, which was developed through literature review, the team's experience, and partner feedback.**
  - Questions were open-ended and focused on several areas, including: Impacts of the pandemic on their communities
  - Feelings about contact tracing
  - COVID-19 testing thoughts and preferences
  - Opinions about vaccines



### KEY FINDINGS

- During the beginning of the pandemic, participants experienced fear, illness, loss, and separation. **These experiences motivated intense information seeking, mitigation behaviors, and testing.**
- Participants were unsure of the vaccine (vaccine skepticism) despite their experiences. **Participants did not trust how quickly the vaccine was developed** and wanted clearer information from people and leaders they trusted.
- **Black participants expressed that they did not want to be subjects of experiments**, citing racism and history of experimentation on Black communities.
- **Latinx participants reported difficulty finding COVID-19 testing sites**, transportation issues, and language barriers.
- **Black and Latinx respondents were more likely than White respondents to report use of COVID-19 prevention behaviors**, often motivated by the disproportionate suffering seen in these communities.



### LIMITATIONS

This study has the following limitations:

- **Interviews help researchers understand wide ranges of perspectives**, but should not lead to generalizations about certain communities.
- **Participants were from mostly urban counties in one state**, so we cannot make assumptions for these communities in rural areas or other states.
- **Participants were interviewed in the early part of the pandemic**, so views may have changed, especially about the vaccines.
- **The interviews helped researchers understand community perspectives**, but there was no focus on understanding how those perspectives affect their behaviors.



## CONCLUSIONS

**Black and Latinx communities experience severe structural barriers in our society such as getting access to testing.** Most importantly, vaccine skepticism is an important topic to address, particularly with Black communities, so they may make informed decisions.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Transparency is key.** Facilitate informed choices through clear, transparent information and community-engaged strategies.
- **When working with communities of color, do not assume inaction is due to lack of knowledge.** Marketing campaigns focused on reassurance often dismiss worries about COVID-19 testing and vaccines. Spend time, energy, and money engaging community leaders and trusted health professionals as partners who can support informed choices.
- **Address logistical barriers that often affect communities of color,** like access to testing and complicated online registration processes.
- **Improve access to testing within underserved communities,** regardless of documentation status, by providing:
  - Convenient testing options
  - Accessible sites within walking distance
  - Translated health information and education
  - Clear information about testing costs and eligibility for free testing
- **Participants noted the following information is needed when trying to make a decision about getting vaccinated:**
  - How were the vaccines developed?
  - How effective are the vaccines?
  - What adverse effects have been seen with the vaccines?
  - How have others responded to the vaccines?



A Research Collaboration with



This summary was performed in April 2022. This summary includes only the results of a single study. Other studies may find different results. The study was supported by in part by the NIH RADx<sup>®</sup> Underserved Populations (RADx-UP) initiative (3 UL1 TR003017-02S2).

**Citation:** Jimenez ME, Rivera-Núñez Z, Crabtree BF, et al. Black and Latinx Community Perspectives on COVID-19 Mitigation Behaviors, Testing, and Vaccines. JAMA Netw Open. 2021;4(7):e2117074. doi:10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2021.17074

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