

Telecommuting shields workers from COVID-19, says report

5 November 2020, by Steven Reinberg Healthday Reporter



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(HealthDay)—Working from home during the pandemic significantly reduces your risk of catching COVID-19, U.S. health officials say.

The option to work remotely, however, appears to be available mostly to college-educated white employees with [health insurance](#) who make \$75,000 a year or more, according to a new U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report.

"We have two different kinds of classes of Americans. One is the essential services class, and then we've got the white-collar class able to work from home," said Dr. Eric Cioe-Pena, director of global health at Northwell Health in New Hyde Park, N.Y. He reviewed the report and was not part of the research.

Of nearly 250 workers who reported on their status during the two weeks before getting COVID-19, those who worked outside their homes were significantly more likely to fall ill than those who worked remotely at least part of the time, CDC

researchers found.

The percentage who had been able to telework either full- or part-time was lower among patients who tested positive for COVID-19 (35%) than among patients who tested negative (53%), they noted.

The burden of these class differences falls along racial and economic lines, Cioe-Pena said.

"There is a specific class of essential workforce, namely medical, where we've made sure that they have adequate PPE [personal protective equipment], but I don't think we've been as rigorous in the kind of provision and assurance for other essential workers," he said. "So, there is this population of people that are essential, but are not protected to the level that medical workers are."

Cioe-Pena regards this divide between those at more and less at risk for COVID-19 as reflective of broad inequalities in society.

"This represents the kind of structures and systems of power that already privileged white workers and have disadvantaged non-white and lower-paid workers," he said. "As we go through COVID, we need to try to address some of these inequalities."

At the very least, Cioe-Pena said essential workers should have the right to adequate [personal protective equipment](#). They also need paid sick time and health insurance, he added.

Vital workers include doctors, nurses, [police officers](#) and firefighters, but Cioe-Pena said it's important to consider others who provide much-needed services, including grocery workers, delivery people and many others.

"They are all servicing our essential infrastructure, and without them our society would grind to a very disturbing halt," Cioe-Pena said. "I think that we're

clapping for them, but we need to provide for them as well."

The report was published Nov. 6 in the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

More information: For answers to frequently asked questions about COVID-19, visit the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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