

New report outlines how government can address COVID-19 ethnic disparity

19 January 2021

A new report from The Runnymede Trust and The University of Manchester's Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity has addressed the possible causes of—and offers solutions to—the ethnic disparity of the effects of Coronavirus.

Ethnic minority people experience a much higher risk of COVID-19-related death—a stark [inequality](#) that impacts on all ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minorities are also at increased risk of complications and mortality post COVID-19 infection.

There has been much discussion of what might be driving ethnic inequalities in infections and outcomes—these include speculative approaches which question whether inequalities might be due to genetic or 'cultural' differences.

There is no evidence for genetic or genetically-related biological factors underlying this increased risk, including vitamin D deficiency. Greater risk is more likely to be the result of pre-existing social and economic inequalities manifesting in the form of chronic illness.

These inequalities reflect increased risk of exposure to the virus because of where people live, the type of accommodation they live in, household size, the types of jobs they do and the means of transport they use to get to work.

Unless racism is understood as a key driver of the inequalities which increase the chances of exposure to and mortality from COVID-19, government and public sector policy responses to the coronavirus pandemic risk further increasing ethnic inequalities in the UK.

The report recommends that the government should:

- Commission further research which identifies how racial discrimination in

housing, [health services](#), employment and criminal justice have affected the [health outcomes](#) of black and ethnic minority communities.

- Immediately conduct Equality Impact Assessments on all [government actions](#) in relation to the coronavirus pandemic, ensure that these include recommendations for action to minimise inequalities, do this in consultation with the groups affected, and act on the resulting recommendations.
- Immediately strengthen the social security safety net to mitigate the impact of social and economic inequalities on the health of ethnic minority people, paying particular attention to the increased risks they face in employment, education, economic security and housing.
- Increase Statutory Sick Pay and widen eligibility for it, including extending it to those who are not currently eligible because of low or intermittent pay and zero-hours contracts and to cover those in quarantine.
- Scrap the No Recourse to Public Funds condition imposed on migrants with limited, or without, leave to remain, in order to ensure that they have access to healthcare and the social security and housing support necessary to allow them to socially isolate.
- Issue a public information campaign to ensure that everyone is aware of the government's exemption from charging for COVID-19 healthcare treatment and stopping immigration checks as part of their public health response to the pandemic.
- Ensure that all workers have access to [personal protective equipment](#) to address the documented greater difficulties that [ethnic minority](#) workers have had in accessing this.
- Ensure suitable, secure accommodation and housing for people who live in overcrowded housing and/or intergenerational households, and who

need to self-isolate or shield.

- Establish a wide-ranging, well-resourced and independent inquiry into ethnic inequalities in health, which includes COVID-19 in its scope and moves beyond a focus on explanation to one that provides detailed recommendations to address fundamental causes.

"The stark ethnic inequalities in relation to the coronavirus pandemic reflect wider and longstanding inequalities. Underpinning these are processes related to and the consequences of structural, institutional and interpersonal racism and discrimination. It is vital that as we deal with the current crisis and plot our way out of it we take the opportunity to put in place action to address these inequalities," says report author James Nazroo, professor of sociology.

More information: The report is available online:

www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Runnymede%20CoDE%20COVID%20briefing%20v3.pdf

Provided by University of Manchester

APA citation: New report outlines how government can address COVID-19 ethnic disparity (2021, January 19) retrieved 25 August 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-outlines-covid-ethnic-disparity.html>

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