

Hispanic immigrants of working age at highest risk of dying from COVID-19

8 April 2021, by Leigh Hopper



Hispanic immigrants of working age are the backbone of California's agricultural and service industries. Credit: Lance Cheung, USDA

Hispanic immigrants of working age—20 to 54 years old—are over 11 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than U.S.-born men and women who are not Hispanic, according to a USC study of California death certificate data from 2020.

The study, published Monday in the *Annals of Epidemiology*, highlights California's urgent need to bring vaccinations, treatments and other interventions to a demographic that comprises the backbone of the state's agricultural and service industries. Unions and [advocacy groups](#) are racing to convince immigrants, both documented and undocumented, to get vaccines, Politico reports.

"We've known since early on that people of color are more likely to die of COVID. The CDC says that Hispanics, overall, are 2.3 times more likely to die than non-Hispanics," said Erika Garcia, an assistant professor of preventive medicine at the Keck School of Medicine of USC and the study's first author. "Yet when we looked at this specific, working-age group, we were astonished to see

much higher disparities."

When the researchers looked at young, foreign-born Hispanic individuals, they found COVID deaths as a proportion of the typical total deaths was 11.6 times higher than that of young, U.S.-born, non-Hispanic individuals. The disparities persisted, even after accounting for education level, which served as a proxy for socioeconomic status in the study.

Examining [death certificates](#), researchers identified 10,200 COVID-19 deaths in California occurring between February and July 2020. Death certificate data, rather than hospital system or insurance company data, allowed the researchers to capture COVID deaths among historically marginalized groups, including immigrants, who might be underrepresented in [health care](#) or insurance systems.

Overall, those who died were primarily age 65 or above, male, Hispanic, foreign-born and had an [education level](#) of high school or below. When the researchers drilled deeper into the data, they found disparities were larger among younger-aged Asian/Pacific Islanders, Blacks, Hispanics and whites.

For example, among Black men and women 20-54 years old, the COVID death rate was nearly five times that of whites. Among Hispanics of the same age, both U.S.-born and foreign-born, the COVID [death](#) rate was 8.5 times that of whites.

"While they are experiencing lower COVID-19 mortality overall, younger populations should not be left out of public health interventions," Garcia said. "There are complex risk structures that differ not only between groups but also within a group, which need to be considered in public health guidelines and policies.

"For example, people of color are more likely to be

employed in industries with more exposure to infections and [close proximity](#) to others—this is an important risk factor for individuals of working age."

More information: Erika Garcia et al, COVID-19 mortality in California based on death certificates: disproportionate impacts across racial/ethnic groups and nativity, *Annals of Epidemiology* (2021).
[DOI: 10.1016/j.annepidem.2021.03.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annepidem.2021.03.006)

Provided by University of Southern California

APA citation: Hispanic immigrants of working age at highest risk of dying from COVID-19 (2021, April 8) retrieved 16 June 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-hispanic-immigrants-age-highest-dying.html>

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