

## Black residents now account for more than 8 in 10 D.C. coronavirus cases

By [Lola Fadulu](#) and [Dan Keating](#)

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Black people make up more than 80 percent of coronavirus cases reported in the District in recent days, compared with 46 percent late last year, a disparity that D.C. Mayor Muriel E. Bowser (D) highlighted in a call with Ward 8 community leaders Tuesday.

The share of new infections involving Black people spiked sharply in the city starting around mid-April, when the coronavirus vaccine became widely available to D.C. residents. The share of cases involving White people, meanwhile, has fallen below 10 percent, compared with 33 percent of cases in December.

It is yet another way in which the highly contagious virus — which has disproportionately sickened and killed people of color throughout the pandemic — has exacerbated the nation’s deep racial divides. Similar trends have been seen elsewhere in the country, including in both [Kentucky](#) and [Tennessee](#).

The District’s population is about 45 percent Black and 42.5 percent White, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates. But White residents have been significantly more likely to get vaccinated, due to higher rates of both hesitancy and access issues for Black Washingtonians.

“I got a troubling statistic from Dr. Nesbitt today that the percent of people of color — Black and Brown people — who are getting covid has gone up,” Bowser told the Anacostia Coordinating Council, referring to D.C. health director LaQuandra Nesbitt. “And that is a direct function of vaccination.”

Bowser urged the more than 90 people on the Zoom call to get vaccinated if they had not already done so: “You’re putting yourself at risk and you’re putting the city at risk, because if this virus kicks up again, among unvaccinated communities, it could drive our numbers up and shut us down, and none of us wants that.”

The number of coronavirus cases in D.C. has fallen steadily since the last peak in January as vaccinations take hold. As a result, the number of Black residents getting sick remains far below what it was earlier in the pandemic.

But city data analyzed by The Washington Post shows that the virus has more than ever become a disease mostly affecting people of color in the city.

“I am terrified that this thing could become a Black and Brown disease, and that it will stay in our community for a

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are fully vaccinated, compared with 28.8 percent of White residents.

Community health leaders say they are particularly concerned about getting front-line, essential workers vaccinated, especially as the District and other jurisdictions are repealing mask mandates and restrictions on the size of gatherings because of rising vaccinations and falling case rates.

“People are going to be walking around now, without masks, and our front-line people will not know whether that person is vaccinated or not,” Tuckson said.

Neil Sehgal, an assistant professor of health policy at the University of Maryland School of Public Health, said the availability of the vaccine has split society into two risk groups, with unvaccinated people at high risk of contracting the virus and dying from it, and vaccinated people at small risk of both.

“There’s a disparity in who’s getting vaccinated,” Sehgal said. “And if those cases that we’re seeing are concentrated among unvaccinated people, and fewer Black residents of D.C. are getting vaccinated, it seems to reason that our Black neighbors are at a greater risk of contracting covid today than at any point in recent memory.”

Sehgal noted that while some people may choose not to get vaccinated, others probably face barriers to getting the shots, such as limited transportation and challenges getting time off from work.

In the first few months of the vaccine rollout, residents of affluent, mostly White parts of the District snapped up vaccination appointments in every ward of the city, navigating the complex online sign-up system with relative ease.

But as supply ramped up and demand began to subside, the D.C. government shifted from a strict sign-up system to one that increasingly offered walk-up appointments in multiple locations, from mass-vaccination sites to neighborhood pharmacies, churches and community clinics.

The government launched a new program Tuesday that allows employers in the city to request a vaccination clinic for employees at their workplace. The Vaccine Exchange Program is also open to faith-based and community-based organizations. The clinics can take place indoors or outdoors. Workplaces can request a clinic at [request.vaccineexchange.dc.gov](http://request.vaccineexchange.dc.gov).

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