



**November 17, 2022**

## **Road Map Bulletin: Exploring Inequities in Flu Vaccine Uptake**

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai Community –

Flu season is here, and this week, we want to discuss some lesser-known disparities surrounding influenza hospitalization rates, why they exist, and what can be done to keep all communities healthy.

Last month, [The Wall Street Journal reported](#) that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) had found that Black, Hispanic, and American Indian adults in the United States are hospitalized for influenza at higher rates than white adults. From 2009 to 2022, [flu hospitalization rates](#) were 80 percent higher among Black adults, 30 percent higher among American Indian adults, and 20 percent higher among Hispanic adults.

Lower vaccination rates among communities of color likely play a significant role in this disparity. During the 2021-2022 flu season, for example, vaccination coverage was 54 percent among white and Asian adults in the United States, compared with 42 percent among Black adults, 38 percent among Hispanic adults, and 41 percent among American Indian adults. And as we all know, while vaccination does not prevent all infections, it does add protection, making cases less intense and less likely to lead to hospitalization.

However, that doesn't tell the full story. As we have [previously examined](#) when talking about COVID-19 disparities, lower vaccination rates exist for a myriad of reasons, including lack of access to health care and insurance, missed opportunities to vaccinate, and misinformation and distrust—which are all made worse by racism and prejudice.

CDC officials have said that targeted outreach to increase flu vaccination could help lower the differences in severe outcomes. **Judith A. Aberg, MD, FIDSA, FACP, Dean of System Operations for Clinical Sciences, Dr. George Baehr Professor of Medicine, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai**, echoed this, explaining that we won't be able to reduce health disparities until we aggressively seek out the populations most at risk and provide access to care and fight misinformation.



“While there may be genetic reasons for why some populations are more likely to have specific conditions, the vast majority of poor outcomes related to infectious diseases is due to the lack of engagement with health care systems and the populations who are impacted,” she said.

Expanding community programs like the federal [Vaccines for Children program](#), which provides vaccines at no cost to providers for children who are on Medicaid, uninsured, or underinsured, and setting up free influenza vaccine stations in more places—not just at commercial drug stores, but at trusted locations in communities—can help reach high-risk populations.

In addition to equitable access to vaccines and all health care services, building a trust between patients and providers is also critical.

**Kristin Oliver, MD, MHS, Associate Professor of Environmental Medicine and Public Health, and Pediatrics, and Global Health Program Director, Preventive Medicine Residency, Icahn Mount Sinai**, told us that building that relationship can start at the individual level:



“Simply having conversations with vaccine-hesitant patients or community members and listening to their concerns may do a lot more to restore trust and improve immunization rates in the long term. Even if a patient leaves the visit unvaccinated, they will leave feeling heard.”

Uncovering and fighting disparities like this through education and increased access is exactly what the Road Map was designed to do—and this winter, Mount Sinai will continue its work to ensure all communities have access to the care they need and deserve.

All the best,  
Angela and Shawn

## Join Us for Upcoming Events

**Office for Diversity and Inclusion's Diversity Innovation Hub | Building Digital Health Equity Final Presentations**—On Monday, November 21, at 6 pm, participants in the Building Digital Health Equity Training will present their final presentations and offer a view into a world where currently accepted digital health solutions are reimagined to be accessible and impactful to all. Register [here](#) to attend this virtual webinar.

**Chats for Change | Deeper Dive Series | "White Supremacy—Culture Characteristics: Fear of Conflict"**—Chats for Change is a production of Icahn Mount Sinai's Racism and Bias Initiative. One of the greatest barriers to the growth of society is our shared inability to address hurt and harm. Join us on Tuesday, November 22, from noon to 1 pm as we build an understanding of this paradigm, and explore ways we can all learn to "say the thing." Register [here](#) to attend this virtual event

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