



July 6, 2023

Clearing the Air on the Connection Between Race and Poor Air Quality

Happy Thursday, Mount Sinai Community –

After the last few weeks, we all know how important it is to not take clean air for granted. As we continue to feel the effects of poor air quality from the [Canadian wildfires](#) and from [other pollution](#), we want to shed some light on the ways in which poor air quality disproportionately undermines the health of communities of color.

In the past, we've discussed how [people of color face higher rates of asthma diagnosis, hospitalization, and death due to high levels of airborne pollutants](#), and the complex causes of this disparity. A [recent study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine*](#) underscores why we must consider racial identity and socioeconomic status together when assessing health inequities.

Mount Sinai's Center on Health and Environment Across the LifeSpan (HEALS), which conducts comprehensive research to understand how nutrition, the social environment, and other modifiers contribute to health inequities and works to devise tangible, evidence-based solutions, [is doing exactly that](#). New research from the HEALS team found that ZIP codes with more Black and low-income residents were exposed to higher levels of particulate matter from soil and dust, heavy fuel and industrial activity, and motor vehicle sources—all of which can have a negative impact on health.



Perry Sheffield, MD, MPH, Associate Professor of Environmental Medicine and Public Health, and Pediatrics, and member of the Mount Sinai Institute for Exposomic Research and HEALS, explained that, “Black and brown communities and low-income communities have long been burdened with additional industrial and traffic sources of pollution. This has, in part, resulted from race-based housing and other discriminatory policy practices.”

The solution, she told us, is tighter federal air pollution regulations: “This would benefit everyone and is one important piece of correcting environmental injustice.”

[Implementing stricter limits on fine particulate matter could reduce mortality rates](#) by up to 7 percent for Black and low-income Americans over 65 who are already exposed to some of the dirtiest air in the United States.

In January, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a draft rule tightening limits on fine particulate matter, but it will take significant legislative action to correct decades of harmful environmental racism. Comprehensive research coupled with evidence-based policy solutions, community engagement, and public awareness is vital in addressing racial disparities in air quality. By prioritizing environmental justice and implementing equitable policies, we can work towards creating healthier and more sustainable communities for all.

To suggest a topic, highlight a coworker, or provide feedback on the Bulletins, send us an email at RoadMap@mountsinai.org.

All the best,

Shawn and Angela

Join Us for an Upcoming Event

Chats for Change: Celebrating Disability Pride Month—Chats for Change is a production of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai’s Racism and Bias Initiative. On July 20, 1990, a landmark U.S. rights law, the Americans with Disabilities Act, was signed into law, extending civil rights protections to people with disabilities. Disability Pride Month celebrates disabled people by promoting their visibility, applauding their achievements, and rejecting internalized ableism. Although not nationally recognized in the United States, Disability Pride Month helps us understand the importance of honoring each person’s uniqueness. Join us on **Tuesday, July 11, from noon to 1 pm** as we amplify Disability Pride Month and discuss how we can support the contributions of this community. Register on [Zoom](#).

