COVID-19 and Societal Inequities

We have seen the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on every aspect of our daily lives. The main concern has been its impact on community health and our healthcare systems. Beyond the immediate threat of contracting, spreading, and treating the virus, COVID-19 has significantly affected systems and institutions in our society.

States and major cities have taken important steps to increase social distancing to “flatten the curve” of active COVID-19 cases. This has resulted in many states and cities implementing “shelter in place” or “safer at home” rules that require many businesses to close if they cannot move their workforce online. While in most cities in the U.S., restaurants can remain open for carry out or delivery, many
cannot keep their business running with the additional restrictions and significant decrease in customers. As of March 23, 2020, 46 states and Washington D.C. have closed schools for at least several weeks. These closures have both an immediate and a long-term impact on our health, welfare and economy.

It is important to understand and reflect on how COVID-19 will continue to highlight and widen societal inequities, further marginalizing already vulnerable groups of people.

Here are some examples:

- We are seeing bias and hate that targets the Asian American community through scapegoating and stereotyping. In addition, bullying, harassment and slurs have become commonplace. And, there is a reported increase in hate crimes against Asian American people.

- While a majority of our K-12 schools and colleges close their buildings and move to online learning, disparities such as food insecurity, insufficient digital access, and lack of critical social services persist and are magnified.

- Immigrants and those who are undocumented face vulnerabilities with the health care system (i.e., fear or seeking help and lack of coverage). Many recent immigrants work in jobs without sick leave and are unable to self-quarantine, making them much more susceptible to the virus than the general population.

- Many members of marginalized groups have already experienced disproportionate harm as a result of this global crisis. People who are homeless or incarcerated are particularly vulnerable because of crowded and unsanitary conditions, inability to engage in social distancing and more. Victims of domestic abuse are further marginalized and at risk because there is more time at home, stress and financial strain.

- People with lower incomes and fewer financial resources are impacted disproportionately, as they struggle to navigate the health care system,
school closings, reduction in employment and shelter-in-place restrictions. With working from home the “new normal” and shutdowns of cities and states across the country, many workers have lost or will soon lose their jobs.

To learn more about these specific effects, see Coronavirus Highlights and Perpetuates Inequities in Our Society

Age

10 and up

Questions to Start the Conversation

- What does inequity mean? (Inequity refers to a lack of fairness or justice; unfair and avoidable differences in treatment or experience).

- What do you know about the Coronavirus and the impact it has on specific groups of people?

- What did you learn about here that you didn't know before?

- How did you feel as you think about these inequities?

- Do you see people talking about these inequities on the news, on social media or among your friends?

Questions to Dig Deeper

- How are these inequities similar to or different from other inequities we see in the world?

- How can we make people more aware of how this virus is impacting marginalized groups of people?

- Are there any actions, large and small, we can take to do something about these inequities?

Take Action
Ask: What can we do to help? What individual and group actions can help make a difference?

- As a family, consider donating or volunteering with local food banks and organizations that provide food for people in need.
- Help to organize an online conversation (using zoom, google hangouts) and talk about this issue, sharing information, resources and suggested actions. Or make a video with your thoughts and feeling and share on social media.
- Keep up-to-date on and support legislative and advocacy efforts that help those most affected by the crisis. Reach out to your members of Congress to share your thoughts and suggested actions.

Additional Resources

- Coronavirus Highlights and Perpetuates Inequities in Our Society
- The Coronavirus Surfaces Fear, Stereotypes and Scapegoating
- 10 Ways Youth Can Engage in Activism
- Helping Students Make Sense of News Stories about Bias and Injustice
- What We Do: Confront Bias and Discrimination