Coronavirus: Misinformation, Fakery and Fear

The rumor that Black people are less susceptible to the new coronavirus was false and ridiculous. But there is something more worrisome.

March 7, 2020 By Kate Ferguson

I thought long and hard about retelling a story that popped up online saying Chinese doctors had confirmed that African people are “genetically resistant” to COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

The rumor was driven by a Cameroonian student’s recovery from coronavirus in China where he was hospitalized after contracting the disease. Eventually, Snopes.com and other credible news sources debunked the account. The 21-year-old man regained his health after undergoing treatment with antibiotics and other drugs.

The fact is that anyone who comes into close contact with someone who has the coronavirus is at risk of acquiring the illness.

However, as the infection continues to affect more people in the United States perhaps the focus should be on what might happen to individuals in communities where health and economic disparities already result in higher rates of death and poor outcomes for vulnerable population groups.

Based on these circumstances and other socio-economic variables that determine who receives good health care in America, the threat this infectious disease poses to poor, underinsured or uninsured Black people—and other people of color—would, arguably, be higher than the danger it poses to many of their white counterparts.

As the most current statistics from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases show, illnesses such as hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis are more likely to affect African Americans, who make up just about 13% of the U.S. population.

What’s more, unemployment rates for Black people remain stubbornly lower than that for white Americans. Add to this the systematic dismantling of the Affordable Care Act, which helped people of color to achieve great gains in health insurance coverage, and the struggle low-earning workers would face to take a single paid sick day to get tested for coronavirus and you have a disaster in the making.

Then toss into the mix the long-term implications of workers testing positive and needing to quarantine themselves so they don't risk spreading the infection to others with whom they come into contact—both in and out of their communities.

When taken together, all these variables would create just the kind of scary inciting incident that has the potential to decimate whole communities in locations everywhere. This includes those unseen, forgotten places where individuals live in confinement in jails and prisons. There Black people still outnumber white and Hispanic individuals.

Over the past decade, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the gap has steadily narrowed. But Blacks and Hispanics still make up larger shares of incarcerated people than they do of the U.S. population.

When not properly contained, infectious diseases have ravaged these often overcrowded, understaffed communities. With the emergence of the coronavirus, prisons are on high alert, according to reports. But despite emergency procedures and protocols in place to address outbreaks of this kind, these strategies can be difficult to implement for the federal and state organizations that supervise penal institutions.

Clearly, this health crisis comes with huge repercussions that are affecting millions of people all over the country and the world, and that's certainly not fake news.

More about coronavirus:

- What You Need to Know About the New Coronavirus
- 7 Ways to Prevent the Spread of the New Coronavirus

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