

COVID-19 response for Arab American communities in Wayne County, Michigan

CONTRIBUTOR: Avani Sheth, Chief Medical Officer, Wayne County Public Health Division

CATEGORY: Epidemiology & Laboratory Capacity (ELC)

Due to the large Arab American population and their higher risk of COVID-19 complications, the Wayne County Public Health District (MI) implemented focused disease surveillance and prevention activities among this population. The information and strengthened partnerships within this community informed local control and outreach efforts led by community leaders.

The “What”

Michigan is home to the second largest concentration of Arab Americans in the U.S., having an estimated population of over 500,000 residents. The [largest Arab-speaking population in the U.S. resides in metro Detroit.](#)

When considering the impacts of COVID-19 infections among ethnic minorities, Arab Americans are at higher risk for severe COVID-19 and complications. Arab Americans have a higher prevalence of cardiovascular disease and related risk factors and lower rates of health insurance compared to the general population of Michigan. Arab Americans often live in multigenerational households, which increases the risk of virus transmission and pose barriers to implement mitigation strategies. There are also cultural and language barriers, and vaccine hesitancy is common among this population.

The Wayne County Public Health Division (WCPHD) utilized Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Disease (ELC) cooperative agreement funded COVID-19 epidemiologists and case investigation staff to increase capacity to be able to focus surveillance and response efforts on these higher risk populations.


The “So What”

Throughout the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, population-based surveillance reports were produced to help monitor COVID-19 trends and outbreaks within predominantly Arab local municipalities. These community reports were disseminated to community and local healthcare leaders. [They informed local control and outreach efforts led by community leaders, and provided a data driven plan for WCPHD’s COVID-19 vaccine roll-out/distribution that was grounded in vaccine equity.](#)

The “Now What”

WCPHD plans to continue to build on its ability to conduct COVID-19 and other disease surveillance activities to understand spread and control within specific local populations that may be at higher risk to ensure equitable access to vaccination and mitigation strategies. In addition, it allows WCPHD to strengthen community partnerships and provide community-facing actionable data to improve outreach and engagement efforts.

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