

14 July 2020

## **BRIEF19**

*A daily review of covid-19 research and policy.*

### **RESEARCH BRIEFING**

#### **Covid-19 spread among meat and poultry facility workers.**

Meat and poultry processing plants bore the brunt of the covid-19 pandemic early on, as they were home to many initial outbreaks in the United States. The industry employs an estimated 525,000 workers in approximately 3,500 facilities nationwide, and the virus tore through these plants due to large numbers of employees working in close proximity for extended time periods. Other factors contributing to these outbreaks included shared transportation, congregate housing, and frequent community interaction. The toll was especially hard on rural communities where many plants are located, as their smaller local hospitals were stressed.

Last week the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention published a [report](#) studying such outbreaks in its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. Having compiled data through May 31, 2020, researchers were able to obtain information from 239 facilities in 23 states across the U.S. A total of 16,233 workers were confirmed to have contracted covid-19 with 86 deaths (0.5 percent). Fourteen states reported the total number of employees working at the relevant facilities (112,616) with a 9.1 percent rate of infection among those workers. In 21 of the states, race and ethnicity were reported more than half of the time (61 percent) and 87 percent of the infections occurred among racial and ethnic minority workers. Seven of the facilities performed comprehensive facility-wide testing. These facilities discovered a crude prevalence of asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic persons totaling 14.4 percent of the workers. Interventions performed at the facilities to help prevent spread of infection included mandated face coverings, adding hand hygiene stations, the placing of physical barriers between workers, and the implementing of temperature checks and symptom screening.

Unfortunately data was limited by high non-responding states—only 56 percent of sites responded—and only sites with one or more laboratory-confirmed cases of covid-19 were included. However, the data available clearly show the increased risk of infection and spread in these vital industrial sites. Targeted interventions to prevent infection spread and appropriate education to employees were noted to be the most vital factors for these facilities in their efforts to contain the spread of covid-19.

—*Christopher Sampson, MD*

### **POLICY BRIEFING**

#### **Former top Trump official calls for more testing.**

Mick Mulvaney, President Trump's former White House Chief of Staff, published an [op-ed](#) for CNBC on Monday decrying the continued testing crisis in the United States as numbers of novel coronavirus infections continue to swell. Mulvaney, a Republican and Special Envoy to Northern Ireland, noted that his daughter recently sought out testing

before going to visit her grandparents but was denied because she did not meet the criteria. Further, his son recently came down with symptoms suspicious for covid-19 and while he received a test, the results took over five days to come back.

In his essay, Mulvaney encouraged wise spending in further coronavirus-related relief by Congress, writing “Any stimulus should be directed at the root cause of our recession: dealing with Covid.” He noted that traditional fiscal stimulus activities such as direct payments or incentives for certain activities such as traveling, are not likely to be effective during a public health crisis—people are hesitant to spend money, not because they are lacking cash, but because they are concerned about the safety of doing so.

Instead, Mulvaney advocated that money should be spent on increasing testing capacity, the number of available hospital beds, and research for therapeutics and vaccines. The former member of the House of Representatives also pointed out that nearly half of the \$2 trillion appointed in the CARES act passed in March has yet to be spent and encouraged legislators to remember this before doling out further federal funding designed to keep the economy afloat.

—*Jordan M. Warchol, MD, MPH*

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