

# Wear Your Mask!

## The Pandemic Hits Communities of Color Harder than Most

*Ebony Vandross*



**BEFORE YOU READ:** Demographic (noun) means a particular sector of a population. It can refer to race, gender, age group, profession, or any other category we might use to describe a group of people in a population. What demographics do you think are most affected by Covid-19?

### Shopping While Black (and Masked)

Whenever I leave the house to go to a store, I have a mental checklist I always review:

Am I dressed appropriately? Are my clothes a bit too worn or casual? Is my hair done? (I tend not to style my hair unless I go out.)

And even before entering the store, the list continues:

Do I have everything I need readily available so that I'm not seen reaching into my bag or pockets while I'm inside the store? Is my face properly composed to look friendly, not threatening?

I think about all of this because while I statistically do not fit the typical profile of a shoplifter, as a black woman, I am likely to be accused of being one.<sup>1</sup>

That is why now, during the Covid-19 outbreak, the thought of adding a facemask to my list of necessary items when going to the store is not

at all appealing. Wearing something that covers my face will only make me look more suspicious.

Yet, it's more important than ever that I and other people of color feel comfortable wearing a mask.

### People of Color More at Risk

The most recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that Covid-19 has been affecting people of color at much higher rates than people who are white.<sup>2</sup> These demographics — which include Black, Latinx, Native,<sup>3</sup> and other groups — also do not have proper access to basic preventative healthcare. That also means that they may have difficulty accessing testing and treatment for Covid-19.

Another reason that people of color are more at risk of contracting Covid-19 is because a large percentage of frontline health workers are part of this demographic. In June, the CDC reported that 576 people that worked in this field died from Covid-19.<sup>4</sup> And healthcare workers aren't

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1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/24/shopping-while-black-yes-bias-against-black-customers-is-real>.

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2. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html?smid=em-share>

3. <https://indiancountrytoday.com/news/indian-country-s-Covid-19-syllabus-EiN-p5Q-XkW-smnaeBJV6Q>

4. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html>

the only field where you will find people of color on the front lines. Many people with jobs that are deemed essential, like those in transportation, food service, manufacturing, and more, are suffering and dying at higher rates. These jobs also tend to pay lower wages and provide little or no access to healthcare.

### Protecting Everyone Means Protecting the Most Marginalized

While we know that something like a disease cannot discriminate, people of color are suffering more due to ongoing inequality in issues like employment, housing, and healthcare.<sup>5</sup> And while many people who are not part of these groups are expressing frustration<sup>6</sup> – boycotting, protesting,<sup>7</sup> and even attacking those who try to enforce CDC recommended guidelines like wearing a

facemask,<sup>8</sup> – it is important to remember that these recommendations are meant to protect everyone.

So now I have added “Is my facemask on properly?” to my mental checklist before I enter a store. And I absorb the additional stress of worrying that people who already thought I was a shoplifter will feel threatened by my masked appearance. At least I feel secure knowing I am doing my part to protect myself and others. If only our healthcare, housing, and employment systems worked the same way – operating with the knowledge that taking care of everyone, no matter their race or socioeconomic background, is how we keep everyone safe during a pandemic.

**AFTER YOU READ:** The author “zooms in” on her own experience and “zooms out” to focus on the larger population. How does that technique affect you as a reader?

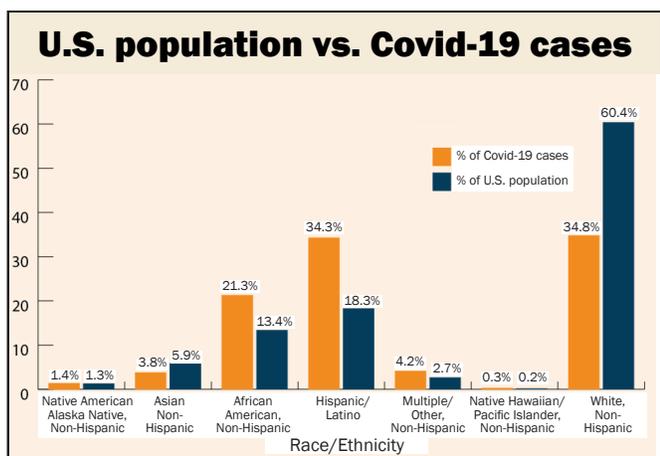
5. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>

6. <https://www.miamiherald.com/news/coronavirus/article243818302.html>

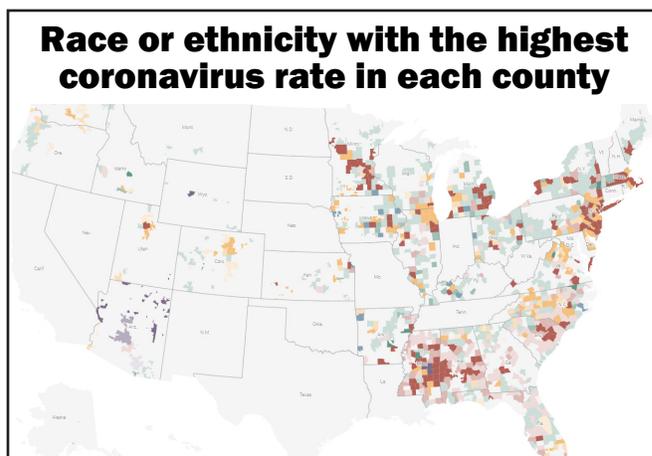
7. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/07/19/coronavirus-ohio-anti-mask-crowd-rallies-statehouse-saturday/5468011002/>

*Ebony Vandross is an E-Learning and Communications Associate at World Education.*

8. <https://fox6now.com/2020/07/25/san-francisco-bus-driver-allegedly-attacked-with-bat-after-asking-passengers-to-wear-face-masks/>



Study the bar graph and describe what you see. Write several true sentences. Source: <https://www.lhsfna.org/index.cfm/lifelines/july-2020/Covid-19-s-disproportionate-impact-across-racial-lines/>. July 2020.



Brown areas indicate that Blacks have the highest Covid-19 rate in that area. White means: no race-based data. Learn more at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html>