

## **COVID-19 Social Determinants of Health Podcast Revised Transcript**

Rhonda Toole

Hello and welcome to Cigna's podcast Series designed to help our clients understand the latest information surrounding COVID-19, and how Cigna is supporting our clients and customers during this uncertain time. My name is Rhonda Toole. I'm the Vice President of Client and Customer Engagement with Cigna, and the executive sponsor of our Client Health Disparity Advisory Council. I'm excited to moderate today's podcast. Current data on the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States shows minority populations are being disproportionately impacted by the illness.<sup>1</sup> Today we've invited Dr. Michael Howell, Cigna's regional medical executive for the southeastern United States, to talk about the action, Cigna is taking to support our customers in these populations and the roles employers and providers can play in helping people stay safe. Thank you for joining us Dr. Howell.

Dr. Howell

Thanks, Rhonda. I appreciate the opportunity to discuss such an important topic. We're all living through extraordinary times apart, but together. As a doctor, I think about the emotional health of myself and those I love and care for, and that of my colleagues and our customers who are practicing social distancing every day.

Rhonda Toole

Dr. Howell, when the COVID-19 minority population impact data began to emerge, needless to say it was an alarming moment in an already alarming environment. Why do you think COVID-19 is disproportionately impacting minority populations, and what can be done to help?

Dr. Howell

I think there are a number of factors that could be contributing to higher rates of severe illness and COVID-related deaths among racial and ethnic minority populations. First, these populations have an increased risk of exposure to the virus, as a result of employment in service industries and fields deemed essential. And they're more often serving as caregivers to family members and living conditions that make it difficult to follow steps to prevent getting sick with COVID-19. We also find that getting accurate and reliable health information to these populations is difficult. They are more likely to rely on information from friends and family, rather than reputable sources. So, you have populations who are more likely to be exposed to the virus and less likely to be taking the necessary steps to protect themselves, and those around them, because they don't have the information they need.

Next, these populations are more likely to delay getting care when they are sick. They may also be facing reduced access to quality care or a lack of resources in their communities, due to stigma and systemic inequalities. Some racial and ethnic minority populations live in the neighborhoods that are farther from grocery stores and medical facilities, making it difficult to receive care if sick, and to stock

up on supplies that would allow them to remain at home. And they're more likely to suffer from unmanaged chronic health conditions like hypertension, diabetes and obesity, because of medical access challenges associated with severe community infections such as COVID-19. There remain a number of ongoing health and wellness challenges, ethnic and minority population face, and the COVID-19 pandemic shone a bright light on many of them.

There are important steps everyone can take to protect themselves and others from the spread of the virus. The problem is this information isn't always reaching our minority populations. Employers and providers can be trusted sources of information and should be relied upon to share timely, accurate information with employees and patients.

Rhonda Toole

You mentioned steps, everyone can take to stay safe, what are some of the steps?

Dr. Howell

We recommend following the CDC guidelines for protecting yourself and others from the Coronavirus.<sup>2</sup> These include washing your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, or using a hand sanitizer with an alcohol content of at least 60%. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands. Avoid close contact with people who are sick, even inside your home. Leave six feet of distance between yourself and other people outside of your home. We call that social distancing. Wear a cloth face covering when in public. Cover your coughs and sneezes with your arm or your elbow. If you cough or sneeze into your hand, wash your hand immediately, and/or use a hand sanitizer. And finally, clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily. These can harbor the Coronavirus and cause an infection in other people.

Dr. Howell

In summary, we're living in challenging times and we must adapt our lives to the circumstances of our environment. We encourage you to continue to adjust to the new normal and to take advantage of every opportunity to stay well and productive in the midst of change.

Rhonda Toole

Sounds as if by all of us working together, we can stay safe. Dr. Howell, thank you for the information you shared today on this important topic. And thanks to all of you who joined the podcast today. Stay tuned for our next podcast in the series. And in the meantime, please check out our Cigna COVID-19 podcast series and visit the COVID-19 Resource Center on Cigna.com for the latest information. Stay well, and take care.

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**Sourcing notes (recorded by Dave Sweeney):**

1. "COVID-19 in Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups." *CDC.gov*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 5, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>.
2. "How to Protect Yourself and Others." *CDC.gov*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved May 5, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/prevention.html>.