African Americans Trust Black Churches for COVID-19 Guidance

Almost 97% of church leadership surveyed in several Minnesota cities want to receive coronavirus information for congregants.

December 14, 2020 By Alicia Green

A new study by researchers at the Mayo Clinic reveals that African Americans consider Black churches to be reliable sources of COVID-19 information, which may prove essential in helping to serve and protect the health of Black Americans, who have been disproportionately affected by the new coronavirus.

The findings were published in Preventing Chronic Disease, a public health journal of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

For the investigation, researchers partnered with 120 African-American churches in Minnesota to implement a COVID-19 emergency preparedness plan over an eight-week period through the FAITH! (Fostering African-American Improvement in Total Health) program.

FAITH! targets health disparities specifically related to cardiovascular disease in Black communities, but earlier this year, doctors changed its focus to address the coronavirus crisis.

Churches received emergency preparedness manuals and starter kits to distribute to their members. In addition, they delivered over 230 COVID-19–related messages, which included photographs, infographics and links to key websites via Facebook and email.

Overall, researchers noted that an estimated 6,539 people viewed the content posted on Facebook, which drew 1,260 interactions, such as likes, loves, comments and shares. In total, eight emails (one each week) were sent to 120 churches, representing an estimated 12,000 congregants.

“Black churches have long been more than places of worship to their communities,” said FAITH! director LaPrincess Brewer, MD, MPH, a cardiologist and health disparities researcher and the study’s first author. “They served as strongholds for disseminating trusted information, including health information, in their communities.”

Church and community communication leaders praised the program, calling it reliable, culturally

relevant and timely in its use of social media.

Researchers hope this community-based approach can help public health officials implement effective COVID-19 campaigns and initiatives for other high-risk populations.

For related coverage, read “Amid COVID and Racial Unrest, Black Churches Put Faith in Mental Health Care” and “Black Doctors Urge African Americans to Take Future COVID-19 Vaccine.”

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