Latinos Working in Food Processing and Agriculture Face Greater COVID-19 Risk

About 70% of employees who contracted the coronavirus in these work settings were Hispanic.

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As more research continues to emerge about how COVID-19 disproportionately impacts minorities, new findings from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicate that Hispanic laborers in food manufacturing and farming jobs are more likely to contract the coronavirus than people of other races and ethnicities in these workplaces.

Results showed that among 742 food and agriculture workplaces in 30 states, 8,978 workers were diagnosed with COVID-19 between March 1 and May 31. Of those employees, 55 died. Most workers diagnosed with COVID-19 were male (61.6%), and those ages 20 to 39 accounted for 44.3%.

Of the 5,957 employees who reported their symptom status, 83.2% were symptomatic, and 16.8% were asymptomatic or presymptomatic.

Based on the race and ethnicity data reported by 5,721 workers who tested positive for COVID-19, 72.8% were Hispanic, 16.8% were white, 6.3% were Black and 4.1% were Asian/Pacific Islander. Overall, researchers found that 83.2% of cases occurred among racial and ethnic minority workers in food manufacturing and agriculture, suggesting that these individuals are disproportionately affected by COVID-19.

Similar findings were reported among workers in 382 meat and poultry processing facilities, where there were more than 28,000 cases and 132 workers died. However, the researchers noted that a much higher proportion of COVID-19 cases occurred among Black and Asian/Pacific Islander workers.

“These findings support the need for comprehensive testing strategies, coupled with contact tracing and symptom screening, for high-density critical infrastructure workplaces to aid in identifying infections and reducing transmission within the workplace,” stressed scientists at the federal health agency.

The CDC advised that minimizing workplace exposures could help protect workers and help reduce health disparities between different racial and ethnic groups.

In conclusion, the agency stated that proper intervention and prevention protocols must be enforced in such work setting. These include practicing social distancing, providing personal protective equipment for workers and surrounding communities and proper sanitizing, cleaning and disinfecting of the workplace.

For related coverage, read “Structural Racism Puts Latinos at Risk for COVID-19” and “In Health-Conscious Marin County, Virus Runs Rampant Among ‘Essential’ Latino Workers.”

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