

## Coronavirus is causing the 'historic decimation' of Latinos, medical expert says

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— The country can begin to address the “extraordinary problem” affecting the Latino community now by making sure it gets adequate testing and immediate access to care, an expert said. Wilfredo Lee / AP

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**By Suzanne Gamboa**

A global health expert said Wednesday that the coronavirus is causing "the historic decimation" of the Latino community, ravaging generations of loved ones in Hispanic families.

Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of Tropical Medicine at the Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, spoke at a virtual Congressional Hispanic Caucus briefing Wednesday, when he read off descriptions of people who died on Aug. 13 in Houston alone.

"Hispanic male, Hispanic male, Hispanic male, black male, Hispanic male, black male, Hispanic male, Hispanic female, black female, black male, Hispanic, Hispanic, Hispanic, Hispanic, Hispanic, Hispanic" Hotez said, adding that many are people in their 40s, 50s and 60s.

"This virus is taking away a whole generation of mothers and fathers and brothers and sisters, you know, who are young kids, teenage kids. And it occurred to me that what we're seeing really is the historic decimation among the Hispanic community by the virus," he said.

Hotez contacted other medical officials in Texas and found that the pattern is similar in other cities. He added that the pattern also applies to the Latino population in other parts of the country, particularly in the southern U.S.

Before Hotez spoke at the briefing, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's leading infectious disease expert, said that hospitalizations among Latinos as of Sept. 19 were 359 per 100,000 compared to 78 in whites. Deaths related to Covid-19 are 61 per 100,000 in the Latino population compared to 40 in whites, and Latinos represent 45 percent of deaths of people younger than 21, Fauci said.

Fauci said the country can begin to address this "extraordinary problem" now by making sure the community gets adequate testing and immediate access to care. But he said this is not a one-shot resolution.

"This must now reset and re-shine a light on this disparity related to social determinants of health that are experienced by the Latinx community – the fact that they have a higher incidence of co-morbidities, which put you at risk," Fauci said.

"That's something that you do not fix in a month or a year. It's something that requires a decades-long commitment to change those social determinants, which make that community more susceptible to diabetes, to obesity, to hypertension, to kidney disease," he said. "We need to look at what we need to do now to make this to be an enduring and burning lesson of a challenge that we have for the Latino community."

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Fauci also urged the Latino congressional members on the call to get their Latino constituents to consider enrolling in vaccination trials so they can be proven to be safe in everyone, including African Americans and Latinos.

“We need to get a diverse representation of the population in the clinical trials,” he said.

Fauci said he believes there will be an “answer” by the end of the year or beginning of next year on whether one of five potential vaccines is safe and effective. “We only will know after the tests are over, so anyone who makes predictions about our having it really doesn’t fully understand the challenges of getting a trial done,” he said.

Texas is one of the states that did not expand Medicaid to provide more access to health care for its population under the Affordable Care Act. It has the highest percent of people without health insurance coverage in the country, and Latinos are the largest share of people lacking coverage.

The state also is the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging the Affordable Care Act. A U.S. Supreme Court hearing on the state’s challenge is set for Nov. 10. It will take place before a more conservative court that could include a new justice appointed by President Donald Trump. The [president nominated Amy Coney Barrett](#) to fill the vacancy left by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who died Sept. 18.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus’ chairman is Rep. Joaquín Castro, D-Texas, who lost a stepmother this past summer to Covid-19 and whose father was infected with the virus. He is the twin brother of former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julián Castro, who was a 2020 Democratic presidential candidate.

Texas lagged behind other states in closing businesses and mandating wearing of masks as the virus began its virulent spread in the spring. The state’s governor also has recently begun to ease

restrictions that were put in place in the summer, reopening restaurants while restricting crowd sizes and mandating the reopening of schools.

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