

Pandemic Gender Snapshot #8 – March 15,¹ 2021

Update on Houston/Harris County Covid-19 Fatalities by Gender, Race/Ethnicity & Age²

Based on March 8/11, 2021, data; CITE AS: UH IRWGS Analysis

Though vaccines are now being delivered increasingly widely in Houston/Harris County, fatalities continue here. **While we feel optimistic, masking and distancing remain key to getting through what we can hope will be the final phase of the pandemic.**

Between December 1, 2020, and the week of March 8, 2021, **971 Covid-19 deaths** were reported in Houston/Harris County, raising **the count to 3410 (1354 women & 2053 men—60.2%/39.7%** and 3 of unknown sex).³ This includes a substantial rise in the number of mortalities in January, and it does not yet reflect those deaths in February and March and prior for which the certificates have not been processed. (All data are provisional and do not include undiagnosed Covid-19 deaths, or deaths with certificate not finalized.) The lag time for death certification in this data has averaged roughly two months ([see December report](#)). While the pandemic continues, national and local daily mortality reports will always reflect a substantial undercount due to this lag.

Since the last Snapshot, **the gender, race/ethnicity and age differentials in Covid-19 mortality in H/HC have continued marked.** Figure 1 provides a **H/HC Covid-19 mortality rate calculation by gender and race/ethnicity** based on reported Covid-19 deaths to date (March 2020 to the present) proportioned to the race/ethnicity breakdown of the adult population of Harris County.⁴

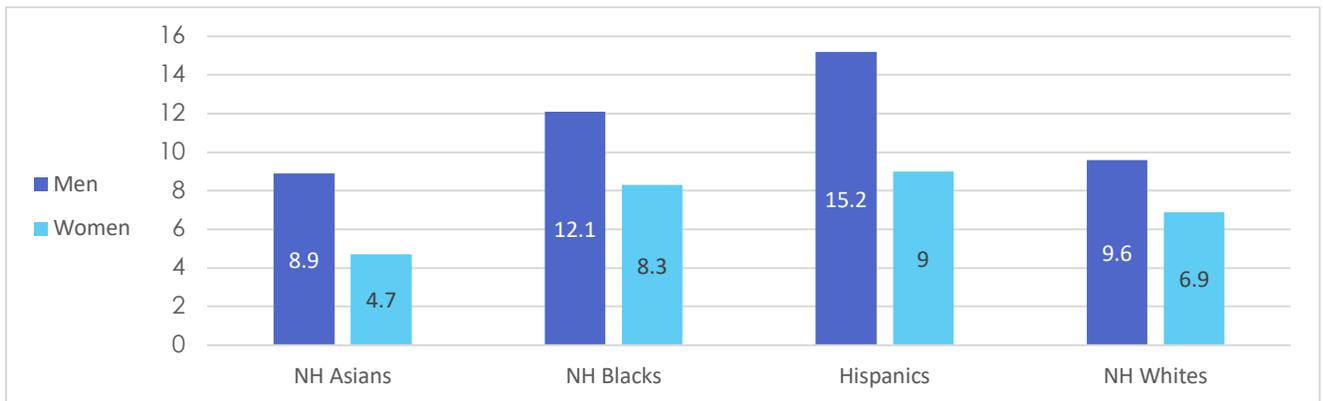


Figure 1 Reported Covid-19 Mortality Rates /10,000 Adults* Present in Harris County, by Gender & Race/Ethnicity, Week of March 8, 2021, data. *Adults = 20+ in the Harris County population (per 2019 ACS).

¹ As of March 14, the total number of Covid-19 deaths for H/HC was 3466. In the Greater Houston 19-county area, the March 14 recorded death count was 5470. In Texas overall there have been 45,000 Covid deaths to date.

² This Snapshot uses current Covid-19 death data based on Houston and Harris County Health Departments’ death certificate data (they divide the area based on decedent’s residence). **This is provisional, dynamic data.** Gender/sex & Race/Ethnicity are as reported and may not reflect individuals’ preferred identities.

³ Several deaths present on earlier Health Dept. lists were deleted by March 2021.

⁴ Adult only, because there have been few deaths in the younger population here (6 between 10 and 19 years old).

People of color, particularly men of color, have borne the brunt of the losses.

Figure 2 presents the specific numbers of reported H/HC Covid-19 deaths by gender, race/ethnicity and age.

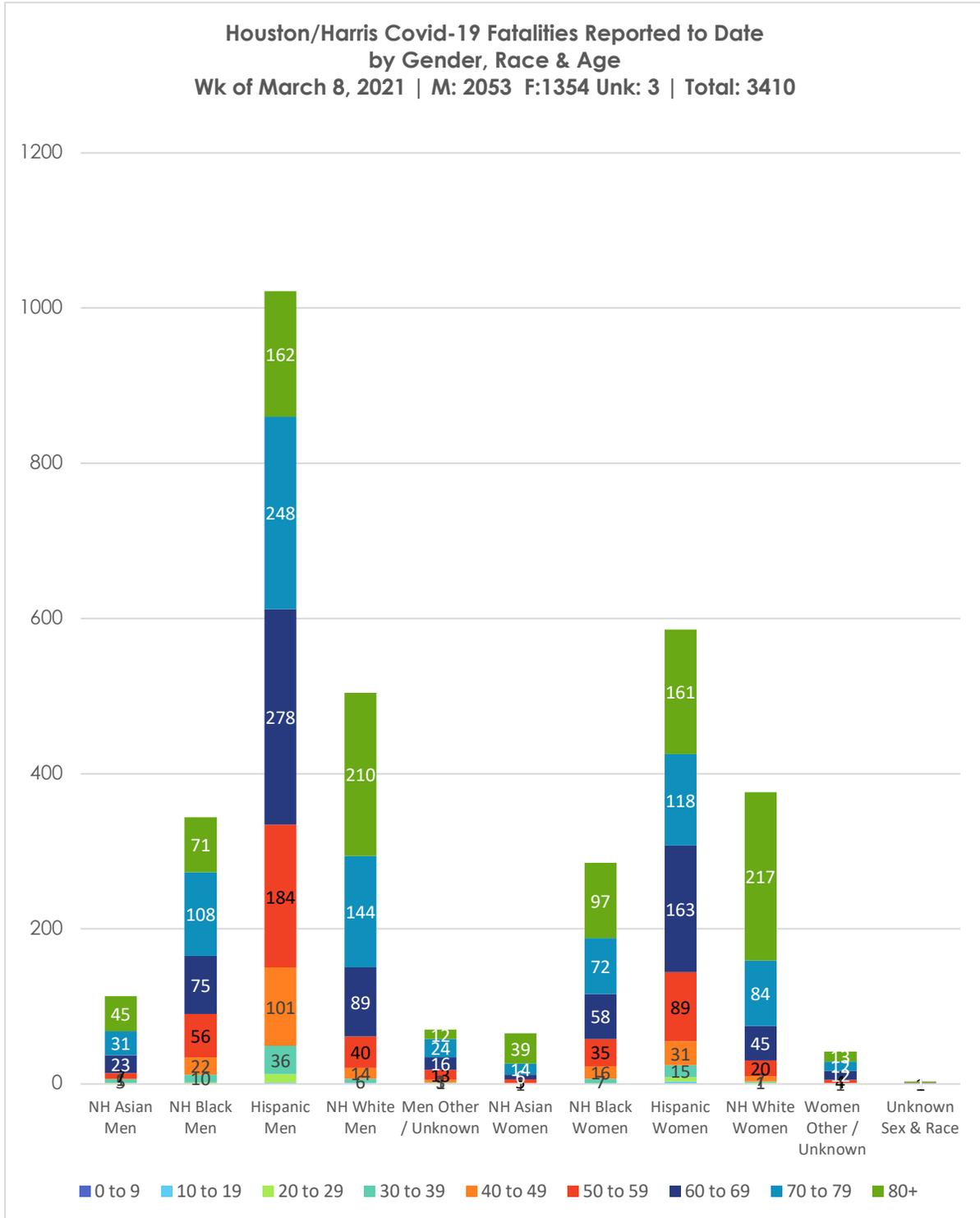


Figure 2 HHD – 2043 | HCPH– 1367 * HHD data for March. 11 & HCPH data for March 8, 2021

As of early March 2021, reported deaths by group in H/HC included:

NH Asian **178** (113m; 65f)
 NH Black **629** (344m; 285f)
 Hispanic **1608** (1022m; 586f)
 NH White **880** (504m; 376f)
 Men & Women of Other/Unknown Race **112** (70m; 42f)
 Unknown Sex and Race **3**

	NH Asian Men	NH Black Men	Hispanic Men	NH White Men	Men Other / Unknown	Total
0 to 9						
10 to 19			2	1		3
20 to 29	1	2	11		1	15
30 to 39	5	10	36	6	1	58
40 to 49	1	22	101	14	3	141
50 to 59	7	56	184	40	13	300
60 to 69	23	75	278	89	16	481
70 to 79	31	108	248	144	24	555
80+	45	71	162	210	12	500
	113	344	1022	504	70	2053

Table 1: Male Mortality by Race/Ethnicity and Age, Houston/Harris County

	NH Asian Women	NH Black Women	Hispanic Women	NH White Women	Women Other / Unknown	Total
0 to 9						
10 to 19			3			3
20 to 29			6	2		8
30 to 39		7	15	1		23
40 to 49	1	16	31	7	1	56
50 to 59	5	35	89	20	4	153
60 to 69	6	58	163	45	12	284
70 to 79	14	72	118	84	12	300
80+	39	97	161	217	13	527
	65	285	586	376	42	1354

Table 2: Female Mortality by Race/Ethnicity and Age, Houston/Harris County

The divisions in health access revealed here along lines of class and race/ethnicity (often linked in the US) indicate the need for a more equitable state and national health system. **One way of addressing this in Texas could begin as early as this Spring 2021 with expanded access to Medicaid through the ACA, which has been further incentivized by the American Rescue Plan.** Such a system would return tax dollars to Texans that they are already paying (to effectively fund health care in other states), with 95% of costs covered federally. The remaining 5% could be covered by the rise in state tax dollars collected on the new funds brought into the state and spent at Texas businesses. The State Legislature could pass such expansion in the 2021 session.

The **adult population of Houston/Harris County (20+)** breaks out by Gender & Race/Ethnicity thus:
Male: 7.9% NH Asian; 17.6% NH Black; 41.8% Hispanic; 32.7% NH White
Female: 8.2% NH Asian; 20.5% NH Black; 38.9% Hispanic; 32.4% NH White (ACS 2019)

Though the documentation of infections does not reliably report race/ethnicity,⁵ so we cannot track infection equity or correlate infection with death rates here, death certificates do document race/ethnicity, fairly consistently. (However, Harris County has increasingly listed race/ethnicity as Unknown [7.8% on Sept. 1, 1.6% at mid-July; COH HD R/E Unknown is 0.4%]⁶ All but four of the 112 of those listed as of Unknown Race in this report come from Harris County data. Designations as Unknown Race were found by a *Washington Post* [Special Report](#) to more often involve people of color than whites).

Figure 3 portrays the adult (20+) Covid-19 mortality rate relative to the presence of each group in the full H/HC population, regardless of gender. Since gender is a major determiner of Covid-19 outcomes, Figure 1 gives a fuller portrait of the effects here.

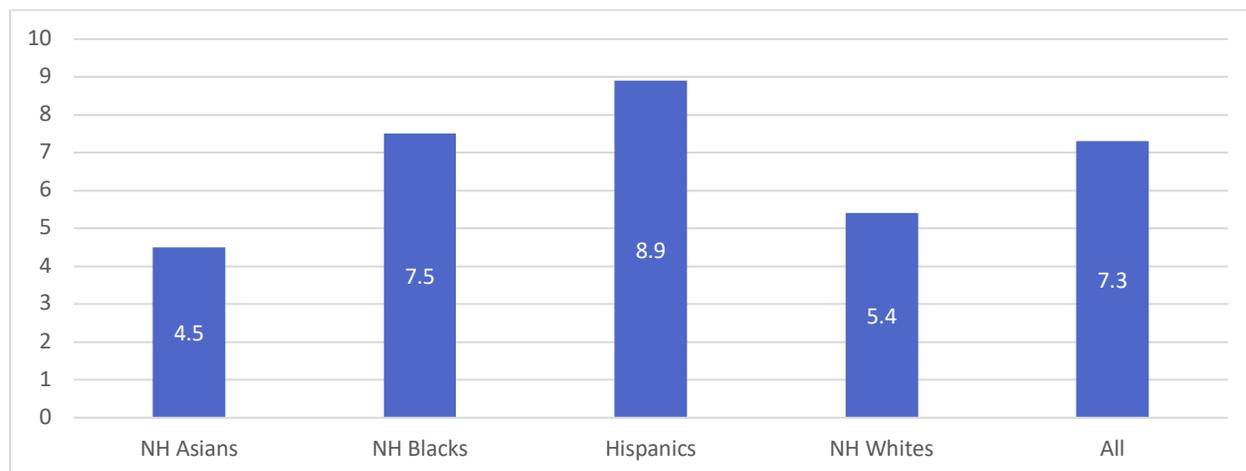


Figure 3 Reported Covid-19 Mortality Rates / 10,000 Adults* present in Harris County, by Race/Ethnicity & Overall, Week of March 8, 2021 data. *Adults = 20+ in the Harris County population (per 2019 ACS).

⁵ Per the Houston/Harris County Covid-19 Dashboard, 117,000 out of the total 212,686 cases reported as of December 17, 2020, were “Race Unknown.” The dashboard no longer reports on this, but a similar rate is likely still in effect.

⁶ While “unknown” race was listed 5 times in June, it ballooned to 30 in July, lowered to 15 in August, 5 in September and 3 in October, as of December 2020.

RACE/ETHNICITY ANALYSES

Figure 1 indicates that Hispanic men have died of Covid-19 to date here at a rate 58% higher than that of White men, 71% higher than Asian men, and 26% higher than Black men; while Black men have died at a rate 26% higher than White men and 36% higher than Asian men, per reports to date.

Mortality rates overall are generally [higher among men as compared to women](#) but variation among women of different racial/ethnic groups is also substantial and some women's group rates are close to those of some men's. While **Black and Hispanic women** in H/HC have died at rates lower than men of their same groups, **their rates are close to those of White and Asian men**. Hispanic women have died at rates 30% higher than White women, 91% higher than Asian women, and 8% higher than Black women. Black women have died at rates 20% higher than White women and 77% higher than Asian women. Age variation factors in here as well.

Differences are in part attributable to the combination of historical bias creating unequal access to health care; doctors when accessed treating people of color less aggressively; both of which have led to higher incidence of underlying conditions. In addition, those with higher rates of frontline employment and dense living situations face elevated infection rates.



As a result of frontline employment, **relatively large numbers of young people are included in the Hispanic and Black death tolls, whereas that is not the case among Whites and Asians.** Those who can work at home are not as likely to be infected. *Where 32.7% of Hispanic and 26.2% of Black male deaths were to men 59 and under, this was true for only 12.7% of White and 12.3% of Asian male deaths.* Likewise, where 24.6% of Hispanic and 20.4% of Black female deaths were to women 59 and under, this was true for only 8% of White and 9.2% of Asians female deaths. ***Though people under 65 may be under the impression that they are immune from serious Covid effects, these fatality data indicate that is not the case, and that they should take the same precautions as their elders.*** In addition, some long-term effects of Covid-19 on some who have been infected and recovered, of all ages, including brain damage, are suspected but not yet understood.

GENDER ANALYSES

As noted above, of the total 3410 reported deaths in the two jurisdictions to the week of March 8, 2021, **60.2% (2053) were male and 39.7% (1354) were female, consistent with the global pattern of more male deaths**, though testing shows an **infection rate of roughly 50/50.**⁷ Of the 971 recent reported deaths, **a similar proportion seems to hold (the Houston Health Department numbers were 608 total, with 369 Male and 239 Female (60.7/39.3%), with men’s mortality rate continuing more than 50% higher than that of women.**⁸ The global difference is likely due to a combination of biological and behavioral factors, **with behaviors that lead men to be in worse health than women generally perhaps more influential.**⁹ A report in *Nature* on August 26, 2020, found that older men produce a weaker immune response to the virus than older women. The proportion of reported Covid deaths to men in this region has increased over the months. But people of all genders/sexes with such co-morbidities as *obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and respiratory ailments* are at greater risk than those without. Of the deaths documented in the City of Houston between Oct. 2 and Dec. 1, **only 5.5% (16/288) were listed as not involving an underlying condition.**¹⁰ Recent research suggests that mild overweight can also be a risk factor.¹¹

More analysis to follow shortly.

⁷ Per the Houston/Harris County Covid-19 Dashboard: 51% female, 44% male and 5% unknown, as of Dec. 19, 2020.

⁸ This is a wider gap than the [CDC’s national data](#) indicate, which is 54% male / 46% female (12/19/20). Harris County data reports have changed, so this break out is not currently available.

⁹ The [Western Journal of Emergency Medicine](#) reports that in Italy this spring men had 58% of Covid-19 infections & 70% of Covid-19 deaths, while Wuhan China saw most infections (between 51.0 and 66.7%) among men, with a 1:1.64 female/male ratio of deaths (*WJEM* 2020;21(3): 507-509). Respiratory infections SARS (2003) and MERS (2012) also saw sex-linked differentials. In the US, state death data around sex differentials vary widely, which brings researchers at the [Harvard GenderSci Lab](#) to postulate that behavioral reasons like men’s going to the doctor less, eating less healthy foods, and smoking more than women overall may play the biggest role. Nonetheless, some hormonal or genetic protection—from higher rates of estrogen/progesterone or from the double X chromosome—may play in. Differential rates of exposure through work outside the home & differences in over health-affecting behaviors (mask wearing, handwashing, etc.) are also potential factors. Grace Huckins, “[Covid Kills More Men Than Women](#). Experts Still Can’t Explain Why,” *Wired* (7.9.2020). See also [Takahashi, et al.](#), “Sex differences in immune responses that underlie COVID-19 disease outcomes,” *Nature*, August 26, 2020.

¹⁰ Harris County Health Department data (8.31.20) stated there were underlying conditions in 87.6% of deaths, but only 2.9% of their cases listed No Underlying Conditions. The remaining 9.5% of cells are marked Unknown or left blank.

¹¹ Roni C. Rabin, “[Extra Pounds May Raise Risk of Severe Covid-19](#),” *NY Times* (Oct. 10, 2020)

For more information on the Institute for Research on Women, Gender & Sexuality & this data:
uh.edu/class/ws/research