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Surgo Ventures and Covid Act Now analysis of 700+ U.S. counties finds Black vaccination rates are greater than White in 36% of counties, but considerable challenges remain

In these counties, vaccination rates are lower than the national average and communities are being disproportionately hit by Delta

WASHINGTON, October 5, 2021 — The vaccination rate for Black Americans is catching up to the vaccination rate for White Americans, according to an analysis of never-before released data on vaccination rates by race for approximately 700+ U.S. counties covering 34% of the US population by Surgo Ventures and Covid Act Now. However, despite the higher rates among the Black population, these counties are experiencing lower overall vaccination rates and, in many cases, worse outcomes.

Surgo conducted its analysis using a dataset from Covid Act Now, which scraped individual state vaccine dashboards to collate county-level, race-stratified vaccine data.

What is the racial vaccination gap across the US?

Counties reporting > 100% vaccination rates omitted

'No difference' defined as not statistically significant or less than 2 percentage point difference

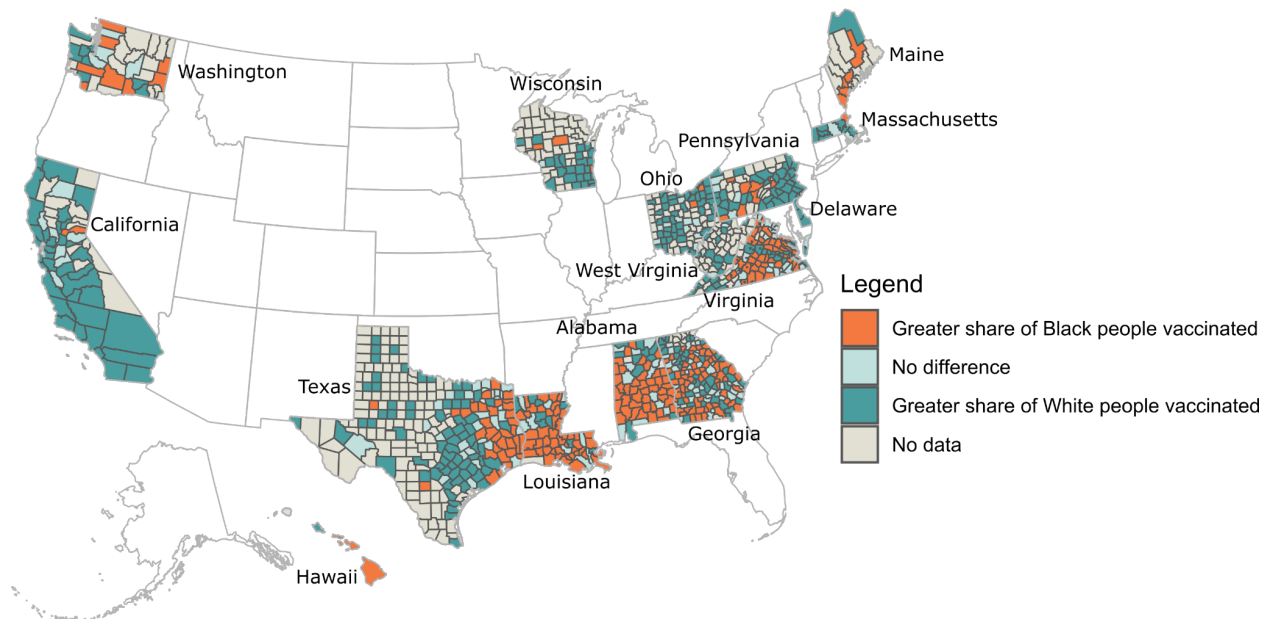


Figure 1. U.S. county map of the comparison between vaccination rates among the Black and White populations. Red counties indicate the vaccination rates among the Black population exceed those of the White population in the respective county. Green counties indicate the vaccination rates among the White population exceed those of the Black population in the respective county. Analysis by [Surgo Ventures](#) using data sourced from [Covid Act Now](#).

“We’ve found a nearly universal trend of Black vaccination rates catching up to the White vaccination rates in the United States, in that 94% of counties we analyzed have been closing the racial vaccination gap between their Black and White populations since the end of May,” said Dr. Sema K.

Sgaier, Co-Founder and CEO of Surgo Ventures and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “And what’s particularly surprising is that in more than one third -- 36% -- of the counties for which we have data, the Black community has surpassed the White community in vaccination rates.”

Looking closer at the 700+ counties analyzed, Surgo found this trend especially pronounced in the US South, where in 44% of the Southern counties for which data was captured, the cumulative Black vaccination rate is currently higher than the White vaccination rate. This trend of Black vaccination rates outpacing White vaccination rates appears most pronounced in the South due to a smaller initial vaccination gap between White and Black populations at the start of the summer.

“While it’s encouraging to see vaccination rates in the Black community increasing, it’s important to note that across the South, overall vaccination rates are being dragged down by a large percentage of unvaccinated, white adults,” said Igor Kofman, CEO of Covid Act Now. “Nationally, in counties for which we have data, 62% of the white population is vaccinated, but in counties where we are seeing higher Black vaccination rates, we’re seeing an average white vaccination rate that’s lower -- only 53%. We can’t ignore the challenge this poses for efforts to improve vaccine uptake in the Southern United States.”

Among its analysis of counties where the Black vaccination rate has surpassed the White vaccination rate, Surgo also found:

- **In counties where Black vaccination rates are higher than White, 68% are rural.** Whereas 74% of counties where White vaccination rates are greater than Black are urban.
- **These counties are more pro-Trump¹ (55% of the population of these counties voted for Donald J. Trump in the 2020 election compared to only 44% in counties where the White vaccination rate is greater), and are more likely to believe in COVID-19 conspiracy theories²** (35% of the population of these counties are deemed by Surgo to be [COVID Skeptics](#) compared to 29% in counties where the White vaccination rate is greater).
- The total vaccination rate in these counties lags behind the total national average by 6 percentage points (67% total vaccination coverage, compared to 73% nationally), compared to counties where White vaccination rates are higher which have a total vaccination rate 2 percentage points higher than the national average (75% compared to 73% nationally). **As a result of lower overall vaccination rates, counties where the Black population is vaccinated at higher rates than the White population are experiencing worse COVID-related health outcomes (experiencing 10% more COVID cases per 100K and almost twice as many deaths per 100K in the past week alone)³.**

Surgo offered the following solutions that state and local leaders should explore for increasing the rate of vaccinations in their communities and reducing racial gaps in coverage:

- The challenges with vaccine uptake in the South, and especially the rural south, and coastal states and urban centers are different. Southern state and county leaders in particular should focus on improving currently low rates of overall vaccine coverage with a focus on White people living in rural areas.

¹ MIT Election Data and Science Lab, 2021, "County Presidential Election Returns 2000-2020", <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VOQCHQ>

² Surgo Ventures. 2021, "County Vaccine Personas," <https://surgoventures.org/vaccine-persona-explainer>

³ Johns Hopkins University. 2021 "COVID-19 Data", <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>

- In the coastal states, leaders should continue focusing on closing the racial vaccination gap, especially among Black people living in urban areas. This may be accomplished by mimicking grassroots efforts focused on increasing vaccination rates among people of color through outreach and education and reduction of access and logistical barriers to vaccination.
- Leaders should tap into increased interest in getting the vaccine as the level of community transmission of COVID infections remains high, as reported by [the CDC](#).
- Efforts to continue decreasing the racial vaccination gap may be accelerated by targeting younger adults and adolescents who include higher shares of minority populations, compared to other adults.

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About Surgo Ventures

[Surgo Ventures](#) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving health and social problems with precision. We do this by bringing together all the tools available from behavioral science, data science, and artificial intelligence to unlock solutions that will improve and save lives. We work globally; in the United States, the United Kingdom, and in low- and middle-income countries on issues including COVID-19, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, housing, and more.

About Covid Act Now

Covid Act Now is the COVID-focused initiative of the Act Now Coalition, an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in March 2020 to help people make informed decisions by providing timely and accurate COVID data in the U.S. Our multidisciplinary team draws on expertise in technology, design, data science, epidemiology, public health, and policy.