

Issue: AZ Maricopa COVID-19 Testing

Disparities in COVID-19 Testing for Minorities

Maricopa County, Arizona

The reporting of COVID-19 cases, case distribution, and testing sites changes frequently, and may vary regionally. For the purposes of this inquiry, we have taken a focused look at Maricopa County. Selected information below is current as of the date reported; updated data can be obtained where cited.

Summary

Data for COVID-19 testing broken down by race or ethnicity in Arizona is difficult to find or, in some cases, unavailable. The Johns Hopkins University’s Coronavirus Resource Center has documented that, as of July 1, 2020, only four states have released testing data broken down by race; Arizona is not among them.¹ However, the trends in Arizona cases echo the national data reported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): long-standing socioeconomic and health inequities have resulted in four to five times higher rates of COVID-19 infection among minorities.² Indeed, a report published just this week by the *New York Times*, presents (with interactive state maps) a detailed look nationwide at racial and ethnic inequity of COVID-19 infections.³

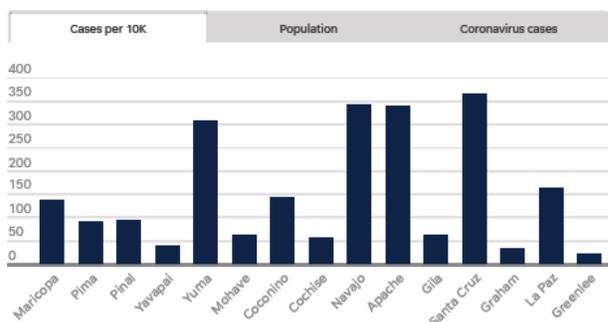
In Arizona, reporting the race or ethnicity of those tested for COVID-19 is not required and is dependent upon patient self-reporting. One needs to look at other information as a proxy for gleaning the disparities in COVID-19 testing for minorities—both opportunity and access.

Heavily urban Maricopa County has the most testing sites of all counties; however, sites are not evenly distributed, and there are fewer in minority communities. Concentrated Hispanic/Latino communities are low income, heavily immigrant, and non-English speaking. They work long hours in service industry jobs and rely on public transportation, making it difficult to get to testing sites. The recent testing problems in southwest Phoenix demonstrate the enormous need and pent-up community demand for testing in these underserved communities.

The Big Picture: Statewide COVID-19 Cases per County

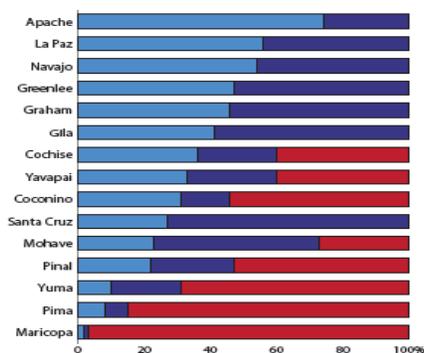
The per capita COVID-19 cases per county as of July 6, 2020, are shown in the graph on the left.⁴ For additional context, the figure on the right shows the urban-rural breakdown of these counties.⁵ As seen, the highest per capita rates largely track with the most rural counties.

Some less populous counties have more COVID-19 per capita



SOURCE: Department of Health Services, Office of Economic Opportunity
NOTE: Arizona's official tally likely does not capture all cases of COVID-19 in the state.

Percent Population in Rural, Urban Cluster, and Urban Areas



►► The entire population in 7 of Arizona’s 15 counties live in Rural or Urban Clusters.

Cases by Zip Code

The Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) maps cases by zip code. If the patient reports no residence, the zip code is attributed to the testing facility address. Data is unavailable for all zip codes where more than 50% of the population is composed of tribal residents; these zip codes are labeled “tribal” and the case count is reported as “suppressed” with the explanation that data is pending tribal approval.^{6,7} For Native American case counts, the Indian Health Service tracks regional aggregate cases reported by tribal health facilities.⁸

Statewide COVID-19 Testing Sites

As of July 6, 2020, ADHS reports 294 testing sites statewide.⁹ The map below provides a dramatic visualization of what the numbers reveal: most of the testing sites are in the two most urban counties, with Maricopa County having the vast majority. Most rural counties have a handful or none at all.

The table below also compares the county minority population with the number of COVID-19 testing sites in that county. The four major minority groups in Arizona are Hispanic/Latino, American Indian/Alaska Native (hereafter referred to as “Native American”), Black/African American, and Asian. Hispanic/Latino represents the largest minority group across nearly all counties, followed by Native American. Native Americans represent the majority in three counties (Apache, Navajo and Coconino Counties). Black/African American and Asian represent less than 5% of the population across all counties.¹⁰



COVID-19 Testing Sites

County <i>Decreasing Order from Most Urban to most Rural</i>	Number COVID-19 Testing Sites*	Percentage Minority Population
Maricopa	196	45.2
Pima	45	49.7
Yuma	10	71.0
Pinal	9	44.6
Mohave	2	22.4
Santa Cruz	1	86.5
Coconino	4	45.3
Yavapai	17	19.1
Cochise	0	44.3
Gila	2	38.8
Graham	0	49.3
Greenlee	0	54.7
Navajo	5	58.8
La Paz	0	48.5
Apache	4	82.7

Definitions Urban vs. Rural¹¹ Testing sites current as of 07/06/20 *Total is greater than 294 (here, 302), as it also includes those unattributed by “county” but were placed by address. Major minorities percentages as of July 1, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

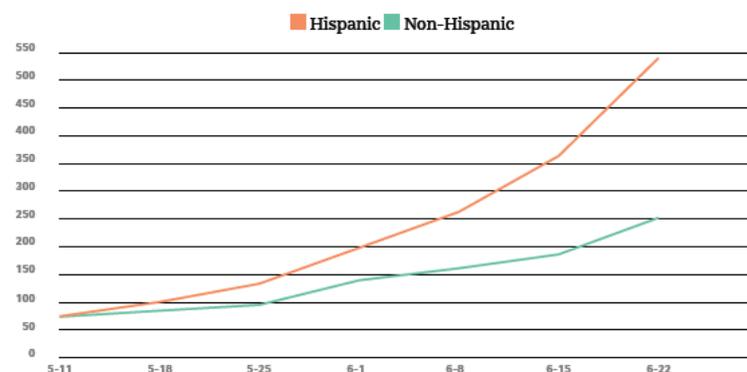
Maricopa County

Race or ethnicity is known for only approximately 44% of confirmed COVID-19 cases. In Maricopa County, 31.4% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, 6.4% is Black/African American, and 2.8% is Native American. As of June 28, 2020, Native Americans have the highest case rates and hospitalizations per 100,000 people in the county; the Black/African American population has next highest.

Hispanic/Latino populations have twice the rate of cases as non-Hispanic. Another way to look at this is that Hispanic/Latino represent 50% of cases but are only 31% of the county’s population, and Native Americans represent 8% of cases but are only 2% of the county’s population.¹² Case rates are also rising faster in minority communities. The figure below shows the rising Hispanic infection rate.¹³

The rate of infection among Hispanics is rising faster than the rate among non-Hispanics.

Rates per 100,000 residents



By Justin Price, The Republic

Source: Maricopa County Department of Public Health

The Southwest Valley¹⁴

The southwest Valley of Phoenix includes the communities along the Interstate-10 highway. The south- and west-side communities of Phoenix are heavily minority, low income, and have been historically underserved. The area is home to much of the region’s manufacturing and distribution facilities. Most residents here are service industry workers, with many deemed essential workers during the current pandemic. These residents work long hours under conditions that may expose them to risk of infection and need to rely on public transportation.¹⁵

The region described as “Phoenix (Southwest) Tolleson City PUMA, AZ” is heavily minority with the two main groups being Hispanic (52.8%) and Black/African American (10.3%). Over 54% are non-English speaking and 84% are US citizens. Nearly 25% of residents are foreign-born, mostly from Mexico, followed by the Philippines and Guatemala. Well-over 40% of both the Hispanic and White populations live below the poverty line.¹⁶ The southwest region described as “Maryvale (West) PUMA, AZ” has similar minority demographics. The Maryvale community is more than 75% Hispanic and has among the highest COVID-19 infection rates in Phoenix.¹⁷

The Maryvale community was much in the news for a “testing blitz” that revealed the pent-up demand for testing. Organized by Equality Health, in partnership with the City of Phoenix and

Sonora Quest Laboratories, the testing was held Saturday, June 20, 2020. More than 1,000 people waited in triple-digit heat for the drive-through testing, some waiting up to 13 hours. While most people had appointments, many arrived without one hoping to get tested. The demand and heat overwhelmed test materials and staffing. A second event was quickly scheduled for the following weekend. By Monday evening, more than 1,000 people had scheduled appointments.

Following the widespread outrage over the June 20, 2020 Maryvale testing event, local politicians Sen. Lupe Contreras, Rep. Lorenzo Sierra, and Rep. Diego Espinoza (LD19, Democrats) sent a letter to the Governor's office requesting more support for Equality Health's future testing blitzes.

The growing demand for testing combined with decreasing supplies is leaving local leaders to scramble for materials and testing capacity. Rep. Sierra captures the extreme frustration with the fundamental lack of a federal or statewide strategic approach for COVID-19 testing. He emphasizes that the state needs to anticipate where the testing will be needed most and notes:

"Our essential workers deserve our testing. They're the ones that are the most vulnerable ... we owe it to them to have accessible, affordable testing. If we had a comprehensive, strategic plan from the get-go ... we would have been able to get ahead of this. Now we're never going to catch up."¹⁸

Tolleson Meatpacking Plant

On June 9, 2020, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue applauded the "safe reopening" of meat packing facilities nationwide and noted that they are operating at 95% average capacity compared to this time last year. He praised the results of President Trump's April 28, 2020 Executive Order directing the USDA to work with the CDC and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to enable safe operations, and said,

"I want to thank the patriotic and heroic meatpacking facility workers, the companies and the local authorities for quickly getting their operations back up and running...."¹⁹

The JBS Beef plant is located in Tolleson, Arizona and employs approximately 1,500 people. In May, Mayor Anna Tovar reported that Tolleson City officials have been *unable to get data from JBS* on any employees testing positive. The company has twice declined an offer of help from the state, saying they will work with the City to provide opportunities for employee testing.²⁰ Mayor Tovar has continued to advocate and to obtain testing for Tolleson and JBS employees, yet the results of that testing are still inaccessible.²¹

Summary

COVID-19 cases in Arizona are surging aggressively.²² As of early July, cases have reached their highest levels ever for the state, with no indication that the curve is leveling off. As Governor Ducey has admitted, "we can't be under any illusion that the virus is going to go away on its own."²³

The need for a coordinated strategic state approach to COVID-19 testing is urgent. Data shows that cases are growing disproportionately among minority populations. The heavily minority, poor, and underserved communities in Maricopa County have the greatest challenges for access to testing. Local leaders are scrambling on their own to ensure enough testing sites exist to serve their residents and keep them safe and healthy.

Given the dire circumstances, legislators in Maricopa County must continue to push the Governor's office for more testing support and ensure that it is delivered to where it is needed the most. Concurrently, they should also drive to ensure race and ethnicity data is recorded with every COVID-19 test done. This data is desperately needed to ensure that the resources required for the fight against COVID-19 are provided to Maricopa's minority citizens who are the most at risk of dying from this horrendous pandemic.

¹ <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/racial-data-transparency>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/05/us/coronavirus-latinos-african-americans-cdc-data.html>

⁴ <https://www.azcentral.com/in-depth/news/local/arizona-health/2020/03/20/arizona-coronavirus-map-county-county-look-covid-19-cases/2879808001/>

⁵ https://crh.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/topics/20190226__AZlegOnePageFinal.pdf

⁶ <https://www.azcentral.com/in-depth/news/local/arizona-data/2020/04/12/coronavirus-arizona-zip-code-new-data-shows-where-cases-found/5133117002/>

⁷ <https://adhsgis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/84b7f701060641ca8bd9ea0717790906>

⁸ <https://maps.ihs.gov/portal/apps/StoryMapBasic/index.html?appid=6f48038819f6452e9762b3a8126afbe8>

⁹ <https://www.azdhs.gov/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/infectious-disease-epidemiology/index.php#novel-coronavirus-testing>

¹⁰ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/>

¹¹ https://www.localmajority.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AZ.Rural_Healthcare.20200617.ll_.pdf

¹² <https://www.maricopa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/59661/COVID-19-Daily-Data-Report?refer=home-button>

¹³ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-data/2020/06/27/latino-covid-19-rates-continue-rise/3263558001/>

¹⁴ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2020/06/25/2nd-covid-19-testing-blitz-planned-maryvale-more-come/3260856001/>

¹⁵ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2020/06/21/coronavirus-testing-long-wait-turned-away-covid-19-tests-maryvale-arizona/3233532001/>

¹⁶ [https://datausa.io/profile/geo/phoenix-\(southwest\)-&-tolleson-cities-puma-az#demographics](https://datausa.io/profile/geo/phoenix-(southwest)-&-tolleson-cities-puma-az#demographics)

¹⁷ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2020/06/25/2nd-covid-19-testing-blitz-planned-maryvale-more-come/3260856001/>

¹⁸ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/phoenix/2020/06/25/2nd-covid-19-testing-blitz-planned-maryvale-more-come/3260856001/>

¹⁹ <https://www.usda.gov/media/press-releases/2020/06/09/americas-meatpacking-facilities-operating-more-95-capacity-compared>

²⁰ <https://www.abcl5.com/news/region-west-valley/tolleson/jbs-meat-plant-in-tolleson-declines-states-offer-to-help-with-covid-19-testing-for-the-second-time>

²¹ <https://www.tollesonaz.org/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=283>

²² <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/data/state-timeline/new-confirmed-cases/arizona>

²³ <https://www.actionnewsjax.com/news/health/about-face-arizona/QLYHRDBS5OYFJKUWTGCNQZGO5Q/>