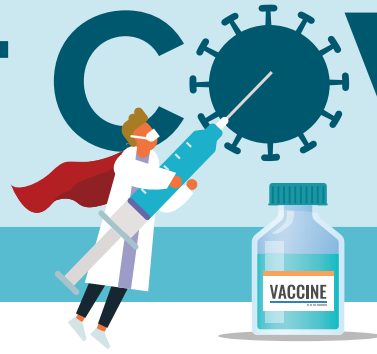


COMBAT COVID



An Open Letter to our Community from African American Physicians of Southwest Georgia

Few of us write letters anymore. Young people say it is too formal and too outdated. But in this moment – in the current state of our city, our region, our state and our country – an open letter just feels right.

As African Americans, many of us face medical issues that make day-to-day survival difficult. Hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, obesity and kidney disease are all more common in southwest Georgia than in most of the country, and they are particularly burdensome for African Americans who are more at risk of dying from these illnesses than anyone else. As if these issues were not enough, now we are dealing with the scourge of COVID-19.

COVID-19 came in like a raging storm and continues to ravage the country. We bore the brunt of this illness in its earliest days while the country learned from the bumps and bruises we took along the way. Per capita, we dealt with more illness and death than any other community, and the country saw the loss and heartache that we had to carry on our shoulders. What might have torn some communities apart brought us together and made us stronger. We have persevered and have stood strong for ten long months.

Our religious and civic leaders have been in lock step with our medical experts from the beginning. We made difficult decisions that were good for the whole – not just the few. But now there is a new surge occurring. Numbers are approaching the same velocity we saw in the earliest stages of the pandemic. Tens of millions of people have contracted the virus and more than 400,000 Americans have lost their fight with COVID-19.

Thankfully, we, as your doctors, have good news to deliver. Help is here.

A great deal of hard work and sacrifice went into developing vaccines that not only can protect us from catching the virus, but also help prevent us from being able to spread it to others. We know you may be a little leery of taking the vaccine – the African American community has not always had the best experience when it comes to medical experiments and new therapies. As your doctors and members of your communities, we know the history. What we can tell you, however, is that tens of thousands of others have gone first, getting the vaccine so we would not need to be the experimental group. Time and again, these vaccines have been proven to be safe, and they have a 94-95% success rate, which is outstanding for vaccines.

We know some of you are afraid. Anything that is new comes with fear. Fear of the unknown is human nature. There is something that is known, though – we know that the diseases that already afflict our beloved communities dramatically increase the risk of serious illness from COVID-19. The very same illnesses that were already causing so many problems are now teaming up with COVID-19 to make things that much more difficult! That is why our community has seen a higher percentage of death from COVID-19.

Therefore, it is imperative that we all embrace this vaccine as soon as it is available. We must give ourselves a fighting chance against these most difficult foes. We must use whatever tools we have. So, not only are we imploring you to get the vaccine, but we must get to 100% face mask usage. The combination of the vaccines and face masks could get us back to normalcy. We could get back to going to restaurants, to movies, to visiting family and to worshipping at church. As your doctors, we can see the light at the end of the tunnel. We need you, our community, to trust us now more than ever.

If you have trusted us to treat your diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, we ask that you give us that same trust again. We are not asking you to do something that we have not been willing to do ourselves. We have gone before you and walked the road we are now asking you to walk. We were immunized first so that we could earn your trust and help you, our community, understand that this is the most important health matter we are facing.

We want everyone in southwest Georgia, no matter your race or your background, to be vaccinated when you are eligible to do so.

While we are equally concerned about everyone in our great part of the state, we know many African Americans have a particular reluctance to being vaccinated. We understand we have a specific responsibility to share the facts with our African American community and to encourage each of you to roll up your sleeves for this potentially lifesaving shot. As your doctors, we will continue to have your back and will continue to give you guidance that is based in science and medicine. Please know that we would not write you this letter if it were not a matter of life or death. We want everyone to choose life. Get vaccinated and always wear your masks while in public. God bless our entire country and our community that we love and serve every day.

Sincerely,

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