

OC LEADER BOARD

Opinion, Analysis, Insight

Social Disparity Endures as COVID-19 Explodes in California

When I first wrote for the Leader Board last May, Europe was just entering an unimaginable outbreak only to be exceeded by the carnage in the northeastern United States.

California and particularly Orange County were relatively spared the initial wave of the pandemic. At that time, New York City had experienced 1,500 deaths per million people while California was at 51 and Orange County at 16.

No one thought it could ever again be as bad as it was for those deadly hot spots.

Wrong.

Today we focus less on total deaths (that is the past) and instead on death rate, which had grown as of Jan. 22 to 139 per million people in Los Angeles County and 85 per million people in Orange County per week! By comparison, California is at 86 and the U.S. is at 65, so all of California was above the U.S. death rate at that time, and was only exceeded for major countries worldwide by the U.K., which is at 128 deaths per million per week.

So, California—including Orange County—were recently among the deadliest spots in the world and Los Angeles County was off the charts! Not sure I can put enough exclamation points on that statement.

With that preface (and clear indications that rates have fallen since Jan. 22), what is concerning is that COVID-19 is not evenly distributed across social strata but bears down harder on certain sectors that divide along ethnic and racial lines.

Going back to May during the first wave in Los Angeles County, the African American community, which accounts for 9% of the population, was suffering 14% of deaths. Much of this was attributed to this community constituting a higher percentage of essential employees continuing to go to work at higher risk of exposure. As late as November during the beginning of the third epidemic wave across the U.S., the per-

centage of social distinctions that were more likely to die than whites were: African Americans 37% and Hispanics 16%.

The latest numbers, as this third epidemic wave far exceeds previous waves, shows the disparity has been closing. In California, the fraction of cases per population are 0.67 (African American), 1.4 (Hispanic) and 0.55 (white) and for deaths the fractions are 1.1 (African American), 1.2 (Hispanic) and 0.87x (white). What this means is that African Americans are not being infected at disproportionately high rates, but they are dying at high rates, which may indicate that they get inferior treatment, or they were diagnosed too late.

Still, basically the disparity for African Americans has come down,

but not so much for Hispanics.

Given the fact that all socioeconomic sectors are feeling the brunt of COVID-19, I would like to now address the total community.

Before I give the local statistics and provide commentary below, I need to first get on my soapbox. Let me start by saying that, although I am a staunch supporter of social restrictions, I do not agree with all the government health advisories. The problem is we are told what we can't do rather than what we can do.

Let me also say that we need to stop being deniers. That behavior is foolish, selfish, and will kill you. There are too many people on their death beds with COVID-19 wishing they took the epidemic more seriously. That is a wrenching way to die knowing that it was avoidable. I call those stupid deaths. Don't die stupid!

There is growing evidence that the case rate is shifting to younger people who are now accounting for a large percentage of all transmissions including to the elderly. What a tragedy to have to live the rest of your life with the guilt of having caused the death of a family member. Don't let that happen!



By Jack A. Syage

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There are two ways to reduce the virus transmission by over 80%: taking the vaccine and wearing a mask. What can we do now? Wear a mask! Don't be stupid. So, what about social isolation? Anyone who drives down PCH on any given day knows that people are not going to stay home and hibernate. So, if you must go out then take basic precautions. Wear a mask, keep reasonable distance, always keep a hand sanitizer with you ... and enjoy the outdoors! There are a lot of fun things you can do safely.

So how bad are things? The first thing you notice with these charts is holy cow, that looks bad right now!

Here are some other key observations:

One can see the three waves of the epidemic.

Orange County and to a lesser extent Los Angeles County avoided the first wave of the epidemic that viciously hit Europe and the northeast U.S. from March through May. We can thank Gov. **Gavin Newsom** for rapidly implementing social distancing mandates.

The second wave hit both Los Angeles and Orange County in July and August as social restrictions were perhaps lifted too soon.

The second wave diminished to relative tranquility in September and October, but then burst into an intense third wave starting in late November with case rates, hospitalizations and death rates peaking about 10 times higher than just two months ago.

If you look closely at the third wave, you'll notice that cases rise first, then hospitalizations, and then deaths. Maybe encouragingly we are seeing a peak and rollover in cases and

hospitalizations and hopefully that will translate into a similar rollover in the death rate in the next couple of weeks.

The main takeaway is that infections in Los Angeles County and Orange County are 10 times greater than they were just two months ago. There is currently an infected and contagious person for every 50 people in Los Angeles and 75 people in Orange County. That is a lot of exposure. That means no matter how safe you continue to be, you are still 10 times as likely to catch COVID-19 as you were two months ago. It is that bad out there!

Will vaccines save us? Yes, but ... We have all been reading how slow vaccine deployment has been. This will improve, but at best no more than 10% of the population will get vaccinated each month.

We need to get to over 60% vaccination to add to about 10% of those who have already caught COVID-19 and are now immunized.

That will still not get us to herd immunity, but it will slow down the epidemic enough to help restore some semblance of normal life. I am not making any predictions when we will return to full normalcy because society will always find a way to prolong the problem.

Editor's Note: Jack A. Syage is CEO and co-founder of Newport Beach's ImmunogenX Inc., an early stage developer working on clinical trials of celiac disease. Syage, who holds a Ph.D., has published over 130 papers, delivered about 100 invited talks and has over 30 U.S. patents issued or pending. He publishes regular updates on COVID-19 at syage-covid19-assessment.com.

Chart 1

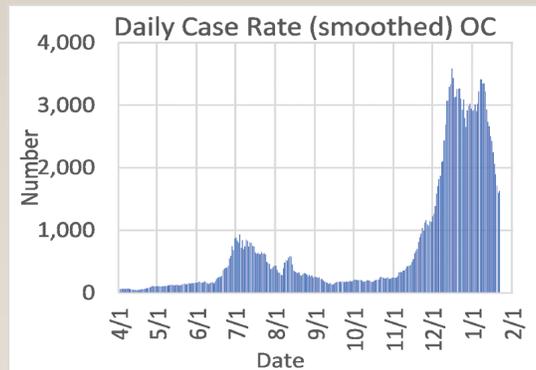


Chart 2

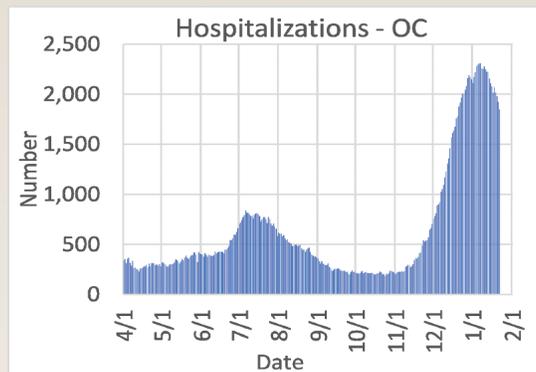


Chart 3

