

Dear people of color,

As a black female physician, I am concerned about the effect of COVID-19 on African-Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. I am also concerned about the effect it will have as our country begins to talk of opening states back up in the midst of a pandemic. We have a culture of getting together that will kill us in a time of pandemic. We have more high blood pressure, diabetes, heart trouble, and kidney disease than the general population. And in our population, people in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 50s and above are dying from COVID-19. If you are a person of color, you do not have to be older to get and die from this disease.

Let me lay down some truth to people of color that we are not completely following:

To start with, I need to explain true social distancing. Let's call the place that you live and the people you live with your family unit. It does not matter if it is an apartment or house or whether you live there by yourself or with others. You have to protect your family unit. You cannot let anybody else into your family unit, otherwise, you risk bringing COVID-19 into your home. You also cannot go to anyone else's family unit even if it is your grandmother, parent or your boyfriend or girlfriend's home. COVID-19 is a virus and it spreads from people breathing on you, coughing, and sneezing. You might begin to see that it can cause problems with childcare, visiting friends, and delivery of groceries to family members. You cannot let your kids play with other people's kids. This will shut down family dinners, parties, cookouts, weddings, funerals, and group religious activities.

If you can work at home, then it will be easier to protect your family unit. But most people of color don't work at home. Ask your employer if it's a possibility. If you work anywhere with the public, then wear a mask and insist that everyone around you do the same.

If you go grocery shopping, make a list of everything you need before you go and don't go more than once a week. Shopping is not a social event; it is a chance for you to pick up COVID-19. Ask others to keep their distance, politely. The distance should be a minimum of six feet to twelve feet if they are coughing or sneezing.

If you're on public transportation, wear gloves or wash your hands as soon as you can once you get off. When you come home, change your clothes, take a shower, wash your hands, and if you are exposed to someone with known COVID-19 stay away from other members of your family unit until it's been fourteen days since you were exposed to see if you develop any symptoms. You don't want to be the person who takes your family down since we are dealing with a virus that can infect you and not give you any symptoms.

Do not drink from the same container as anyone outside your family unit. Do not share cigarettes or weed. Now is not the time for a sexual hook-up, card game, or cookout with anyone who is not in your family unit. Don't fall for the "I feel fine, I don't have it" line for yourself or others. This disease lets people travel around without symptoms and possibly infect friends or family. I realize that asking you to stay within your own family unit is a hard thing because it goes against our typical family behavior. But it is necessary.

The only way to merge your family unit with another (i.e. parents, grandparents, etc.) is for all the people in each family unit to remain distanced for two to three weeks to make sure that nobody in either unit has any infection. If you feel that someone in another family unit is not likely to abide by the social distancing rules then you should not join your family unit with theirs. If all do comply, you may move between the two family units. However, ALL members of the two households must abide by social distancing. That means not going on a secret date or risky trips to the grocery store without gloves and mask or allowing people to stand too close to you or cough on you.

As cities, counties, and states open back up, you cannot change your newly learned social distance behaviors because the virus is not gone. There is no cure and there is no treatment and people of color will continue dying at higher rates than other races.

I am asking that each person practice social distancing as laid out above and speak with your friends, family, and neighbors so that they understand what they are required to do to save their loved ones. Each one, reach one. Let us be a community apart.

Reach out to your state and national leaders to demand testing in our communities. You can find your government representatives at [senate.gov](https://www.senate.gov) and [house.gov](https://www.house.gov). We need testing to find out who currently has COVID-19. Furthermore, antibody testing is also needed to find out who had COVID-19 and got better, where it came from, and how to fight it. Volunteer to give plasma if you recover from COVID-19 so that it may be given to someone fighting to survive their current COVID-19 infection.

We don't have enough test materials currently, but one of the things we can do immediately is get testing for a representative sample (like they do with voter polling) of your community, students before they return to school, or employees at a job site. This will give us an idea of how much illness is in our area and how likely we are to have significant illness going forward in our community.

Ask our local community banks, sports celebrities, TV personalities, CEOs, and politicians to work to set up loans for our small business and provide needed services for our communities. Demand that our state and federal leaders test and protect people in nursing homes and prisons. Share this information with our sororities, fraternities, and lodges, and ask them to spread this information.

Let us come together as a community as we did in the Montgomery bus boycotts where we helped each other survive until we were victorious.

Sincerely waiting for a treatment or vaccine,  
Rhea Craigen, M.D.