



Herbert
Henderson
Office of
Minority
Affairs

COVID-19 Advisory Commission on African American Disparities

MINUTES

July 2, 2020

7:30 AM

Via Zoom

Chair: Jill Upson, Chairperson and Director, Herbert Henderson Office of Minority Affairs (HHOMA)

Commissioners: Pastor Rahsaan Armand, Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church
Owens Brown, State Conference of NAACP
Joylynn Fix, WV Offices of the Insurance Commission
Delegate Caleb Hanna, Nicholas County, House District 44
Romelia Hodges, StriveN4
Delegate Sean Hornbuckle, House District 16, Cabell County
Mike Jones, Kanawha Institute for Social Research and Action (KISRA)
Reverend James Patterson, Institute Church of the Nazarene
Senator Patricia Puertas-Rucker, Jefferson County, Senatorial District 16
Tiffany Samuels, WVU Cancer Institute
Keisha Saunders, Tug River Health Clinic

Presenters: James Arnaez, MPH Ph.D., Lead Epidemiologist, Health Statistics Center
Secretary Bill Crouch, Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR)
Delegate Sean Hornbuckle, House District 16, Cabell County

Call to Order: Chairperson Jill Upson called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m. and proceeded with welcoming the Commissioners and presenters.

Chairperson Upson began the meeting by welcoming everyone. She then acknowledged and thanked Delegate Danielle Walker for joining the meeting. At the previous meeting, a request was made to find out more about the process for reopening Public Schools. Chairperson Upson stated that she had reached out to Superintendent Clayton Burch, who has submitted a reopening plan to the Governor for feedback. She then shared that superintendent Clayton Burch stated that he planned to share the reopening plan with the commission once it has been approved by Governor Justice.

DHHR Update – Secretary Bill Crouch, WV DHHR:

Secretary Crouch began by stating that a few hindrances to scheduling occurred. He shared that they are looking into ways of continuing the testing, alone, with the help of the West Virginia National Guard. In addition, alternatives to staffing the Drive-thru lanes at the testing sites are being considered. Secretary Crouch stated that progress has accelerated and plans to continue testing are underway. WV has stated ahead of other states and it is believed that testing is the solution to keeping the numbers low. Contact tracing is the companion piece to keeping the numbers low. He urged that it is necessary to track down positive case leads to ensure they are tested or self-quarantined. Although we think we are in a good place, the trend has been terrible. Florida, Arizona and Texas are worrisome situations. The state is trying to push harder through this first wave; communications and media will soon

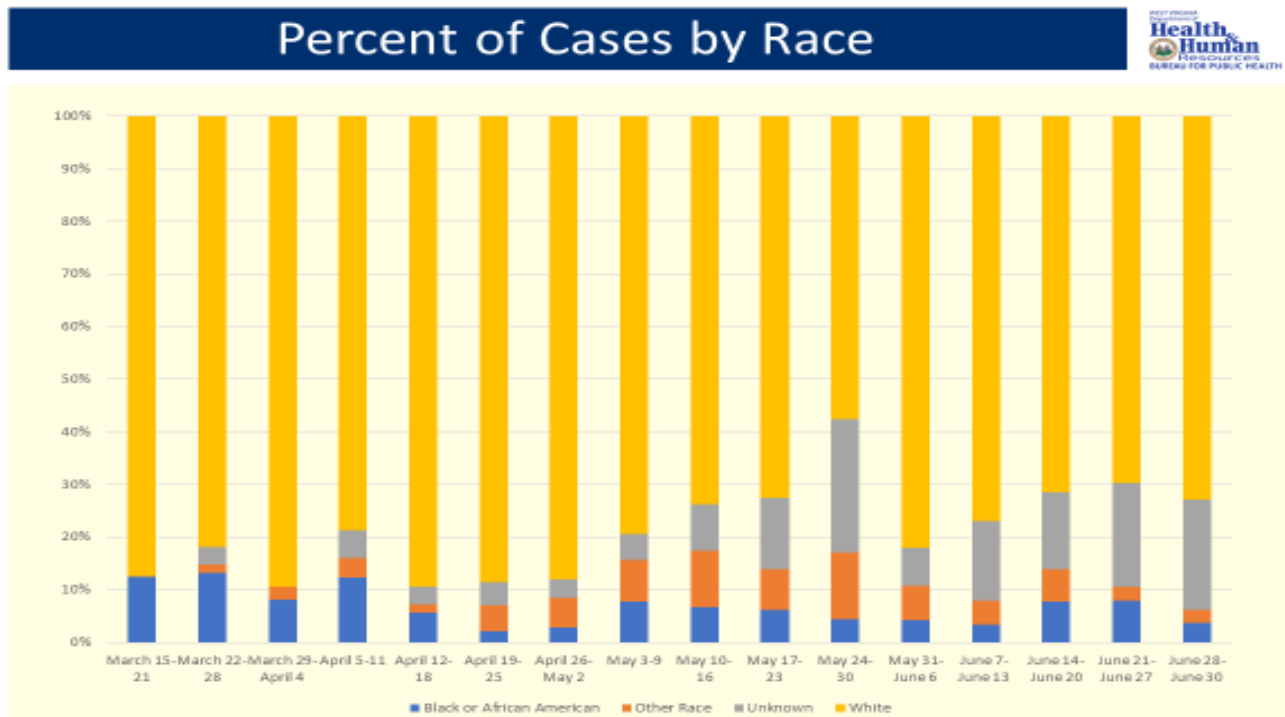
begin. The Governor and Dr. Clay Marsh have done an outstanding job pushing the usage of masks by providing solid and convincing information. Secretary Crouch reported that in the last few days there has been a turnaround with the vice president and Republican leadership in supporting the wearing of face masks. It is hoped that by getting the public to wear masks a surge in West Virginia will be avoided. He shared that, although there was not much of a surge the first time, leadership is not as confident this time. The St. Francis Hospital and others in Fairmont, WVU, Berkeley Springs have been asked to be prepared for a surge of hospitalizations. Secretary Crouch concluded by stating that he would have to leave the meeting early due to a mandatory meeting scheduled with leaders in Washington. He then stated that he was available to address any issues that pertain to him prior to leaving the meeting.

Chairperson Upson responded by asking if anyone had questions for Secretary Crouch before the meeting moved on to the next agenda item. No responses were received. She then introduced Dr. James Arnaez to begin the Minority Data Update.


Minority Data Update – Dr. James Arnaez, MPH PhD, Lead Epidemiologist - Health Statistics Center:

Dr. Arnaez reported that the data shared today is preliminary and was accessed through the WV Electronic Disease Surveillance System (EDSS) on June 30, 2020. The following data are preliminary. As case investigations occur data may be updated and will be reflected in subsequent reports. All data was accessed through the West Virginia Electronic Disease Surveillance System (WVEDSS). Some numbers are small, and caution is needed for generalization and interpretation. Percentages presented are with missing data excluded.

Dr. Arnaez reported that Black/African American cases remain near 8% for the second week. The Unknown race proportion grows to 19.8% for 21-27. The cumulative data for the current week is showing a relatively similar small proportion for Other races.



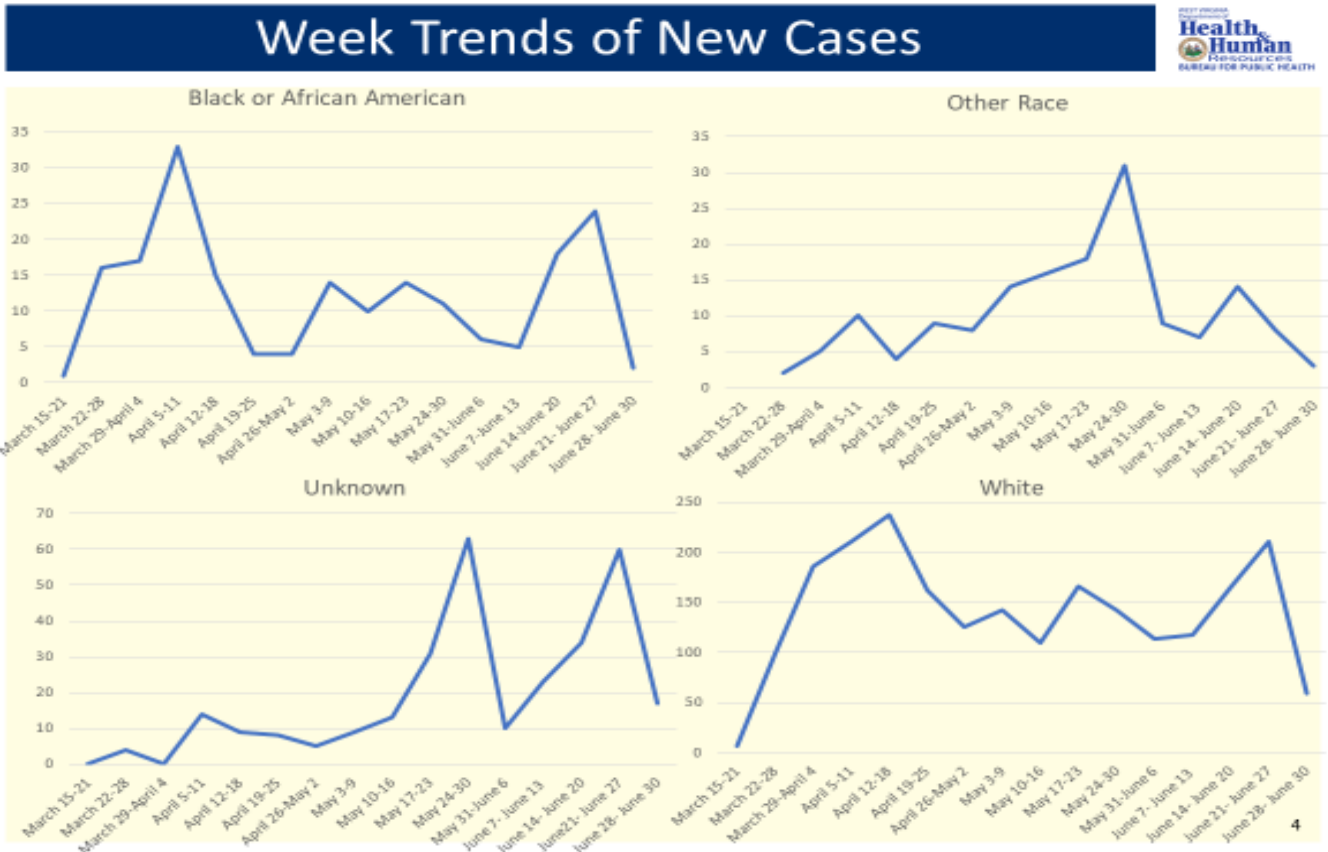
Unknown Race



Seven counties make up 65.9% of Unknown Race

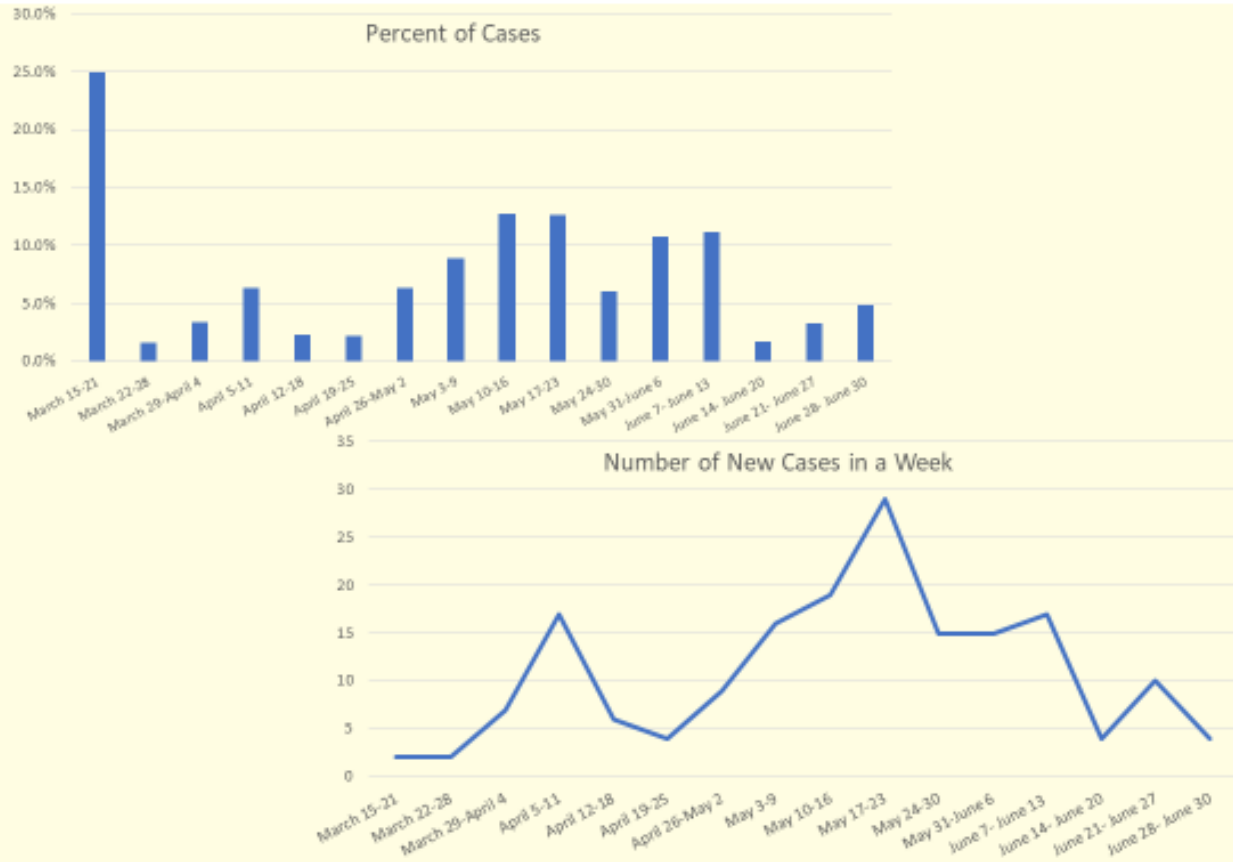
- Berkeley**
- Greenbrier**
- Jefferson**
- Kanawha**
- Monongalia**
- Mercer**
- Randolph**

Dr. Arnaez reported that notable increases for all racial categories except Other race group during June 21-27. There were 24 new cases in African Americans during the same week. This was the highest week since April 12-18 for whites and the second highest for Unknowns since week of May 23 at 60. The only category that did not see an increase was the Other Races, which decreased during June 14-20.



Dr. Arnaez pointed out that has been a notable drop occurred in both percentage and count since June 14th.

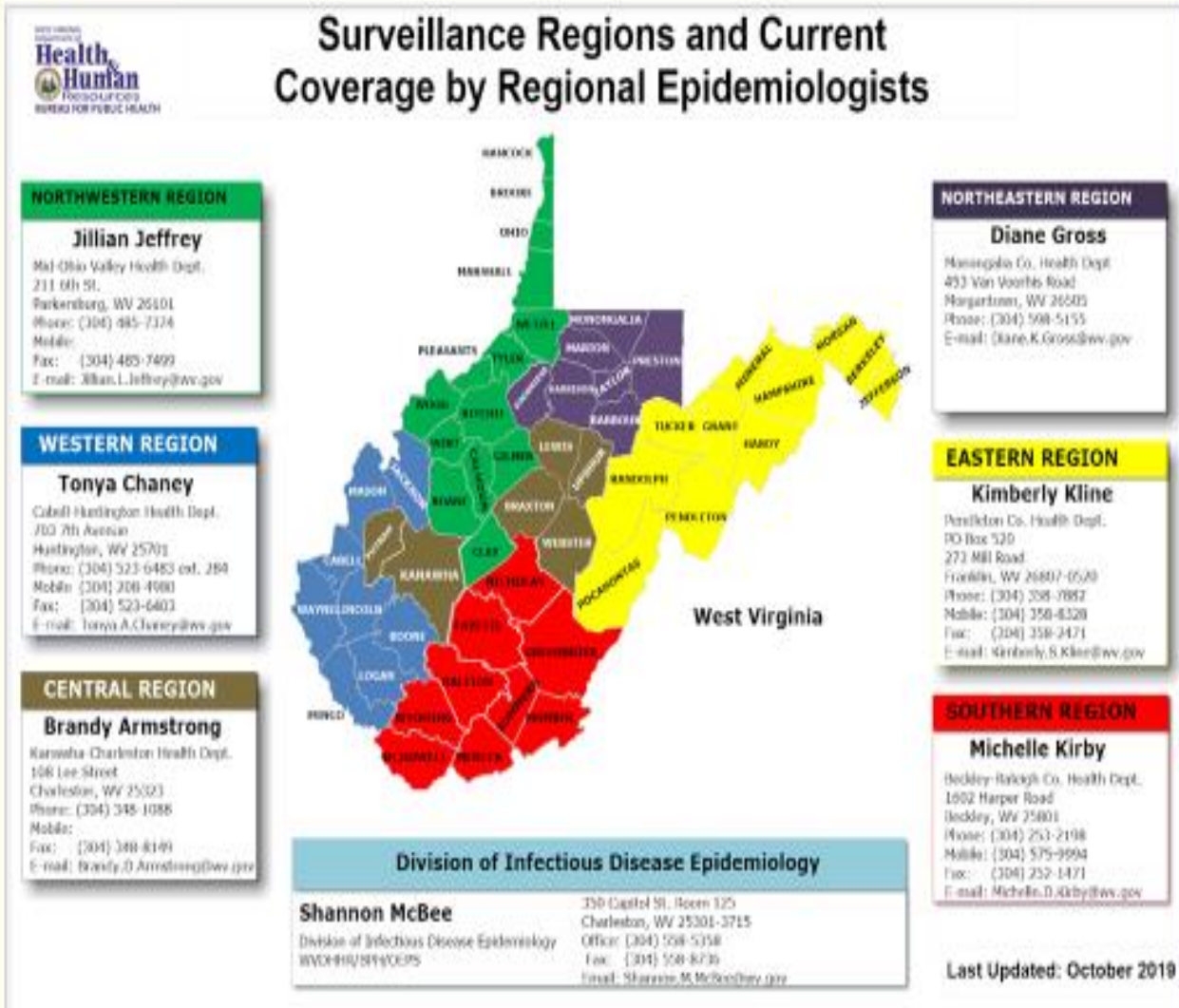
Hispanic



Dr. Arnaez shared the following chart, which is based on the surveillance regions that OEPS uses.



OEPS Regions



Dr. Arnaez provided the following report, which is broken down by region. He reported that Northeastern Region has the largest concentration of African American with a proportion of 11.8% of cumulative cases. He added that the Eastern region, which has the largest number of total cases, has interesting implications. African Americans in the Eastern region make up the highest number of cumulative cases in that racial group. Most Hispanic residents are located in the Eastern region.

COVID Cases by Region, Race, and Ethnicity



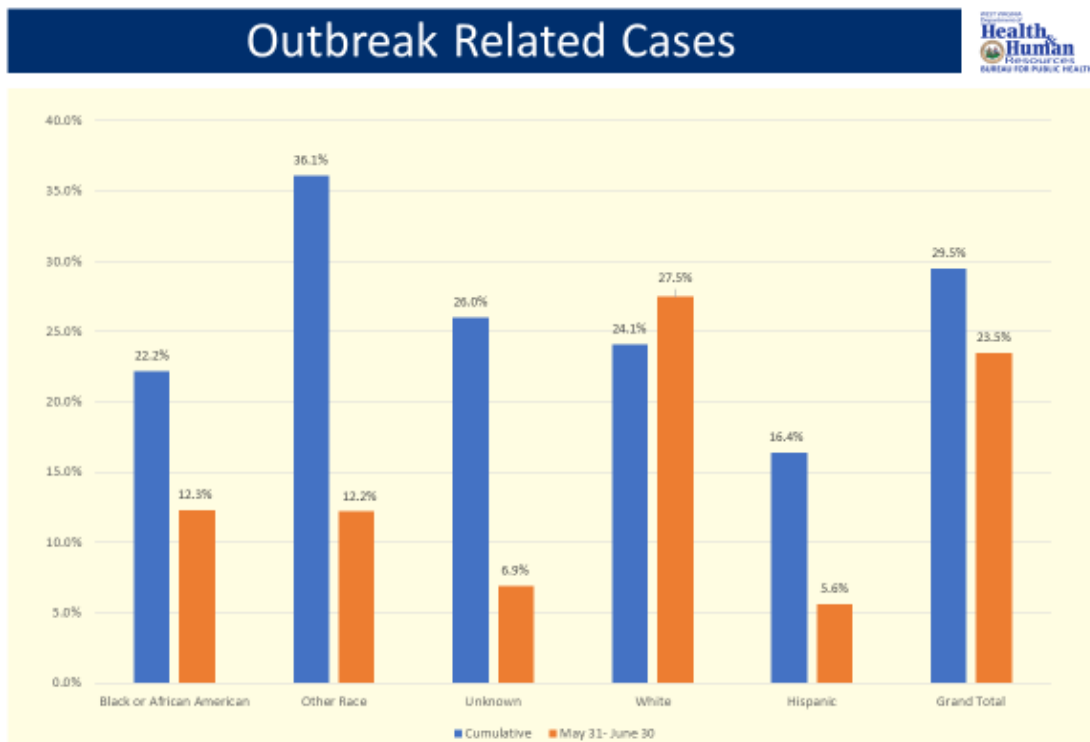
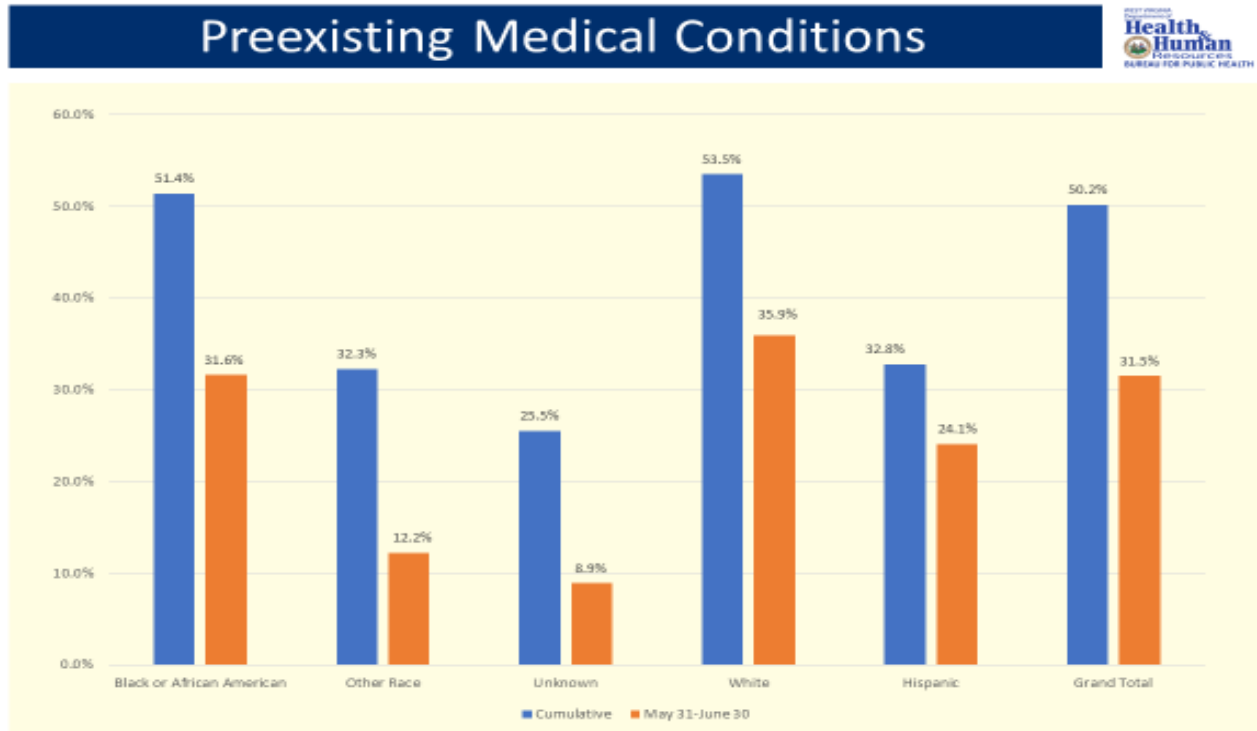
	State	% of cases	Western	% of cases	Central	% of cases	Northwestern	% of cases	Northeastern	% of cases	Eastern	% of cases	Southern	% of cases
Cumulative														
Total	2899		467		413		310		399		1058		252	
Black	212	7.3%	17	3.6%	25	6.1%	16	5.2%	47	11.8%	85	8.0%	22	8.7%
White	2342	80.8%	435	93.1%	348	84.3%	274	88.4%	313	78.4%	793	75.0%	179	71.0%
Other Race	158	5.5%	6	1.3%	16	3.9%	8	2.6%	10	2.5%	102	9.6%	16	6.3%
Unknown	187	6.5%	9	1.9%	24	5.8%	12	3.9%	29	7.3%	78	7.4%	35	13.9%
Hispanic	189	6.5%	5	1.1%	14	3.4%	5	1.6%	9	2.3%	153	14.5%	3	1.2%
May 31- June 30														
Total	870		101		126		116		127		257		143	
Black	57	6.6%	8	7.9%	3	2.4%	10	8.6%	10	7.9%	12	4.7%	14	9.8%
White	686	78.9%	89	88.1%	107	84.9%	97	83.6%	100	78.7%	202	78.6%	91	63.6%
Other Race	41	4.7%	1	1.0%	2	1.6%	4	3.4%	2	1.6%	26	10.1%	6	4.2%
Unknown	86	9.9%	3	3.0%	14	11.1%	5	4.3%	15	11.8%	17	6.6%	32	22.4%
Hispanic	54	6.2%	2	2.0%	2	1.6%	2	1.7%	3	2.4%	43	16.7%	2	1.4%

Hospitalizations, ICU Admission, & Ventilator Use



	Hospitalization	% of cases	ICU Admission	% of cases	Ventilator Use	% of cases
Cumulative						
Total	305	11.6%	126	4.8%	69	2.6%
Black	34	16.9%	12	6.0%	8	4.0%
White	257	11.7%	107	4.8%	54	2.4%
Other Race	8	5.7%	5	3.6%	6	4.3%
Unknown	6	6.7%	2	2.2%	1	2.4%
Hispanic	9	5.0%	3	1.7%	2	2.9%
May 31- June 30						
Total	29	4.3%	12	1.8%	5	0.7%
Black	2	4.0%	1	2.1%	0	0.0%
White	27	4.6%	11	1.9%	4	0.7%
Other Race	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	2.7%
Unknown	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Hispanic	1	2.0%	2	1.1%	1	2.0%

Pre-existing conditions include: Diabetes, COPD, CVD, smoking (current and former), chronic liver disease, chronic renal disease, cancer, immunosuppression, post-partum, neurological disability, and other chronic conditions mentioned by patient.



Mike Jones asked Dr. Arnaez if the reported numbers are cumulative percentages. Dr. Arnaez stated that both cumulative and past month data, since May 15, are shared. The past-month data shifts each week. Mike Jones then asked if it was possible to provide a racial breakdown of the percentages by region. Dr. Arnaez stated that he is working on adding in additional rates; wanting to be certain he had the most recent population data. He then added that should standardize the population by looking at cases per a standardized group to offset the fact that WV is very skewed in terms of population distribution.

Dr. Sanders stated that there is an attempt to complete the race information during the case investigation. She further explained that most of the demographic information comes through the lab order, completed by a healthcare professional and is automatically transferred into the system. There is effort made during contact with a positive case. The Chair noted that she noticed that the 'Unknown' category had increased since the previous week.

Chairperson Upson then read a question that was posted in the chat by Deputy Gary Thompson, asking if the drop in cases with pre-existing conditions could be related to the shift of infection moving to younger people. Dr. Arnaz replied that he would need to follow up on the question by looking into the age distribution in a more recent timeframe. He added that it was a great question since the numbers are increasing in the younger age groups and there are concerns about vacation travel. Dr. Sanders added that she had looked at the age breakdown and found a spike in the teenage population. Dr. Arnaez concluded by stating that he would delve into the age metrics to show if there is a shift and within which age group.

Romelia Hodges asked if would be possible for the group to receive reports on the 'Unknown' category as it is updated. She stated that the 'Unknown' cases are increasing, while the previous ones have not been updated after the contact tracing. She then expressed concern about the reopening of public schools and stated that there should be a media campaign targeting the school-aged group. Ms. Hodges asked if the State had any ideas how it will approach the outbreak while reopening schools. It appears to be an increase in college students. She then asked if the Board of Education had any ideas on how to deal with the 5-9 year olds, who are more apt to touch others, in the classroom when school resumes.

Secretary Crouch apologized for having to leave the meeting due to an urgent call. He stated that he was happy to deal with the question next week. He mentioned the possibility of having a representative from the Board of Education on the call to deal with the concerns about the reopening of schools.

Chairperson Upson reiterated that she had invited Superintendent Burch to join the meeting. Unfortunately, he was unable to attend since the plan had not been approved and finalized by the Governor as of yet. The Chair stated that she would contact the Superintendent Burch's administrative assistant to try to schedule him for the next meeting.

Ms. Hodges stated that the task force could potentially have significant input to give the Board of Education regarding the reopening plan. She expressed her concern that Superintendent Burch would come to the meeting with a finalized plan that is ready for implementation; missing the opportunity to receive feedback from the task force.

Ms. Hodges then requested an invite be extended to Allison Adler, the Communications Director at DHHR, to attend a meeting. She recommended that the conversation be focused on ways to target the school-aged children, as well as ways to better communicate with the adults in the vulnerable community. Chairperson Upson stated that she made notes about the requests and would reach out to Allison Adler at DHHR.

Mike Jones shared an idea to target the youth. He suggested hosting events at the testing sites, called "Maskerade", where the children would be invited to decorate masks. Area organizations could be contacted

to donated bicycles, skateboards, basketballs and other popular items. He explained that this would be an opportunity to educate the children on the importance of hand washing and wearing face coverings. Mr. Jones stated that more planning to develop the idea is needed.

Chairperson Upson asked Mr. Jones if he recommended testing the children at “Maskarades”. Mr. Jones agreed that it would be a good idea, but that the focus is to draw the children and educate them. He told of a sports practice at the Magic Island park in Charleston where none of the children were wearing masks or practicing social distancing. He stated that he had a conversation with the coach about the practice.

Chairperson Upson responded by stating that DHHR and the West Virginia National Guard are not open to having additional people or events at the testing sites due to the risk of exposure to COVID-19. She then shared that there had been discussion about providing the opportunity for community members to complete census questionnaires at the testing sites while waiting in the vehicles. It was decided that the risk to the census workers would be too great. The Chair stated that a “Maskarade” was a great idea and that she would speak with Secretary Crouch and Deputy Secretary Samples. Mr. Jones then suggested the possibility of holding a simultaneous event in the different regions; prior to the testing events to encourage participation.

Pastor Rahsaan Armand shared a concern about the information being disseminated to the community leaders. He explained an incident that he witnessed involving a state inspector of barbers and cosmetologists. The inspector was speaking against the effectiveness and necessity of wearing masks. He then shared that the customers took the comments made by the state inspector as truth. Pastor Armand asked if the task force can make a solid recommendation or a statement in support of wearing masks in public. He then stated that there is a disconnect between those who are ‘pro-mask’ and those who are conspiracy theorists. The Chair stated that the short answer is yes. She then added that the Governor is in support of wearing masks. She comments that she was surprised to hear about the state inspector’s comments. The Chair explained that she received salon services and the distancing guidelines are being followed. She stated that Secretary Crouch would want to be made aware of inconsistencies in state agencies following the guidelines. The Chair stated that she would like more information, offline, about the state inspector. She reiterated Dr. Clay Marsh’s previous remarks that 80% of the people wearing masks would be as effective as having a vaccine. She then offered to work together to develop a statement to be issued as a task force.

Reverend James Patterson expressed his frustration about the task force not recommending any practices as outlined by the national health professionals. He stated that the state is not capable of doing surge testing at the local level. He recommended using community health workers and contact tracing with local community members to ease the distrust. He stated that he thought the task force would inform the power-that-be about what needs to be done in the community and that is not happening. The plans and data is being shared each week, but do not involve the input of the task force. Rev. Patterson shared that the task force is meeting on a weekly basis to ‘ask’ for permission to help the minority community. The state must go by the rules and regulations, but the work still must be done. He shared that he does not see any improvements and that the minority community must mobilize and go do the work.

Faces of COVID-19 Video – Director Jill Upson, Chair:

Chairperson Upson shared that a fillable flyer, inspired by a flyer created by Romelia Hodges, will be disseminated to the task force. She stated that the design is more appealing to the targeted, minority community. The Chair then shared her screen to play the first PSA which features a testimonial by Jonathan Wesley. She then announced that another PSA will be released and thanked everyone that was involved in completing the first PSA.

Cabell Round II Recap – The Honorable Sean Hornbuckle, Delegate:

Chairperson Upson introduced Delegate Sean Hornbuckle to report on the second round of testing in Cabell County. Delegate Hornbuckle shared that he does not have the final count of the testing turnout. He did attend one day and was retested. He reported that, in comparison to the last drive, the event was not as well-attended as the previous event. He mentioned that the setup at the AD Lewis Center was not conducive to walkers or drivers. It was not obviously visible. Delegate Hornbuckle stated that there was only a small 2"x3" sign on Hal Greer Boulevard that was not very legible. He explained that the signage should have been on the property for maximum visibility. He concluded by stating that, overall, the event could have been better.

Chairperson thanked Delegate Hornbuckle for the feedback and stated that she would share it on the afternoon planning committee conference call. Delegate Hornbuckle added that the low turnout and poor signage could have been alleviated through a collaborative effort with the task force. It may be best for the task force to collaborate on how to set up the events in the communities. The Chair stated that she spoke with Deputy Secretary Jeremiah Samples who desires more input from the task force about how the sites should operate. She then shared that the long-term plan is to hold events at a minimum of two sites per week through the fall months. Deputy Samples has requested guidance from the task force on what counties to visit or revisit. The Chair requested the task force members to contact her regarding spikes, outbreaks, concerns or site location recommendations to share with the planning team.

Delegate Hornbuckle then shared a recommendation. He suggested that an immediate fix would be to have Deputy Secretary Samples and others to participate in the task force meeting to alleviate any planning gaps. The Chair stated that the minutes, recordings, and calendar invites are shared with Deputy Samples. She stated that she would share the invitation to attend the meetings with Deputy Samples.

Mike Jones commended Pastor Rahsaan Armand and his team for coordinating a successful testing event. He then requested that Pastor Armand share his plan, which can be used as a template for future testing events. The plan would include strategies to better engage the local community and the media. Mr. Jones stated that he shares the task force information with his contacts to circulate through his local community. Chairperson Upson responded by stating that sharing information with the community is strongly encouraged. The task force relies heavily on the support of community partners to make sure the testing events are successful.

The Chair asked if Pastor Armand would be able to present a template of his testing event plan at the next meeting. Pastor Armand agreed to be prepared for the next meeting.

Romelia Hodges shared that there has been difficulty in dealing with local health departments across the state. She then suggested that the task force find a way to circumvent the issue to focus on testing and logistics. A great amount of time is spent convincing the health department to do what is being asked. The Chair agreed that getting the needed support in several counties has been a challenge. She then stated that this concern would be mentioned at the next call when everyone is present.

Chairperson Upson asked if Delegate Hornbuckle had any other comments about the inconsistencies in messaging. Delegate Hornbuckle explained that the inconsistencies in messaging is a top-down issue, which is hard to overcome. The Delegate shared that he is respectful of everyone that is a supporter of our President. In referring to the He questioned how to combat people that are unwilling to speak because of politics. He referred to the incident with an inspector that was spreading information that was not conducive to public health and safety. The Chair stated that she spoke with Dr. Reidy, the local health inspector in Jefferson

and Berkeley counties who stated that the virus does not care about politics. She added that anyone can possibly be infected.

Chairperson Upson announced that the next testing will take place on July 10-11 in Marshall, Monongalia (retest), Preston and Wayne counties. She then asked Romelia Hodges if she had any addition comments about the upcoming testing. Ms. Hodges stated that are less than 10 days to plan the testing event in Morgantown during this critical time. Due to recent outbreaks, the testing is very necessary and targets the students who might not normally get tested. This allows the community to come out in a collective effort to get tested. Ms. Hodges mentioned that Delegate Danielle Walker has done a phenomenal job in coordinating the testing efforts. Chairperson Upson and Danielle Walker have worked in tandem together to finalize the events, despite the obstacles. The Taylor County Health Department is providing services for the Morgantown testing event since there were many obstacles faced in dealing with the local health department. Ms. Hodges suggested providing a lot of education to the public to stop the spread in Morgantown and Monongalia areas. The NAACP is partnering with Delegate Walker and HHOMA to make sure the hospitality needs are secured. Ms. Hodges reinforced the earlier comments about the importance of having the right people on the call to help make a smooth transition going forward.

The following week, on July 17-18, testing will be held in Berkeley and Jefferson counties. The Berkeley site will be held at the at the Patriot Antique Center located across from the Rescue Mission. Approval to hold testing at Ranson Elementary School is pending; Ranson Civic Center is another option.

Owens Brown suggested adding younger people to the task force to get their ideas. He then asked if anyone on the task force is under 40 years old. The Chair stated that Delegate Caleb Hanna, task force member, is under 40 years old. Mr. Brown then shared that the NAACP sent young people out to recruit other young community members. Younger task force members would also be able to assist in social media efforts. The Chair responded by stating that it is possible that younger people can be connected directly with task force members to voice concerns. Chairperson Upson concluded by stating that she would find out if it is allowable to add younger members to the task force.

Meeting adjourned at 8:38 a.m.