

Dear Boone County community,

Over the last two weeks, community members have joined local and national protests in response to the killing of George Floyd and many other Black lives that have been taken through violent and racist acts. These acts are the result of centuries of systemic racism that is ingrained in our society. Systemic racism is a public health emergency.

Systemic racism disproportionately affects the stress and burden of illness experienced by Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other people of color. These minority groups are more likely to experience higher rates of diabetes, heart disease and obesity. We are seeing these health disparities during the current COVID-19 pandemic through alarming nationwide trends that suggest Black individuals are disproportionately infected with the virus. In Boone County we are also seeing this trend. As of June 4, 28.4% of our COVID-19 cases were Black individuals, despite making up only 9% of our county population.

Columbia/Boone County Public Health and Human Services stands against the hatred, racism and violence that is inflicted on our communities of color. We will continue to offer support, advocate for policy change, and conduct programming to address health disparities. Our work is not done until everyone is safe, everyone has their basic needs met, everyone is healthy, and everyone has access to achieve their full potential. We provide up-to-date data and reports that are available on the Boone Indicators Dashboard [here](#).

Addressing racism as a public health emergency is important, even during a pandemic. Residents should be able to protest peacefully and have their voices heard. It's important to remember that the risk of COVID-19 is still prevalent within our community and we want to protect the residents participating in these activities. People should not have to choose between their demands for justice and their health. We urge everyone to take the following precautions to prevent the spread of the virus:

- If you are sick, please stay home and utilize alternative means to make your voice heard.
- Whenever individuals gather in large numbers, there is a potential for the virus to spread, so it is important to maintain social distancing, including at least 6 feet of physical distancing or more.
- Shouting generates more droplets which can spread the virus further, increasing the chances of transmission. Therefore, everyone should wear a mask when physical distancing is not possible.
- Use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol often.

- Avoid touching objects and surfaces that others have touched.
- We recommend everyone who participates in protests or demonstrations monitor themselves for COVID-19 symptoms. Anyone with symptoms should seek testing right away. Those who do not have symptoms who believe they were exposed to someone with the virus may want to seek testing 5-14 days after they believe they were exposed. That allows individuals to learn if they are positive earlier.
- It is important for anyone that believes they have been exposed to minimize their contact with others for 14 days after their possible exposure.

We as a community can take active steps each day to help fight systemic racism. We encourage Boone County residents to contribute to efforts that help inspire change within our society by:

- Calling out racism when you see it.
- Reaching out to those in leadership positions. Hold them accountable by encouraging them to advocate for policies that help address racism.
- [Registering to vote](#).
- Exploring business and personal training opportunities offered by the [Inclusive Impact Institute](#).
- Following local organizations on social media that are working to address systemic racism in our community.

This is an extremely difficult time for many of our residents. Tending to the physical, emotional and mental health needs of our community continues to be the foundation of our public health response, especially now. We encourage everyone to check in on their family, friends and fellow Boone Countians. [Please reach out](#) to our department for any assistance you may need. We are here for you now and always.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie L. Browning". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.