

Black Clergy Health Brief: A Resource for Pastors

Provided by The Health
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March is MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS AWARENESS MONTH!



Multiple Sclerosis (MS) is a potentially disabling disease of the brain and spinal cord (central nervous system). In MS, the immune system attacks the protective sheath (myelin) that covers nerve fibers and causes communication problems between your brain and the rest of your body. **Eventually, the disease can cause permanent damage or deterioration of the nerve fibers.**

CAUSES

The cause of MS is unknown. It's considered an immune mediated disease in which the body's immune system attacks its own tissues. Myelin can be compared to the insulation coating on electrical wires. Learn more at: www.wegetmstoo.org

DID YOU KNOW?

- An estimated **226 Black people and 238 white people of every 100,000 have MS**, according to a recent study in Southern California funded in part by the National MS Society. In this community and in general, women are 3 times more likely to get MS than men.
- Research has demonstrated that MS occurs in most ethnic groups, including **African-Americans**, Asians and Hispanics/Latinos. Susceptibility rates vary among these groups, with recent findings suggesting that **African-American women have a higher than previously reported risk of developing MS.**
- There is no cure for MS. However, there are treatments to help speed the recovery from attacks, modify the course of the disease and manage symptoms.
- Signs and symptoms of MS vary widely between patients and depend on the location and severity of nerve fiber damage in the central nervous system.
- Some people with severe MS may lose the ability to walk independently. Other individuals may experience long periods of remission without any new symptoms depending on the type of MS they have.
- MS signs and symptoms may differ greatly from person to person and over the course of the disease depending on the location of affected nerve fibers.
- It isn't clear why MS develops in some people and not others. A combination of genetics and environmental factors appears to be responsible.
- *"MS has long been believed to be a disease of white people, but the prevalence of MS in Black people has been understudied and therefore underrecognized. The findings of our study and other recent studies indicate that MS has affected Black and white adults at similar rates for decades."*
- The average age of patients with prevalent MS was 51.7 years (SD 13.1 years), and 76.8% were women. **The female preponderance was more pronounced among Black patients (81.2%)**
- MS prevalence varies by race and ethnicity, being similarly high in White and Black and significantly lower in Hispanic and Asian persons in Southern California. Taken together with previous studies, these **findings indicate that the burden of MS in the US Black community has long been underrecognized.**

COMMON SYMPTOMS INCLUDE:

- Numbness or weakness in one or more limbs that typically occurs on one side of your body at a time.
- Tingling
- Electric-shock sensations that occur with certain neck movements, especially bending the neck forward (Lhermitte sign)
- Lack of coordination
- Unsteady gait or inability to walk
- Partial or complete loss of vision, usually in one eye at a time, often with pain during eye movement
- Prolonged double vision
- Blurry vision
- Vertigo
- Problems with sexual, bowel and bladder function
- Fatigue
- Slurred speech
- Cognitive problems
- Mood disturbances

HOW CAN THE BLACK CHURCH LEARN MORE ABOUT MS AND BETTER SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH MS?

- **Encourage members who experience one or more of the identified symptoms to be tested for MS.**
- Share information about MS and how it affects Black people via social media platforms
- Participate in MS events.
- Encourage members to wear orange or an orange MS ribbon to help strike up conversation about MS.
- Recruit advocates for MS who will:
 - (a) Contact local political representatives and ask them for support,
 - (b) Become spokespersons for local newspapers, radio and television station.
- Identify volunteers to help those with the condition.
- Become an MS Ambassadors at your church.
- Direct people to local MS support groups.
- Publish trusted websites so that members can learn all they can about MS
- Offer assistance to all of those who identify as having MS.
- Encourage members to spread the word.
- Distribute MS material from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society to members and the surrounding community
- Sponsor, host and volunteer for MS events and fundraisers.
- Donate to research to help find a cure.

But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,' declares the LORD. Jeremiah 30:17 (NIV)

RESOURCES

<https://www.nationalmssociety.org>

<https://www.medpagetoday.com>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org>

<https://multiplesclerosisnewstoday.com>

<https://mymssa.org>

<https://n.neurology.org>

<https://www.aan.com>

<https://multiplesclerosisnewstoday.com>

<https://wegetmstoo.org>

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