

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“Covid-19 Vaccination Skeptics”

Vaccination campaigns will face an uphill battle with some skeptics. According to the authors of one preliminary study, which surveyed a demographically representative sample population of 493 US adults, about one-quarter of adult Americans (23%) said they'll refuse to get a COVID-19 vaccination when one becomes available. Nearly one-fifth (19%) of respondents characterized themselves as being skeptical of vaccines. Of these, 62% said that they would not get the COVID-19 vaccine. About one-sixth (16%) of all respondents specifically self-identified as anti-vaxxers. Although most people said they do plan to get the vaccine (when available), the number of those who said they will not get it may be high enough to threaten the nation's collective immunity. People who hold anti-vaccine beliefs may jeopardize the effectiveness of a COVID-19 vaccine once it is available, due to issues of noncompliance. But these results did not really surprise the investigators. Although the investigators expected such a response, what surprised them was the number of people who said they would reject COVID-19 vaccination even though they are not vaccine skeptics. If someone is already biased against vaccines, the medical establishment, etc., then they will keep these biases, and be skeptical of medical expertise or other established experts. Surprisingly, 15% of people who are at least somewhat supportive of vaccines said that they would not get the COVID-19 vaccine. Moreover, 19% of people who did *not* identify as anti-vaxxers said they would not get vaccinated. Prominent anti-vaccine websites have already begun circulating misinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine—such as the idea that a vaccine has existed for years and has been kept from public consumption. Recent research suggests that anti-vaccine views are tied to deeply held psychological and moral aversions to inoculation, implying that attitudes may be difficult to change. According to early estimates from US health experts, at least 70% of the population may need to develop immunity to the COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2 virus), either by exposure to it or through vaccination, to achieve herd protection. You might have seen or have heard about a widely circulated trailer for a documentary called *Plandemic*, which authorities say has been discredited. There is an abundance of YouTube videos and stories of dubious origin making all sorts of allegations about Fauci, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and even the so-called New World Order. Find sources with opposing views to balance the story and then decide for yourself.

In the America that I love, when the dust has settled, a COVID-19 vaccine is likely coming and please communicate with your physician freely. It may help save lives, but many skeptics will remain. The decision to take or refuse the vaccine rests entirely on your shoulders. Choose wisely. Do you follow the herd, or walk alone?

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