
What Do People Think About Vaccination?



As the number of COVID-19 vaccinations has now overtaken the number of cases reported since the start of the pandemic, the public perceptions still vary greatly across the world.

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In a recent study published in The Lancet Public Health, Schwarzinger and colleagues (2021) share the results of an online survey experiment conducted in France in July 2020.

The researchers surveyed around 2,000 people with the aim to identify the level of vaccine hesitancy depending on parameters such as the effects of vaccine characteristics, information on herd immunity, and general practitioner recommendation. The findings showed that 28.8% preferred not to be inoculated independent of other parameters (outright vaccine refusal). This choice was found to be associated with female gender, lower educational level, a history of poor compliance with vaccination recommendations, etc. The respondents were most hesitant about vaccines manufactured in China with 50% efficacy and higher risk of side effects, and least hesitant about those manufactured in the EU with 90% efficacy and lower risk of side effects.

In another survey about people's attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines conducted in June last year (Lazarus et al. 2020), only 59% respondents from France stated that if there was a COVID-19 vaccine that was proven to be safe and effective, they would take it. Mostly negative attitudes were also registered in Poland, Sweden, Germany and Spain. Overall, among 13,426 people surveyed, 71.5% said they would be very or somewhat likely to get inoculated. Notably, the level of acceptance differed from almost 90% in China to less than 55% in Russia.

More recent surveys show that the share of those who see vaccination positively increased after the vaccines had been authorised for emergency use. For example, according to the data from KFF (Hamel et al. 2020), 63% of the U.S. public was going to (definitely or probably) get a vaccine in September, and by December this number increased to 71%. At the same time, the share of those who remain vaccine hesitant has not changed (27%).

A Pew Research Center survey (Funk and Tyson 2020) conducted in November, showed similar trend, with 60% of Americans reporting they were willing to be vaccinated, compared to 51% in September. However, the share of those who were definitely or probably not getting a jab stood at 39%, and 21% reported no intent to get vaccinated even if they got more information.

Not in all countries the share of those taking vaccination positively is growing. Research from Ipsos (2020a) conducted in partnership with the World Economic Forum in 15 countries registered a 4 p.p. decline in those who were willing to be inoculated: from 77% in August to 73% in October 2020. Specifically, the drop was observed in 10 of 15 countries, most of all in China (down 12 points), Australia (down 9), Spain (down 8) and Brazil (down 7). In turn, the December survey (Ipsos 2020b) that took place after the first COVID-19 vaccinations in the U.S. and the U.K., recorded an uptick in vaccination intent in both countries (plus 9 points and 5 points, respectively). In many of the other countries the trend is reversed, most of all in South Africa (-15 points), France (-14), Japan (-9), and South Korea (-8).

The most often cited concerns among those refusing the vaccination, according to Ipsos, are, potential side effects; doubts about vaccine effectiveness; not perceiving COVID-19-related risks as high; and opposition to vaccines in general. Hamel et al. (2020) also cite lack of trust in the government to ensure the vaccines' safety and effectiveness, concerns that the vaccine is too new, and concerns over the role of politics in the development process.

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