

A Growing Number of Doctors Show Skepticism of COVID Vaccines, Not Safe or Effective



Given the high levels of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy across the country, public health officials and the mainstream media have devoted a significant amount of time and energy trying to identify and promote strategies to convince people to get vaccinated.

Various [strategies used](#) include reducing the presence and endorsement of “conspiracy theories on social media,” public health promotion campaigns and depoliticizing COVID vaccines.

The most prominent strategy to get the public to accept a pro-vaccine message has been to have “trusted messengers,” including primary care physicians, promote COVID vaccines to their patients.

Prior research supported the idea that a physician’s

recommendation to vaccinate was amongst the most effective strategies for increasing vaccine uptake...until now.

According to a new survey [published](#) in the April issue of Vaccine, more than 10% of primary care physicians do not agree COVID vaccines are safe, 9.3% do not believe vaccines are effective and 8.3% do not believe vaccines are important.

A group of researchers at the Texas A&M School of Public Health asked 625 primary care physicians whether they strongly agreed, somewhat agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed with the following three statements:

- The COVID vaccines are safe.
- The COVID vaccines are effective.
- The COVID vaccines are important.

Here are their findings:

- 10.1% did not agree the vaccines were safe.
- 9.3% did not agree the vaccines were effective.
- 8.3% did not agree the vaccines were important.
- 5.2% were unvaccinated at the end of the survey in May 2021.

Researchers found the levels of vaccine hesitancy among physicians may be higher than expected and a [troubling proportion](#) of primary care physicians lack high levels of vaccine confidence.

“These physicians may not be well-positioned to actively promote COVID-19 vaccination even as political and media narratives push physicians to lead this effort,” the researchers concluded.

Dr. Timothy Callaghan, lead author of the survey [told](#) MedPage Today he and his colleagues were surprised that almost 1 in 10 surveyed physicians did not believe vaccines were safe or

effective.

However, only 1 in 20 of those surveyed remained unvaccinated [suggesting](#) some vaccine-hesitant doctors complied due to the healthcare mandates, or were vaccinated at some point and subsequently changed their minds based on personal experience of themselves or their patients.

Callaghan said confidence in COVID vaccines among physicians (89.9%) was higher than among the general public (89.8%), but he failed to mention the discrepancy was a mere .1%.

Callaghan also failed to mention there was a nearly equal or greater percentage of doctors who strongly disagreed COVID vaccines were safe (4.8%) and effective (6.7%) compared to the general public (4.9% and 2.1%).

When it came to answering the question, “Are vaccines important?” doctors strongly disagreed more than twice as often as the public (5.8% versus 2.3%).

Researchers found only 67.4% of doctors strongly agreed COVID vaccines are safe, 75% strongly agreed they are effective and 76% strongly agreed they’re important.

“While it is helpful, albeit troubling, to realize that a non-trivial proportion of primary care physicians lack confidence in vaccines like the general public, investigating what factors predict beliefs in vaccine safety, effectiveness, and importance can help us better understand why many physicians lack vaccine confidence,” the researchers [wrote](#).

According to Callaghan:

“Most physicians are well-positioned to serve as our leading vaccine promoters. With that said, 10% is a pretty big proportion to be hesitant. It suggests, for that 10%, we need to do some work in terms of education and potentially, intervention, to increase the level of confidence in that

population of physicians so that we're not at 90% in favor of promoting vaccination, but that it's closer to 100%."

Physicians were also asked about their age, income, race, political views (ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative), location, religious views and whether they previously had COVID in an effort to pinpoint predictors of vaccine hesitancy.

There were only two significant negative predictors that appeared to influence whether a physician would trust the vaccines' safety and efficacy: if a physician was a conservative and whether he/she had previously had COVID – which we know in the vast majority of cases is very mild.

"Conservatives (in the public) with vaccine hesitancy, served by physicians who share their political views, may therefore miss out on opportunities to be presented with information about the benefits of vaccination; especially in rural areas where both hesitancy and self-identification with right-leaning political views are particularly high," Callaghan said.

Political affiliation aside, the actual driver of opinions or "the science" is determined by the media.

Callaghan told Medpage:

"Given the clouded information environment that surrounded COVID-19 in particular, and increasingly, vaccines in general, it remains possible that [physicians] are just relying on what they're hearing in the news and the misinformation that's out there, as opposed to best scientific evidence."

"This statement should alarm the public," [wrote](#) Dr. Madhava Setty, author and board-certified anesthesiologist in an article on the survey. "Are physicians abdicating their role

as medical authorities by allowing the media to be the arbiters of truth with regard to vaccinology? Callaghan's survey results suggest that they are."

While political affiliation does influence one's beliefs, Callaghan blamed the lack of training physicians receive in medical school on vaccines as an underlying reason why some do not have confidence in an experimental product that has [reportedly harmed](#) over a [million people in the U.S. alone](#).

"There's not that much training on vaccines and vaccinology ... in medical school," he said. "Most medical students aren't exposed to in-depth discussions of virology to have those strong opinions."

Although it's true medical students receive almost no training in vaccinology, most physicians should not be expected to have the right opinion about vaccines if they haven't received training on the subject, including those who say they support COVID vaccines.

Setty believes its the minority of vaccine-hesitant doctors who have a better grasp of the issue.

Callaghan, who is an [assistant professor](#) at Texas A&M's School of Public Health, does not have a graduate degree in virology, epidemiology, biology or even public health. His doctorate is in political science.

Setty wrote:

"Perhaps this explains his superficial understanding of medical education. Young doctors do not leave medical school strongly believing that vaccines are not safe or effective.

"The fact that 4.8% of surveyed physicians strongly believe COVID vaccines are not safe and 6.7% strongly believe they are not effective suggests that they have changed their minds based on personal experience or their own exploration of the

topic.

“Arriving at an accurate understanding of COVID vaccine safety and efficacy requires, at the very least, a meticulous dissection of the vaccine trial data and methodology, emerging observational data from this country and around the world and analysis of reported vaccine adverse events.”

The survey was conducted nearly 11 months ago before we saw an alarming number of [adverse events](#), the CDC change its definition of “vaccines,” the Biden administration adopt never-ending boosters because the first 1, 2 and 3 doses didn’t work, the FDA’s lack of transparency about adverse events, U.S. health agencies [bypass their vaccine advisors](#) and even milder strains emerge

If the survey were completed today we would likely see even greater number of physicians adopting a position of skepticism.