

Special Report: COVID-19 Vaccine

A Vaccine Gets Approved, but Challenges Persist

On December 11, the FDA approved the emergency use of Pfizer/BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, beginning the vaccination of healthcare personnel and residents of long-term care facilities in the U.S. The general public is expected to start receiving the vaccine by the second half of 2021. Despite this impressive achievement, a significant challenge remains--overcoming vaccine hesitancy. **Just this week, ML:Next research found that only 55% of Americans say they are likely to get vaccinated.** Remarkably, this figure has remained the same since September, despite the positive assessments of the vaccine's safety and efficacy.

The absence of a compelling and cohesive educational campaign about the vaccine has left Americans with doubts. **The top concerns cited are worries about shortcuts taken to fast-track approval (33%), wanting to wait until more people have been vaccinated (32%), finding the vaccine too political (27%), and fears of side effects (23%).**

While vaccine hesitancy isn't a new issue, it complicates the already difficult task of ensuring Americans get necessary, life saving medicines. Uptake of the common flu vaccine, for example, is far from universal, with only 52% of Americans age 18 or older receiving it last season, per the CDC. Herd immunity, which indirectly protects from COVID-19 by suppressing community spread, requires coverage of 75-85%, according to Dr. Anthony Fauci. Anything short results in a persistent virus, leaving many Americans susceptible, especially those with underlying health conditions.

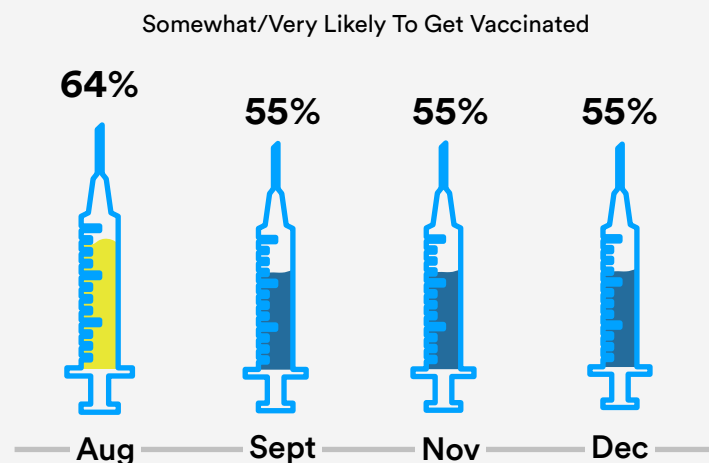
Organizations in the health and pharmaceutical space have a critical role to play in shaping the conversation. ML:Next found that sixty percent of respondents trust government health organizations, such as the NIH, to have their best interests in mind. **Private health organizations are an important piece of the puzzle as well--health insurance and pharmaceutical companies are trusted by 47% and 46% of Americans, respectively.**

The need for a clear and convincing message is made even more pressing given the movement to undermine public trust in the vaccine. Anti-vaccination groups have taken to social media to actively dissuade undecided Americans from getting vaccinated. There is good news, however. Concepts rooted in behavioral economics have been proven as an effective defense. These tactics should be employed to ensure as many Americans as possible are nudged to act. After all, our well-being and health as a nation may be at risk.

- Leverage trusted messengers:** The recommendation of a healthcare provider has a significant impact on people's intention to get the COVID-19 vaccine (Head, Katharine J. et al., 2020). Vaccination messages should come directly from trusted clinicians, making people more likely to take action.
- Frame the message:** How a choice is framed has a significant impact on decision-making, driven, in part, by loss aversion—the human tendency to focus more on the fear of loss than the possibility of gains (Chen & Stevens, 2016). Organizations with a role in marketing the vaccine should highlight what someone could lose by refusing vaccination rather than just focusing on the benefits of vaccination.
- Appeal to the desire to conform:** Humans have a deep-rooted need for belonging and fear of alienation (Thaler, Sunstein, 2008), often referred to as the “herd” or “mob” mentality. Vaccine communications can activate this instinctive tendency, making consumers feel that, by getting vaccinated, they're part of a group movement to end the pandemic. And that, if they choose not to, they're essentially outsiders.
- Integrate principles of altruism:** Altruism can aid in driving vaccine adoption by shifting the focus away from oneself and toward the greater good (Shim, Eunha, et al., 2012). Vaccination messaging should highlight the role of the individual in bringing a larger community one step closer to ending the virus and its associated suffering.

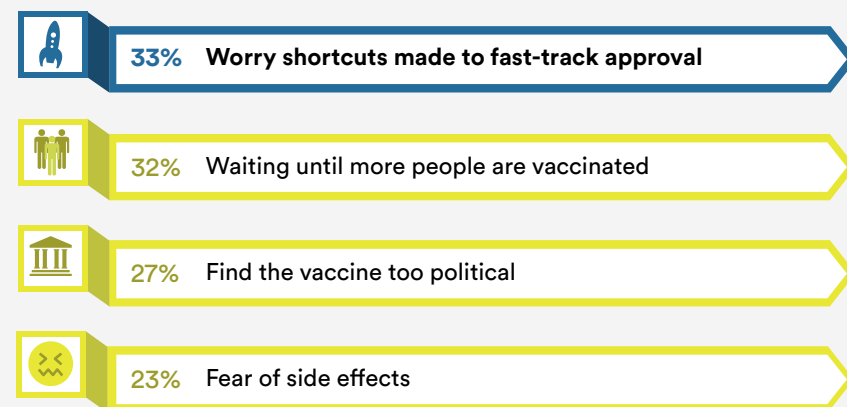
DECLINE IN WILLINGNESS TO GET VACCINATED

Q: “When a vaccine for COVID-19 becomes available to you, how likely or unlikely are you to get vaccinated?”



TOP REASONS BEHIND VACCINE HESITANCY

Q: “Why are you unlikely to get the COVID-19 vaccine?” *



* Among those who are somewhat or very unlikely to get vaccinated

TRUST IN HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY

Q: “How much do you trust that the following entities will put the interest of the general public before their own?”

