



Vaccine Attitudes Focus Groups: Women

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The [Utah Health and Economic Recovery Outreach \(HERO\) Project](#) began in May 2020 as a collaborative statewide testing and analysis project to understand the community-based spread of Covid-19. The goal of the HERO Project is to collect and utilize high-quality local data to help inform decision-makers seeking to guide Utah's citizens and economy through a safe return to normalcy. One year later, the project team is wrapping up its reporting on community testing, impacts of Covid-19 on Utah businesses and consumers, school testing, and vaccine uptake, impact, and implications. This report summarizes and synthesizes focus groups related to vaccines. More information on the HERO Project's past and current work can be found in the project's [previous reporting](#).

Eighteen women participated in two focus groups: one with 10 and one with eight women, each approximately an hour long. The focus groups took place in the late spring and early summer of 2021. Researchers from the University of Utah Department of Internal Medicine's Qualitative Research Core worked on behalf of the HERO Project team to identify key themes from the focus group discussions, which formed the foundation for this report.

Key Takeaways

Participants experienced a range of impacts on their lives from the pandemic and had equally broad thoughts on the Covid-19 vaccine.

Impacts of the Pandemic on Women

- For women who stopped doing as many activities and seeing other people, they felt the pandemic had less of an impact on their life.
- Women who worked from home felt more isolated, as did women who had relatives with chronic illnesses as that required them to self-isolate.
- Most participants said they are "pro-vaccine" or "believe" in vaccines, and those with kids have gotten them vaccinated.

Women's Vaccine Attitudes

- Participants felt receiving the vaccine led to their ability to be social and see loved ones again, a feeling of returning to "normal," improved mental health, not having to wear masks everywhere, and protection for themselves and others.
- Participants trusted sources such as the New York Times and Washington Post for vaccine information, as well as the CDC, peer-reviewed articles, and medical professionals.
- Participants viewed vaccine distribution as efficient and effective, save for issues in signing up for an appointment online.

Women's Experiences and Perceptions of the Vaccine

Participants were asked questions regarding how the pandemic impacted their lives and their perception of exposure, as well as their perceptions of the benefits of risks of the vaccine, their sources of vaccine information, and logistics of receiving the vaccine. Fourteen participants had received a vaccine, while four had not received either dose of the vaccine. The four unvaccinated participants did not have plans to receive a vaccine at the time of the focus group.

Women's Experience During the Pandemic

Participants in both focus groups experienced varying levels of impact in their daily lives from Covid-19. Those who either stayed secluded at home or stopped visiting/seeing others felt it heavily impacted their lives. Some felt a strong impact because they began working at home and started to feel isolated, and a few participants were especially isolative because they had a chronic illness or breast cancer and feared contracting the virus. Others, whose primary changes involved doing fewer activities, did not feel as though the pandemic changed their lives very much, and they continued as usual in many ways.

"I don't feel that COVID's impacted my life by much. I still had to go to work, and I was not that afraid of it. I mean, we're surrounded by viruses, bacteria, fungus, I mean, mold. I mean, it's everywhere. So I wasn't overly concerned. Just normal precautions[...]The main impact was not going places because the places are closed. I mean, if they were open, I might have chosen to go."

Participants also expressed a range of perceptions of risk of exposure. Some felt contracting Covid-19 was inevitable due to the daily exposure of others living in their homes or the chance of contracting the virus anytime they left their house. Because of this, one participant decided not to limit time spent with her children and grandchildren.

"I'm generally healthy. I'm 66. I'm generally healthy, have been most all of my life. So at this age, I pretty much feel like what's going to happen is going to happen and I'm okay with that. I wouldn't want to die a horrible death, but how do I know if it was going to be my time to go and if it was going to be by COVID? I don't know. I just know that I don't want to spend my time stressed out over what might could be, that might not happen, and then basically waste a whole year worrying about something, not seeing my children, not enjoying my grandchildren. And if I were to die, then that's a whole year of lost memories. Memories are what I take with me."

Attitudes on the Benefits and Risks of Getting the Vaccine

Most of the participants said they were either "pro-vaccine" or "believed" in vaccines, and their attitudes frequently changed over time depending on who they talked to and what they learned from these conversations. Many participants said they had received vaccines in the past, and those with kids have gotten them vaccinated.

"I believe in the safety and efficacy...of vaccines. I think that the diseases they protect against are worse than the risk of any side effects from the vaccine. So I think they're worthwhile."

Many of the participants felt the benefits of receiving the vaccine outweighed the risks. Many participants felt being vaccinated and knowing others are vaccinated helped with their anxiety and feelings of safety. They expressed relief and gratitude for the benefits of vaccination, including being able to return to “normal” and no longer having to wear a mask.

“I didn’t want to be a host and I didn’t want to be a vector, so I got the vaccine.”

“It’s just really nice to get-- I feel like I can get back out. I’m not scared. I mean, I wasn’t that scared before, but I feel safer being out and about now and seeing other people. It’s just been so nice.”

When asked about the risks of receiving the vaccine, participants discussed the short-term risks and side effects, such as fatigue, fever, and body aches. One participant was worried about the short-term risks because the thought of being sick for one day as the parent to three small children was a “big deal.” Another participant did not want to support the for-profit pharmaceutical industry by receiving a vaccine but did choose to get vaccinated anyway. The four unvaccinated participants were waiting for more information on long-term risks and side effects, and one wanted to learn about the right dosage for someone who had previously contracted Covid-19.

“Well, I don’t do the flu shot. I don’t do that. And I’m not necessarily against vaccines. I just don’t know the long-term effects of this one. So I’m waiting it out. And like I said, we’ve continued to go to work this whole time. We’ve been cautious, always wear a mask, but none of our family has been sick at all.”

“That’s another thing for me, I feel like I’ve already had the disease and I have natural immunity. I feel the vaccine should go to other people who haven’t had it and need that protection. Maybe where we are, we have plenty of vaccines, then I don’t have to worry about that. But I just feel like I’m not in desperate need of it where somebody who hasn’t had COVID should have that opportunity.”

Sources of Vaccine Information

Participants utilized a variety of sources to get information on the vaccine, from radio spots to emails from their doctors and pamphlets. Trusted sources of information were the New York Times and Washington Post, the CDC, peer-reviewed articles, and physicians and doctors. Multiple participants also said they trust the leaders of the LDS church.

“For me, it’s the CDC probably would just be the main source. I feel like they disseminate the information, but when I’m wanting to know things specifically about vaccines or when I did my research about vaccine safety and efficacy, just making sure I’m checking peer-reviewed medical articles and journals and things to find the data.”

Untrusted sources of information included certain media, resources with credibility, and for some, President Trump. Some participants were disappointed with the politicization of vaccines. Another participant discussed how difficult it has been to trust Dr. Fauci because he “keeps changing his mind back and forth and back and forth.”

“I feel like the news on TV is mostly pro-vaccination. But if you look at any Facebook post, that’s where you get the negative—or the against vaccination.”

Conversations with friends and family members were split, some being pro-vaccine and some anti-vaccine. One vaccinated participant has a close friend who will not get the vaccine, and she said they would not talk about the vaccine or getting vaccinated with each other.

Logistics of Receiving the Vaccine

Most of the participants said the vaccine had been distributed in Utah very well. The only issues discussed were with signing up and using the online system to make appointments. Additionally, one participant noted that Walgreens made it difficult to cancel or change their vaccine appointment. A pharmacist did not want to vaccinate one participant who was nursing at the time. She returned later and received the vaccine from another pharmacist.

"I think we've been more efficient here than in other parts of the country where some of my children live."

Other Considerations

Among the group's concluding comments, one of the unvaccinated participants—who had contracted Covid-19 previously—discussed the complexities within the choice to get vaccinated for Covid-19. Another participant wanted to thank the people involved with developing and distributing the vaccine.

"[U]ltimately, if you decide not to get the vaccine and then you get COVID and you have a rough time of it, I mean, you have a right to have made that choice, and then you have the consequence of your choice, so. I don't know[...]I mean, part of your decision-making should be, as was said before, 'Well, what's my obligation to society in general?' and weigh that against, 'What are my personal rights, though?'"

"I think people are so burned out and traumatized from this whole experience with COVID that, at least, I'm in magical thinking now, that it's over, life is going to return to normal. That may or may not be the case with variants, and it's unknown how long the results of the vaccine keep you safe. I think it's all unknown. We're in uncharted territory. But I don't usually do magical thinking, but I am now because I just can't cope with it anymore. It's so traumatic."

"The risks of dying from COVID pretty greatly outweighed any risks from the vaccine, at least I think. And, yes, it was created quickly, but the consequences of not being vaccinated are-- we say were, now, because it seems to be burning itself out. But the consequences were so dire that, in a risk-benefit analysis, it was an easy choice to make."

Next Steps

In the coming weeks, the HERO Project will publish additional summaries of focus groups held with nurses, long-term care facility staff, people from rural areas, and multiple demographic groups. These reports will help to inform the state's reflection, evaluation, and adaptation of their pandemic response with regard to public perception, concerns, and experiences receiving the Covid-19 vaccine.

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