



Vaccine Attitudes Focus Groups: Asian Americans

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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](#).

Fourteen Asian Americans participated in two focus groups, each approximately an hour long and including six to eight participants. 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

Asian Americans had a variety of experiences during the pandemic and equally broad thoughts on the Covid-19 vaccine.

Asian American Experience

- The pandemic greatly impacted the participants, interrupting their professional and academic endeavors, which increased feelings of isolation and negatively impacted mental health.
- The perceived risk of contracting the virus varied depending on participants' ability to stay home, but even those that felt more at-risk indicated they were healthy and therefore not overly concerned if they did contract the virus.

Vaccine Attitudes

- Participants were generally positive about the vaccine after overcoming some initial concerns about side effects and effectiveness, as they understand there to be many societal and personal benefits to being vaccinated.
- Medical professionals and the CDC were commonly referred to as trusted sources of information. Conversations with family and friends, who were generally positive about the vaccine, also acted as a source of information.
- Participants agreed that the State of Utah did a great job with the vaccine rollout, indicating that it was easy and convenient to access the vaccine.

Asian American Experiences and Perceptions of the Vaccine

Asian Americans were asked questions regarding their experience during the pandemic, as well as their perceptions of the benefits of risks of the vaccine, their sources of vaccine information, and logistics of receiving the vaccine. Twelve participants had received at least one dose of the vaccine, while two had received neither dose.

Asian American Experience During the Pandemic

The majority of Asian American participants described being significantly impacted by the pandemic. A couple of participants experienced mental health issues prompted by job loss, while others described the stress of working from home. Many participants mentioned the difficulty of virtual interactions and isolation from family and friends.

“So I’m not able to go to work, right, because we are working remotely. So that way, you are not able to interact with your colleagues. And sometimes it’s okay, but every time to interact over the phone is difficult sometimes. So yeah, another thing is we can’t go with—now we are going out but if you take last year, we were not able to go out with kids or we can’t make kids birthdays or we can’t socialize, right. So it was like an—as the adult, we can control ourself for we know the pain or we can at least manage. But I have two small kids, so for them it was like a pain to just stay at the house. No school, no outside, no parks, especially April, May, June, July, right, when we can’t go out.”

Among the group, there were mixed perceptions of risk. Some participants felt they were at low risk because of their ability to stay home. Others expressed they were likely at higher risk, but unconcerned with contracting the virus as they were healthy. One participant described the stress of protecting an immunocompromised family member.

“Well, I feel like I’m healthy, as well as my husband. But everything that we did impacted our daughter, as we could be carriers to come home. So it was a little bit scary every day, that we had to protect ourselves really well, with what we did, to protect her.”

Attitudes on the Benefits and Risks of Getting the Vaccine

When asked about the benefits of the vaccine, participants described personal and societal benefits. Many indicated it was important to protect family and children through herd immunity, and one participant trying to conceive hoped to pass antibodies on to her child. Others highlighted the opportunities to travel and the freedom from wearing masks that the vaccine allowed.

“Peace of mind that my family is protected and my multi-generational family as we’ve mentioned before, but my parents who are in the 70-plus range and myself and then minor children, that I think that having everyone vaccinated helps everyone, and having herd immunity just helps our society in general.”

Few participants dwelled on the potential risks of the vaccine. Some participants expressed initial hesitation around the vaccine’s side effects or effectiveness, but ultimately decided the benefits outweighed the costs.

“I did feel a little bit nervous when there was some cases that reported blood clotting when some people had taken the vaccine. But even though it made me a little bit nervous, I still believe it was just a more rare case and that still getting the vaccine overall would be safer for me.”

Sources of Vaccine Information

Participants said little about the type of information they received about the vaccine, indicating that gathering information was less critical since receiving the vaccine. The conversation focused instead on trusted sources for information. Many cited the CDC as a credible source, although the NIH, research articles, media, doctors, and state and local governments were also mentioned.

"I'd say the only ones that I trust are peer-reviewed articles or articles put out by the CDC and things like that. Something that people just randomly post on their Instagram and stuff, I don't really read just because I don't think it's really credible. So I only trust more credible sources."

Asian American participants also reported having conversations with family, friends, and others about the vaccine. Many of these conversations were positive, with individuals expressing a desire to get the vaccine. A few participants emphasized that these conversations allowed them to learn more about the vaccine and speak openly about their concerns.

Five participants also spoke to their doctors about the vaccine, with mixed results. While all the consulted medical professionals encouraged participants to get the vaccine, specific cases around immunocompromised individuals or pregnant women tended to be more informative than general conversations with a family doctor.

"[T]he topic of conversation was whether the vaccine would help protect my daughter, who is immunocompromised, to her doctor. Her doctor said, 'It's not been tested. We don't know, but there shouldn't be any hesitancy in her getting it.' After she got her two shots, a couple of months down the road, he informed her that, 'We don't even know if this vaccination is going to protect you. You might need to be revaccinated in a few months.' And I think it just really was a shock for her to hear that, like also, 'You mean, I'm not protected now?' And also, 'What? I have to get another shot again?' So there's so much we don't know and I tried to explain that to her. But that's a really different take on her, thinking this COVID vaccination might protect her, but maybe not."

Logistics of Receiving the Vaccine

Participants felt the State of Utah did a great job at vaccine distribution, mentioning how easy and convenient it was to access the vaccine. One participant indicated that the rollout of the vaccine was much faster than expected, and others wondered if all states were as effective in the rollout as Utah.

"I'm thinking that--and I might be wrong about this, but that Utah's pretty good about getting it out to everyone as fast as they can. I was driving by Westminster about a month ago and there was a lady holding a sign saying COVID vaccinations now, free. And I thought, I wonder if any state is offering it that easily to everyone. It's been so simplified."

Other Considerations

Participants had little to add at the conclusion of the conversation. One participant wondered if booster shots would be necessary, and another thanked HERO for their testing facilities.

Next Steps

HERO Project will continue to publish reports summarizing focus groups held with Utahns of various communities and identities. 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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