



## Vaccine Attitudes Focus Groups: Hispanics

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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](#).

Thirteen Hispanic Utahns participated in two focus groups, each approximately an hour long and including six to seven 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

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

#### Hispanic Experience

- Hispanic participants were impacted in a variety of ways by the pandemic, describing unemployment, isolation, and death of family and friends.
- Likelihood of exposure depended on participants' individual situations, with greater interaction and the removal of mask mandates leading to greater feelings of risk. Some mentioned that following state guidelines also reduced risk.

#### Vaccine Attitudes

- Participants indicated lack of knowledge about long-term effects as the greatest risk of the vaccine and were hesitant initially. Ultimately, roughly half of the participants received the vaccine to protect family members and end the pandemic. Unvaccinated participants felt they didn't need it or that there wasn't enough information available.
- Access to the vaccine was easy for most participants, but it was acknowledged that there was a lack of information that created confusion and uncertainty for those who did not speak English and those who were uninsured.
- Trusted sources of information varied greatly. Some participants relied on the CDC and FDA, while others did not trust the government. Other sources included media, doctors, family in the medical field, and online research. Social media was the least trusted source.

## Hispanic Experiences and Perceptions of the Vaccine

Hispanic participants 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. Seven participants had received both doses of their vaccine, while six had received neither dose.

### Hispanic Experience During the Pandemic

Covid-19 affected Hispanic participants in a variety of ways. A few participants felt less affected, as they were able to stay at home. Others described unemployment, loss of family and friends due to Covid-19, and isolation from others. One participant who gave birth during the pandemic felt that they did not have access to proper medical care.

*"So my husband was laid off at the beginning of Covid in March 2020, and two weeks later, I gave birth. So my birthing experience was very interesting. And then just spending postpartum in a pandemic, I feel like I didn't have proper access to medical care and that my infant didn't have proper access to medical care just because it was almost put in perspective it's better to stay home than to go into a doctor's office and come in contact with people. We spent a year unemployed. I was finishing up university at Harvard, which we were going to move to Boston for, but ended up staying in Salt Lake and continuing that remote. So I guess it completely shifted us, course-wise, so a lot of impact."*

The likelihood of exposure among Hispanic participants also varied greatly. Participants working in the healthcare field or with children in daycare felt at higher risk. A few participants also felt more vulnerable when the mask-mandate ended, believing it happened too quickly. Participants that felt at lower risk described working from home, adhering to state guidelines, or receiving the vaccination.

*"I was also able to work from home maybe seven months out of the year last year. And we have adhered to all the guidelines and did a lot of things outdoors as a family and didn't really interact with any people outside. I would say maybe 10% chance that we could have gotten Covid by interacting out of the household. So it was pretty small chance to get it."*

### Attitudes on Getting the Vaccine

Roughly half of the participants had received the vaccine, doing so to protect family members and end the pandemic. For the six unvaccinated participants, five had no plans to get the vaccine. Two felt they were young and healthy and therefore did not need it; others would only get vaccinated if there was more research or required for employment.

*"At present, the only reason I would get a vaccine was because I had a job that required me to fly and the TSA or other powers that be decided you can't fly without one, so kind of the old gun to my head routine."*

Many Hispanic participants felt initially hesitant to receive the vaccine, citing misinformation and potential long-term effects. While some ultimately decided to get vaccinated, one hesitant participant became firmly against the vaccine after a friend passed away shortly after becoming vaccinated.

*"I was hesitant at first mainly because of misinformation from my family. But I think I was more just willing to get it after it was being offered to us but also because I interact with a lot of people that are in the medical field. And so I was able to get some information from them too. So I think that I was more willing to get it after that."*

*"I was hesitant at first mostly because of this new technology, which how do you know the long-term effect of. But I see the pandemic worsening and the risk, and I became warmer to the idea of getting vaccinated when the opportunity was extended. Most definitely, the crisis and impact on populations got me to change my mind."*

Participants understood there to be a range of benefits from receiving the vaccine, including a return to normalcy, safety socializing, and decreased anxiety about getting sick.

*"I definitely feel much more comfortable around people and in social places. I also feel like I can get my life back, in a way, and go do my routine things, such as going to a gym, without much worry that I'm nearby people."*

When asked about the risks of receiving the vaccine, Hispanic participants shared worries about unknown long-term side effects, fertility risks, and exhaustion. However, many believed that the side effects of Covid-19 would be worse than the side effects from the vaccine.

*"I would just say that there is, obviously, and there have been vaccines like medications and other things of that sort that generated a long-term effect. Now, in this particular case, getting a normal life and being maybe even alive to be able to face potential long-term consequences is still better than the alternative, so. But yeah, definitely a potential risk for something that is unknown."*

## Sources of Vaccine Information

Few Hispanic participants talked about the information they had received about the vaccine. Two participants mentioned they had not looked deeply into the vaccine. One participant mentioned looking for information on booster shots, and another received information on Covid-19 variants through work.

*"Yeah, I guess I would add: if, I guess, I look at any news, it would be a timeline on if we have to get a booster shot or maybe how well they protect against the variants and stuff. So I guess that would be the kind of news that I'm watching related to the vaccine."*

Among the participants, there was variation in what each individual considered a trusted source. Some relied on the CDC and FDA, while others did not trust government organizations and officials like Dr. Fauci. Some watched the news or listened to the radio for information, and others put their trust in doctors or family members in the medical field. Others preferred to look for their own data. Many participants did not view social media as a trustworthy source.

*"When I talked to my sister, who is a doctor also, she discussed the options, saying what she thought was a safe vaccine because of the history of other vaccines that lab has produced. She said, "I trust this lab because--," that's how she just felt, so. Being my sister, I trust my sister, too, and what she says. I know she is true."*

Conversations with family about the vaccine were mixed, with some very positive about the vaccine while others were strongly against it.

## Logistics of Receiving the Vaccine

Overall, most participants felt the state of Utah did an excellent job at distributing the vaccine. Many found it easy to access the vaccine and mentioned the strong information campaign advertising the vaccine's availability. However, one participant felt that it was difficult to access initially, particularly for those who did not speak English or those without insurance.

*"I think we're definitely improving on how to reach out to different communities. I think that at the beginning, it was a little bit difficult. For example, I have family members who don't have health insurance who don't speak English very well, so they get their information from sources that sometimes aren't reliable. And I also think that they don't understand a lot of the English if it's only in English. Or I also have family members that are not literate in technology, so I had to set all of those appointments up for them in advance in order to get them vaccinated. But now that we have walk-ins and that it's, I guess, more available, that it's more clear to people that, like, 'Hey, you don't need to have health insurance to get the vaccine. You don't need to be a US citizen to get the vaccine.' I think that has definitely opened the doors up for a lot of people to be willing to get it."*

## Other Considerations

One Hispanic participant emphasized that the side effects one experiences is dependent on one's body, so everyone will react differently. In the same vein, another participant was concerned that the constant push to get the vaccine did not take into consideration people who are immunocompromised.

One participant also thought the pandemic proved we lived in a globalized world, emphasizing the importance of informed choices.

*"I think that this pandemic has proven that we live in a globalized world where our choices matter, and we should all make an effort to research and read and make an informed decision based on good information. And whatever that choice you make, it's important, and you should make it based on your conscience and your own data."*

## 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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