

COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy Among Health Care Providers

Adrienne Stevens, EdD, VP, Healio Strategic Solutions

Several vaccines to prevent the COVID-19 virus have recently received, or will soon receive, emergency use authorization and will be available for global distribution in the coming weeks and months. Just as immunologists have worked rapidly to develop and test the safety and efficacy of the vaccines, public health organizations have been working to disseminate preparedness guidelines and educational materials to health care providers (HCPs). The AMA and the CDC are expecting two phases of vaccine distribution; the first will be to a limited population of health care workers and individuals at high risk for the disease, followed by the widespread delivery of vaccines across the United States.^{1,2} HCPs will have a key role in immunization efforts, both in administering the vaccine and in educating their patients. Questions remain about vaccine storage requirements, the number of doses needed for maximum efficacy, as well as the long-term efficacy and the safety or side effect profiles of the vaccines in the pediatric population and in pregnant women.

How likely are you to get a **COVID-19 vaccine** when available?



1% would wait and only get vaccinated if potentially exposed.

In an effort to understand HCP viewpoints about the COVID-19 vaccine in this changing environment, Healio Strategic Solutions (HSS), created and disseminated an original survey to a large group of HCPs who are part of the Healio network. (Healio Strategic Solutions and Healio are Wyanoke Group Companies). These HCPs have opted in to receive notifications from HSS and are not incentivized in any way to take surveys. Personal identifiers are not included in the data analysis and results are presented in aggregate.

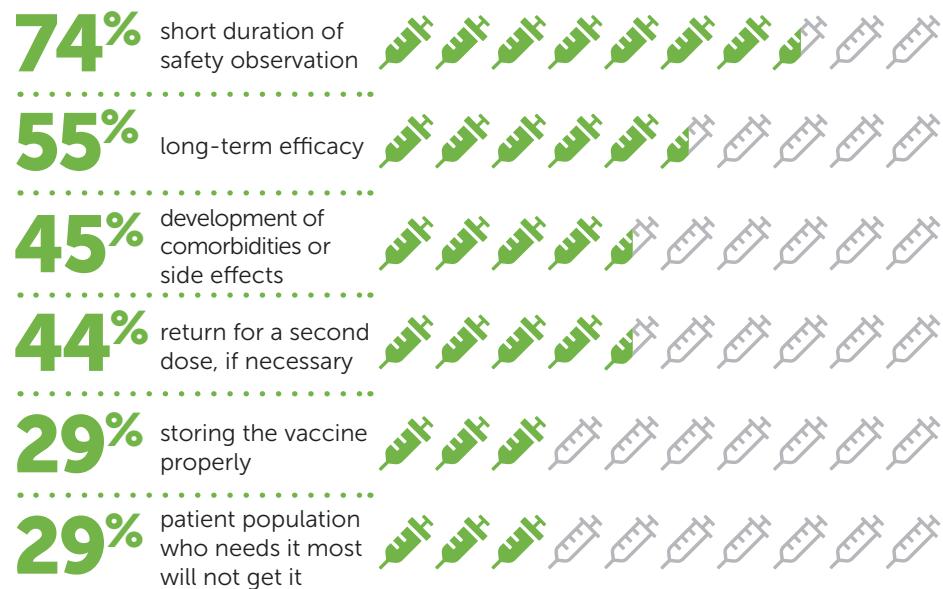
The survey was live for 2 weeks from the end of October to early November 2020 and generated 1,564 respondents (55% female) from many therapeutic categories. Respondents were primarily physicians (61%), nurse practitioners (25%) and physician assistants (11%) who practice in the United States. HCPs in community practice and community hospitals constituted 42% of respondents; 36% were in private practice, and 11% were in university teaching hospitals. HCPs from integrated disease networks, long-term care facilities, urgent care facilities and in pharmacies constituted a combined 11% of completers. Most practices were reported as not being in underserved communities.

Relative to the likelihood of getting vaccinated themselves, 54% reported they would get vaccinated as soon as possible, 39% would wait for a period and 6% would not get vaccinated. Responding to whether a

COVID-19 vaccine should be mandatory, most HCPs surveyed (52%) did not think a COVID-19 vaccine should be mandatory; 27% wanted it to be mandatory and 20% noted it should be mandatory only for HCPs, other emergency responders, and frontline workers who are likely to be exposed to people with COVID-19. Of high importance is concern about the short duration of safety observation (74%), long-term efficacy (55%), potential to contribute to the development of comorbidities or side effects (45%), getting patients to return for a second dose, if necessary (44%), and how to store the vaccine properly in their offices (29%), as well as concern that the patient population who needs it most will not get it (29%). Results also showed 84% were concerned about the potential for misinformation about the vaccine in their patient populations, and 83% were concerned about patient anxiety about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine. Furthermore, 24% anticipate patients worrying about insurance coverage for the vaccine.

What concerns do you have as a clinician about providing the COVID-19 vaccine?

Please select your top two choices.



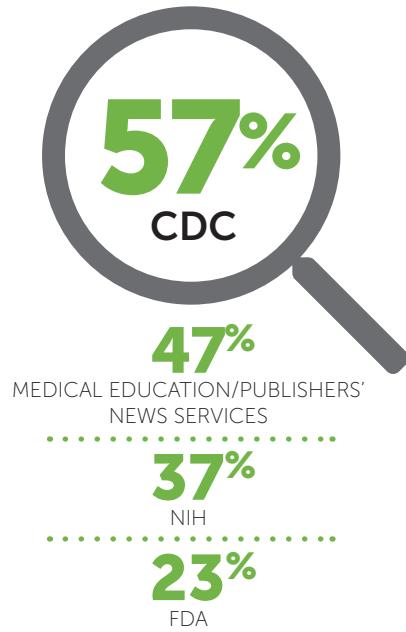
Half of the respondents stated they would recommend their patients get vaccinated as soon as possible, 26% reported they would recommend patients wait 6 months and see what results might yield in the general population, 13% would tell all their patients to get vaccinated regardless of their risk, and 12% would not recommend immunization if the patient is at low risk.

Communication and dissemination of safety information

HCPs in this survey noted several strategies that would positively impact their practices to make it easier to ensure their patients obtain the vaccine, including providing literature to patients in advance that addresses key facts and frequently asked questions (69%), the availability of drive-through testing and vaccination sites (68%), allowing pharmacists to give the vaccine

Where do **you look for reputable information** about the vaccine?

Please select your top two choices.



at major pharmacy chains (65%) and providing a state or national help line so patients can have their questions answered by a live operator before coming into their office (61%). The HCPs were also asked to choose their top two sources for reputable information about the vaccine, and the top results were the CDC (57%), medical education/publishers' news services (47%), NIH (37%) and the FDA (23%).

Global mistrust of biomedical research is real.³ Trust in health care is crucial, given the magnitude of infection rates at historic proportions in this pandemic. HCPs are charged with instilling faith in medicine to their patients. More than ever, it is vital that HCPs can access highly current and truthful information to assist them in understanding research, allaying their patients' concerns and correcting misinformation. HCPs are in a unique position to be transparent with their patients using reliable data from government sources developed in tandem with the scientific community. Campaigns that are being developed to immunize the unprecedented number of people who require the COVID-19 vaccination must provide a sound rationale for the research and development, and safety and efficacy of these agents.³ Effective strategies and dedicated educational resources are necessary to build confidence about the COVID-19 vaccine to both clinicians and patients. Reputable sites by established organizations, like Healio, play a significant role as trusted partners for clinicians.

References

1. Robeznieks A. What doctors can do now to be ready when COVID-19 vaccines arrive. American Medical Association. Published October 23, 2020. Accessed December 7, 2020. <https://www.ama-assn.org/delivering-care/public-health/what-doctors-can-do-now-be-ready-when-covid-19-vaccines-arrive>
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. COVID-19 vaccination program interim playbook for jurisdiction operations. Version 2.0. Published October 29, 2020. https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/downloads/COVID-19-Vaccination-Program-Interim_Playbook.pdf
3. Palamenghi L, Barello S, Boccia S, Graffigna G. Mistrust in biomedical research and vaccine hesitancy: the forefront challenge in the battle against COVID-19 in Italy. *Eur J Epidemiol.* 2020;35(8):785-788. doi:10.1007/s10654-020-00675-8. PMID: 32808095; PMCID: PMC7431109.