

March 16, 2021

To: American College Health Association

Re: COVID Collaborative survey results relating to the college community

College campuses aren't immune from vaccine hesitancy: Polling data from the COVID Collaborative show that the same attitudes that threaten to limit coronavirus vaccine uptake in the general public are prevalent among college students, faculty, staff and administrators.

The national, random-sample survey of 1,845 adults included 171 in the college community, including 111 students, with the rest identifying as faculty, staff (including contractors) and administrators. Sample sizes are adequate for analysis of the student and overall college community groups.

The results show that intended uptake is far from ideal. Sixty-nine percent of college community members overall, including 66 percent of students, say they either have gotten vaccinated, intend to do so or lean that way. This compares with 73 percent of all other adults.

The differences across these groups aren't statistically significant, given the sample sizes. Rather, the point is that uptake or intended uptake is no higher among people associated with institutions of higher education than among the public at large.

Further, among those who may get a vaccine, intention to "wait and see" before doing so is substantial – 55 percent among college community members overall, compared with 47 percent in the non-college-associated public. (Again, this is not a significant difference.)

The demographic distribution of the college community population is one factor. The median age of this group is 27, given that 55 percent are undergraduates. The median age of the non-college community population, by contrast, is 51.

Regardless, reasons for hesitancy on campuses include some of the same shortfalls in trust and norms that exist in public attitudes more broadly. Specifically:

- Members of the college community are no more likely than other Americans to trust that the coronavirus vaccines are safe and effective. The number at colleges who completely or mostly trust that the vaccines are safe is a tepid 60 percent; trust in effectiveness, 56 percent.

These are critical indicators; modeling among the general public shows that trust in the vaccines' safety and effectiveness is far and away the strongest independent predictor of intended uptake.

- The view that all or most of those who care about you want you to get vaccinated also is no higher in the college community. Fifty-nine percent of those in the college group express recognition of this subjective social norm, as do 62 percent of other adults. Bolstering this view is important; it's the second strongest predictor of intended uptake, albeit distantly from safety and effectiveness.

College community members also are no more likely than others to be likely to recommend vaccination to their own family and friends, 47 percent vs. 53 percent. An important line of messaging on campuses, as elsewhere, is to encourage individuals to communicate their desire for those they care about to get vaccinated.

- The moral norm associated with vaccine uptake likewise is no stronger in college communities than outside of them. Fifty-five percent in the college-associated population see getting vaccinated as a community responsibility, not just a personal choice – another suboptimal level, given that this, too, is an important predictor of intended uptake. (In the non-college population it's essentially the same, 56 percent.)

An additional factor is lower likelihood among students to express worry about catching the coronavirus – 45 percent of college students express this concern, compared with 55 percent of adults outside the college population, a marginally significant difference (i.e., at 90 percent confidence). Worry about infection is another predictor of vaccine uptake intention.

Lower worry among students is reflected in another result: College students are marginally more apt than others to say they don't know whether or not they're eligible to be vaccinated, 31 percent, vs. 20 percent in the non-college population, perhaps indicating disinterest.

Among other variables (not uptake predictors), college community members again are similar to the public at large in trust that the vaccines are being distributed fairly (four in 10 are highly confident in this) and in expectations of side effects (expressed by two-thirds). Additionally, trust in the safety of all vaccines generally is essentially identical in the college community overall (68 percent), among college students (69 percent) and in the non-college population (also 69 percent).

Lastly, it's notable that vaccine hesitancy is as high on college campuses as it is in the public at large despite demographic differences that include comparative shortfalls of Republicans and conservatives, two more vaccine-hesitant groups. Specifically:

- Republicans account for 14 percent of the college community population, compared with 28 percent of other adults. The shares of Democrats in these groups are similarly sized; instead, the college community has disproportionately more political independents.
- Conservatives make up 27 percent of the college population, compared with 37 percent of adults outside of the college community.

A table summarizing these results follows. The full survey materials are available via the SEAN COVID-19 [Survey Archive](#).

	All adults	College community	College students	Not college community
Vaccinated or uptake-inclined	72%	69	66	73
Vaccinated	21	14	13	22
If not vaccinated, uptake-inclined	65	64	61	65
DK if eligible	20	25	31	20
If may get vaccinated:				
ASAP	51	45	42*	52
Wait	48	55	58*	47
Trust/safe	60	60	58	60
Trust/effective	61	56	54	61
Trust safety of vaccines generally	69	68	69	69
Subj. social norm	62	59	56	62
Moral norm	55	55	53	56
Recommend to family/friends	53	47	46	53
Distributed fairly	41	42	39	41
Infection worry	55	48	45	55
Side effects likely	70	66	68	70
Republicans	26	14	16	28
Democrats	31	33	32	31
Independents	42	53	52	41
Liberals	28	36	30	27
Moderates	35	37	42	35
Conservatives	36	27	29	37

Highlights indicate statistically significant (including marginally significant) differences.

*small sample, n=85

These results are based the COVID Collaborative coronavirus vaccine uptake tracking survey conducted Feb. 26-March 8, 2021, among a random national sample of 1,845 adults. The study was produced for the [COVID Collaborative](#) by [Langer Research Associates](#), with sampling and data collection by Ipsos Public Affairs via its online, probability-based KnowledgePanel®, which provides internet access as needed to randomly recruited participants.

Members of the college community were identified using the following question:

17. Are you a student or employee at a college or university?

	No, not a college student or employee	NET	Student Yes, under-graduate	NET	Student Yes, grad-uate	NET	Employee Yes, staff or contractor	NET	Employee Yes, faculty	NET	Employee Yes, admin.	NET	Skip.
3/8/21	89%	7	5	2	2	2	2	1	*	1		1	

Results have a margin of sampling error of 9.1 percentage points for the sample of 171 college community members, 11.3 points for the 111 college students and 2.9 points for the non-college-community population, including design effects.