

Covid-19 Variants The Great Public Health Balancing Act And Public Health Citizenship

ASU's College of Health Solutions Health Talks speaker series

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Key issues related to Covid-19 messaging in this talk:

- **How is information about the vaccination, post vaccine behavior, and variants being received by the public?**
 - Importance of clear and compelling messaging after the vaccine to avoid new Covid-19 surges
- **The public health balancing act between vigilance, epidemic fear, and not wanting to be seen as overreaching when making recommendations**
 - Need to balance transparency and positive messaging
- **Health citizenship as the cornerstone of Public Health:** Covid-19 renders this transparent, once again

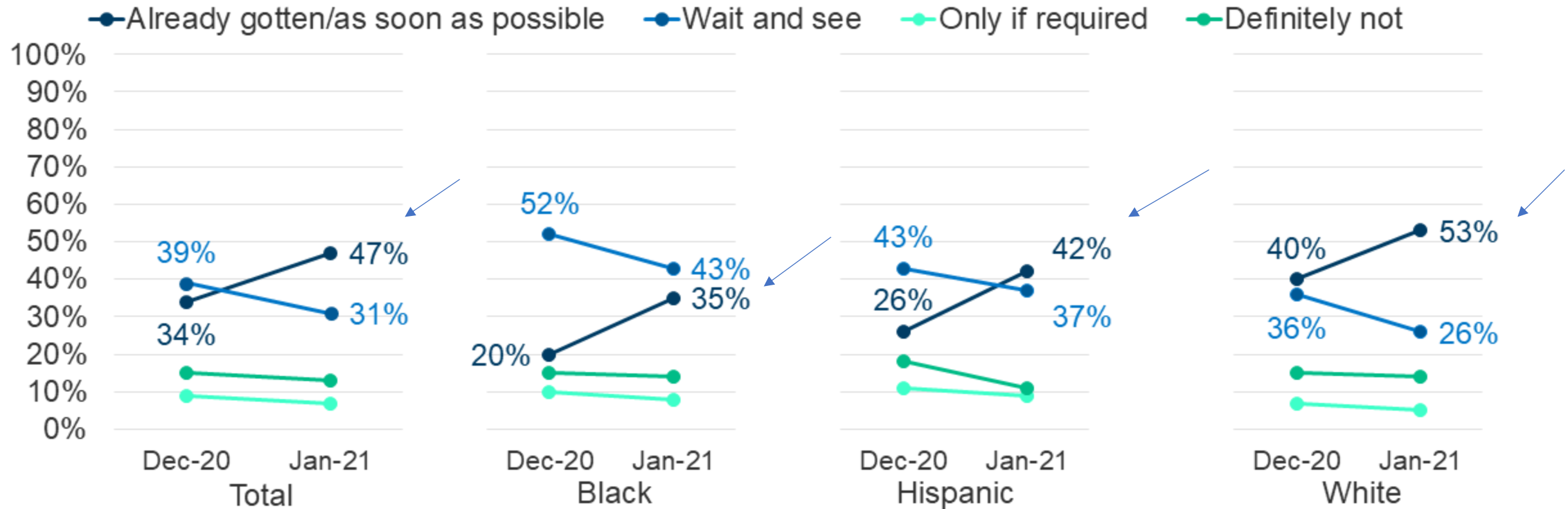
Covid-19 situational analysis: Positive side, we are now moving in the right direction

- Remarkably effective vaccines for preventing severe Covid-19
- Vastly improved vaccine roll out
 - 14.5 % of adult population fully vaccinated
- Numbers of cases and deaths due to Covid-19 dropping significantly
 - although still high
- Hospitals no longer swamped with critically ill Covid-19 patients
- CDC guidelines for reopening business and schools, and safe social interactions after vaccination
- Hope: an end appears to be on the horizon
- Number of vaccine hesitators dropping
 - although still substantial hesitation
 - > 30% of Republicans, minority groups, rural areas

Figure 2

Vaccine Enthusiasm Increased Across Racial/Ethnic Groups, But Black And Hispanic Adults Remain More Wary Than White Adults

Percent who say they will get a COVID-19 vaccine:

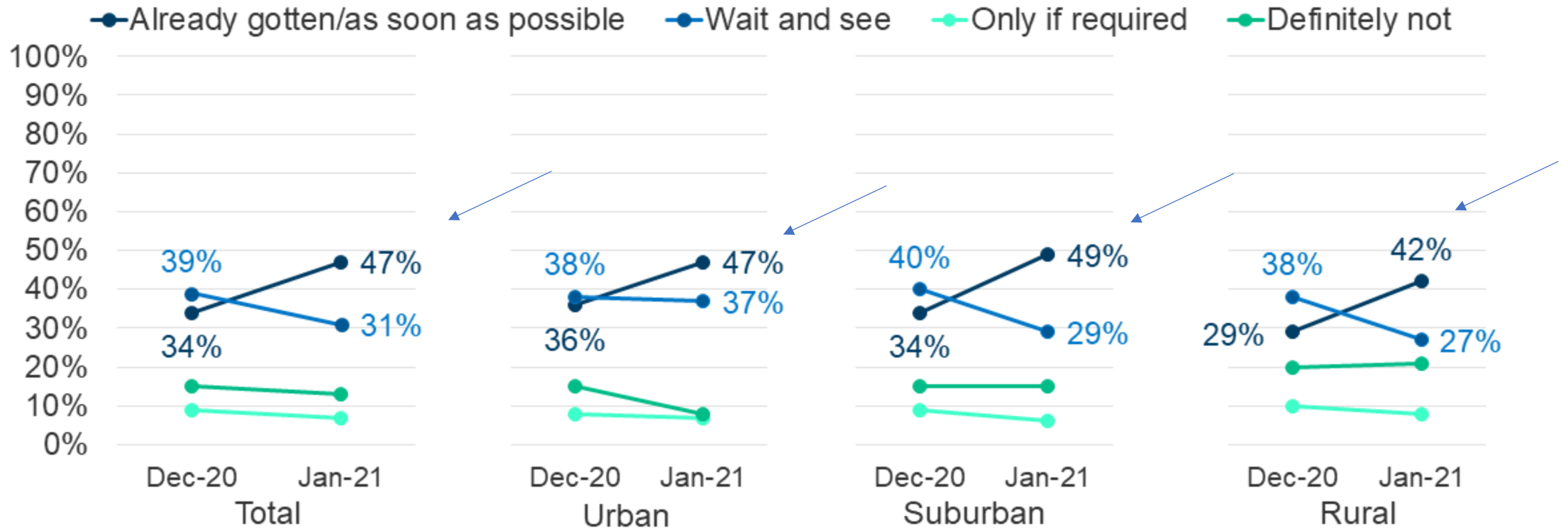


SOURCE KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (Nov. 30-Dec. 8, 2020 and Jan. 11-18, 2021). See topline for full question wording.

Figure 3

COVID-19 Vaccine Enthusiasm Has Shifted Across Community Types, But Rural Residents Remain More Resistant

Percent who say they will get a COVID-19 vaccine:

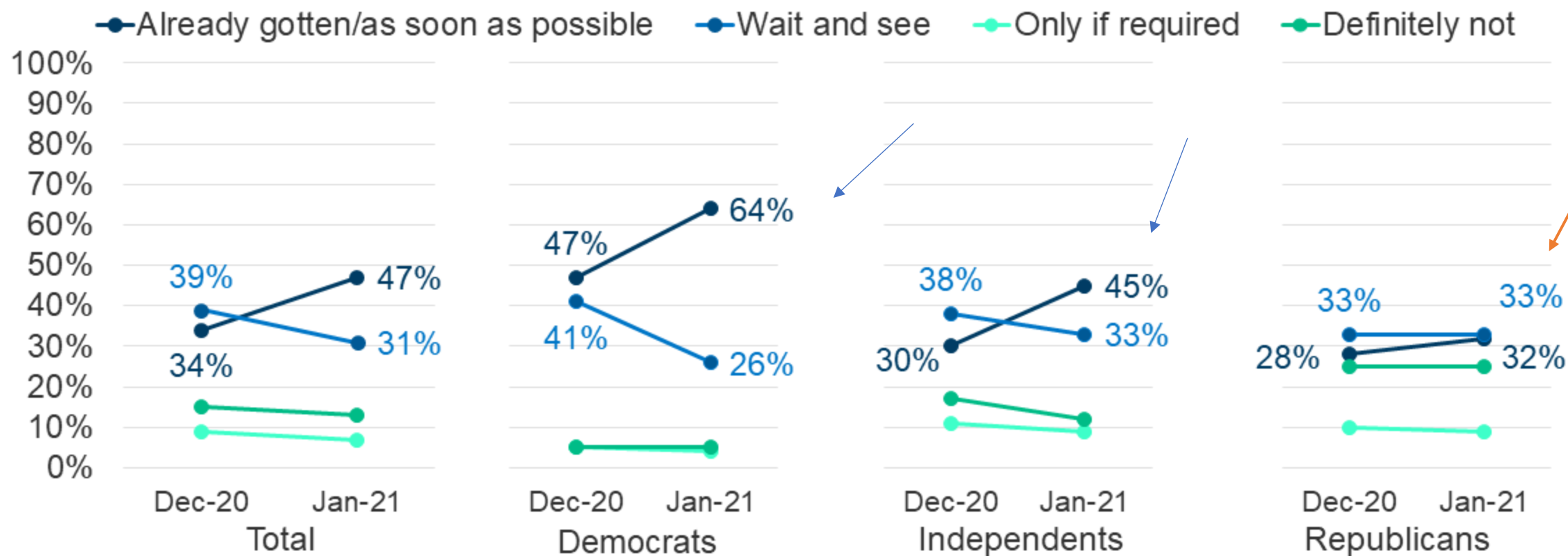


SOURCE KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (Nov. 30-Dec. 8, 2020 and Jan. 11-18, 2021). See topline for full question wording.

Figure 4

Increase In Vaccine Enthusiasm Driven Entirely By Democrats And Independents; Republicans Remain Reluctant

Percent who say they will get a COVID-19 vaccine:



SOURCE KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (Nov. 30-Dec. 8, 2020 and Jan. 11-18, 2021). See topline for full question wording.

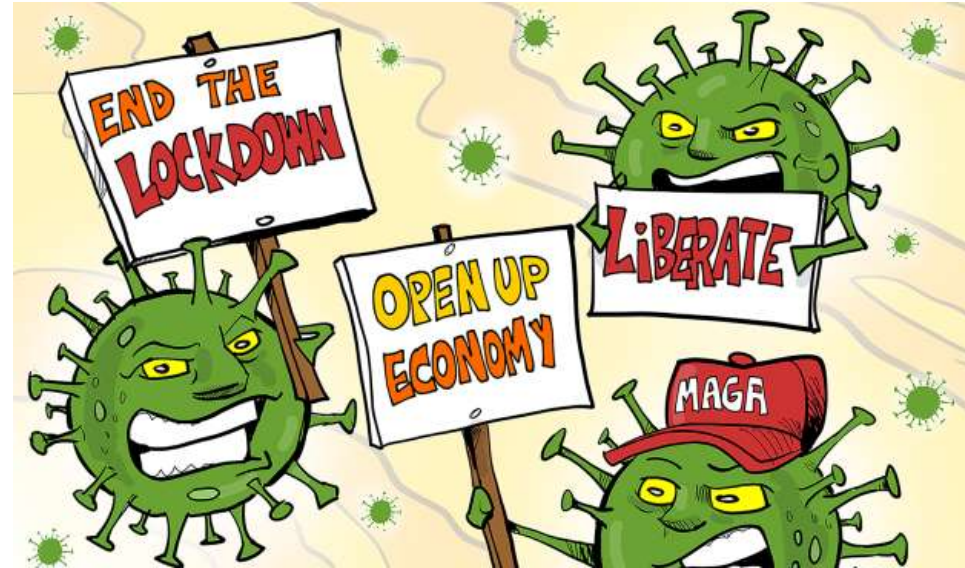
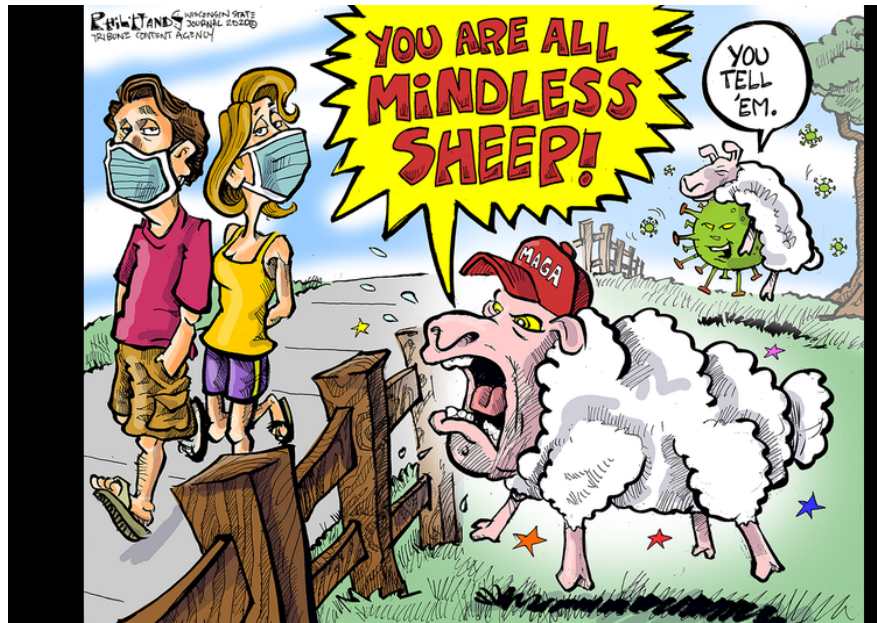
Covid-19 Situational Analysis – Rising Concerns related to variants (B1.1.7; B.1.351; P1; Cal20.C)

- **Third Covid-19 wave occurring in Europe largely related to circulation of variants and relaxation of mitigation – reopening too soon**
- Reports of 50% of all cases coming from Florida, Texas, and Georgia as well as New York City from variants, mostly B.1.1.7 variant
 - Studies showing B1.1.7 is significant more transmissible; news about one variant generalized to others by public
- Mixed messages about efficacy of various vaccines to “ variants”
- **Variants being discussed in the media – often in a sensationalist manner**

Covid-19 Situational Analysis – Rising Concerns

- **Mixed messages about safety and side effects of vaccines**
 - **Ex. Astra Zenaca** – and whether the few cases of blood clots reported are to be expected in this population, due to vaccine, are an acceptable risk
 - –an evolving virus; variants remind us of unfinished science
- **Intentional disinformation from vaccine deniers having larger political agenda still a menace**
 - Overblown and fabricated messages about side effects and deaths due to vaccine widely circulating on social media
- **Emerging long hauler data has become a rising concern**
- **False sense of security at early stage of vaccination roll out**
- **Some states beginning to reopen as if the Covid-19 emergency is over, and we are ready to return to normal; mixed messages**
 - Premature from public health vantage point
 - Acceptable risk according to some politicians who place emphasis on psychological risk and collateral damage to small business

Lingering side effect of COVID-19 politicization: mistrust and social division

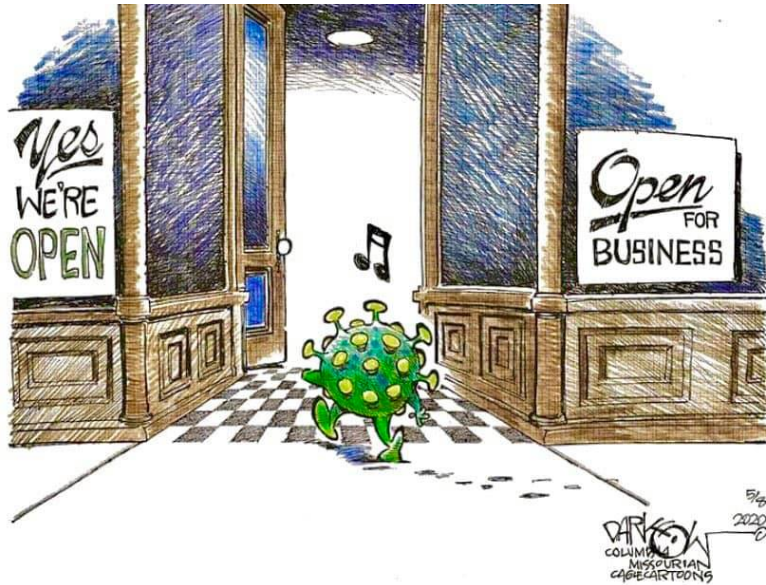


Anti-mask and anti-vaccination have become identity markers

Three Segments of the US Public

- *Those with considerable fear despite good news
- *Those wanting to return to normal, but adhering to precautions
- *Those throwing caution to the wind and returning to normal
whether society is ready or not

The first two groups



We are bracing ourselves and waiting to see the impact of the third group on society at large

- Americans embracing spring weather and exhibiting casual disregard for Covid-19 transmission are playing with pandemic fire



A frat-party-fueled outbreak prompts Duke to quarantine thousands of students.



We are currently at an inflection
point in the pandemic as well as
a point of precarity

**What is needed now in terms of
Covid-19 messaging**

Effective Public Health Messaging is both – informative and evocative

- **Informs the public: evidence-based guidance normed to population**
 - Requires both epidemiology and translational research
 - Information needs to be trusted, conveyed by trusted information providers
- **Addresses public concerns and is attentive to what the public wants to know**
 - Bottom-up Q:A's
- **Considers pragmatics of advice and social issues entailed in following it**
 - Self and collective efficacy
 - Hierarchies of risk, including social risk
 - Real world scenarios
- **Moves from individual behavior change to changing social norms**

Covid-19 Vaccination messaging and media emphasis needs to accentuate the positive

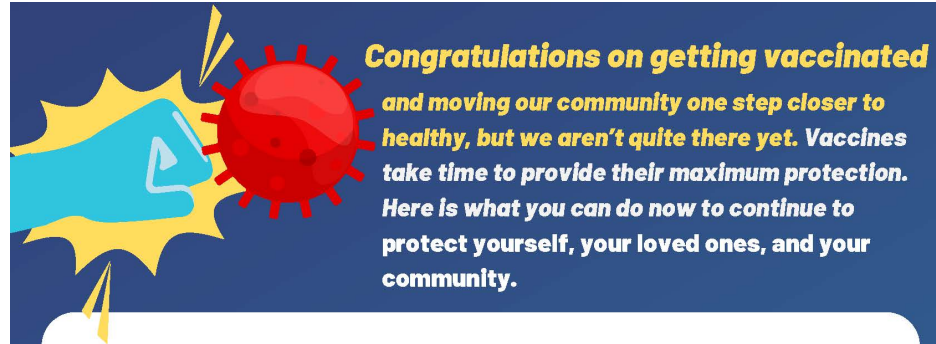
- **Not enough attention has been given to informing the public about just how effective all approved vaccines are in preventing:**
 - ✓ **Severe illness** and keeping people out of hospital
 - ✓ **“Long haul”** chronic symptoms of Covid -19 even if one suffers a mild case
 - ✓ **Hospitals from becoming swamped** which translates into better general care for all and less HCW burnout
 - ✓ **Reducing virus transmission**
 - if not completely, enough to make a significant difference
 - by doing so decreasing variant spread and thus evolution

Post vaccination messaging needs to address common and emerging queries from the public

See [HCWHO.ORG](https://www.hcwho.org) for a working list

- **Three examples :**

- **The vaccine does not cure asymptomatic and mild infections if you already have them**
 - If you experience symptoms in the 14 days after your vaccination you still need to get tested and for the following reasons
 - If ill during this time, it does not mean your vaccine failed because....
- **Side effects may be greater especially for those who are younger and women, especially after the second dose**
 - Side effects are proof of effectiveness of vaccine
 - Even if you do not experience side-effects, the vaccine has still worked because....
- **Yes, you need to get two shots even if you have had Covid-19 already**
 - Vaccines may provide greater protection than infection derived immunity because....



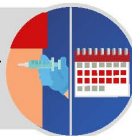
Congratulations on getting vaccinated and moving our community one step closer to healthy, but we aren't quite there yet. Vaccines take time to provide their maximum protection. Here is what you can do now to continue to protect yourself, your loved ones, and your community.

Even after getting vaccinated, it is essential that you:

- ✓ Keep wearing a good fitting mask
- ✓ Keep physical distancing
- ✓ Keep washing your hands frequently
- ✓ Get tested! If you feel sick with COVID-like symptoms including cough, shortness-of-breath, runny nose, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell, get tested! Yes, even if you had the vaccine. These are not likely to be vaccine side effects.
- ✓ Quarantine If you have had a significant COVID-19 exposure
- ✓ Report any side effects through the CDC V-safe project - <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/vsafe.html>

About the vaccines

1. Vaccines take time to provide protection. A few weeks after the first shot the current vaccines are about 50% effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 disease. Two weeks after the second dose of the vaccine, the effectiveness rate can be as high as 95%. Being vaccinated greatly reduces the chance of serious COVID-19 disease.



2. Vaccines are good, but not perfect. Even after the second dose, individuals are not 100% protected. That is why it is critical to continue to protect yourself and others using the strategies you already know – wear a mask, stay distanced, and wash your hands.



3. We know the COVID-19 vaccines reduce symptomatic cases and save lives. What we do not know yet is how well the vaccines reduce disease transmission. Even after being vaccinated, you may still infect others. Continue to practice physical distancing and masking up.



About Side Effects



You are likely to experience some side effects. This is normal. It is your body's immune system reacting to the vaccine and is an indication that the vaccine is working. Approximately 55-83% of individuals develop mild to moderate side effects within the first 3 days post-vaccination. They typically last 1 to 3 days. This is much shorter than the average 2 weeks recovery for mild COVID-19 disease and 6 weeks or more for severe and critical cases.



Rest, hydrate, and move that arm. Plan some downtime after your vaccine. Drink plenty of water, but avoid drinking alcohol before and after doses for a day or two. Alcohol is an immunosuppressant. And move that arm to help spread out the vaccine and reduce arm pain.



The most common side effects are pain in your arm and fatigue, but some people also experience fever, chills, nausea, diarrhea, skin rash, joint, and muscle pain. Side effects are usually stronger and more common after the second dose and in younger people. Plan for a light day if possible, especially after your second dose. They typically last only one or three days; much shorter than COVID-19 recovery.



Do not delay getting the second dose as recommended (best 21 days for Pfizer, 28 days for Moderna but up to 42 days is ok). Delaying the second dose will not reduce side effects and may decrease effectiveness.



Cough, shortness-of-breath, runny nose, sore throat, and loss of taste or smell are **not likely to be side effects of the vaccine.** If you experience these, get tested for COVID-19.



While most people who would have an anaphylactic reaction would experience it within your 15-minute post-vaccination wait, there are extremely rare instances of the reaction occurring up to two hours later. Be sure to continue monitoring for signs such as rapid heartbeat, throat swelling and seek medical attention or call 911 immediately.

About Ongoing Protection

1. While new variants may lead to some reduction in vaccine effectiveness, **current evidence suggests that the vaccines still provide significant protection against new variants** and everyone who is eligible should get vaccinated as soon as the vaccines are available to them.
2. We do not yet know how long the protection from the vaccine lasts. Researchers are currently studying this issue.



Bottom line- Stay vigilant, keep going with the recommended prevention measures until public health authorities change guidance, but have peace of mind that by getting your vaccine, you have substantially reduced your risk of disease!



Scenario-driven practical advice is needed

- Messaging needs to address real world scenarios of what one can and can not do following vaccination

- Beyond CDC's more general advice

- **see [HCWHO.ORG](https://www.hcwho.org) scenario driven recommendations**

- School
 - Visiting friends and family
 - Visiting those who are older, have preconditions
 - Eating out, having a drink
 - Going shopping
 - Going to gym, hairdresser,
 - Attending church....
 - Travel –local and abroad
 - And so on



Concerns about variants need to be addressed in messaging

Offset vaccine-related doubts leading to hesitancy

- *“If the current vaccinations do not cover “variants”, why not wait for one that does?”*
- “What’s the point in getting a vaccine if the virus is mutating? Scientists appear to be shooting at a moving target.”
- If there are variants out there for which vaccines are not very effective , why should I risk side-effects of a vaccine?

Allay post-vaccine doubts leading to misguided actions

- *“ I was vaccinated: How do I know if I have antibodies and immunity from variants –what test can I take ? “*
 - Can I get a “swab” test and find out?
 - Do I need to get a test and find out every time the media reports a new variant was found in this place?
 - ✓ Public needs to understand antibodies are not the only factor responsible for immunity
 - ✓ Tests do not take into account T cell activity – limitation of post vaccine testing for immunity among the healthy

Mental Health, Variants, Unpredictability and Post-vaccination Anticipatory Anxiety

- **Need to balance transparency about variants with concern about messages resulting in textually transmitted fear**
- **The symptoms I am experiencing, could they be a sign of COVID-19?**
 - What if the vaccination did not work and I am one of the unlucky 5%?
 - How about variants ---maybe I have a variant strain?
 - Are the symptoms of variants the same or different than the prototype virus ?

✓ **This source of anxiety is not well recognized in the literature**

Positive messaging is needed:

Doom and gloom messages

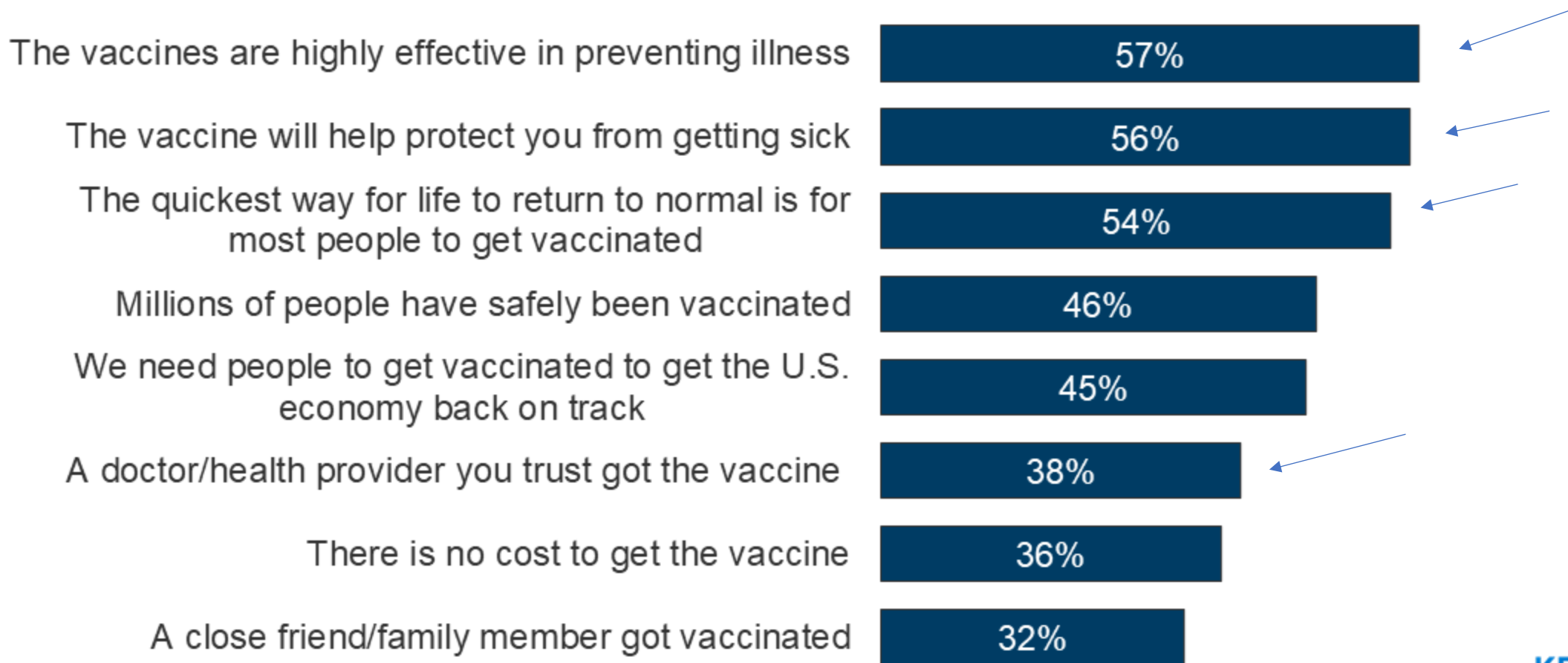
At a time when Covid-19 prevalence is waning

Can undermine public health mitigation efforts

Figure 19

Most Convincing Messages Emphasize Vaccine Effectiveness, Protection From Illness, And Return To Normal Life

Percent who say hearing each would make them **more likely** to get vaccinated for COVID-19:



NOTE: Among those who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19

SOURCE: KFF COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor (conducted Jan. 11-18, 2021). See topline for full question wording.

A public health appeal requires more than data , it requires moral framing to be evocative

- **An appeal to moral identity is needed to motivate action that is deemed inconvenient or restrictive**
- **Messaging, such as the need to wear masks in public after vaccination, needs to:**
 - ✓ **Establish personal as well as social relevance**
 - ✓ **Speaks to collective responsibility that is not abstract, but family and neighborhood, business and don't swamp the health care system focused**
 - Defuses political party associations with public health actions – a tough sell at this point without republican party leadership buy in
 - Is presented in a way that advice does not appear to be bureaucratic overreach
 - ✓ **Gives those who adhere to public health advice a positive sense of moral identity**
 - The respect they gain needs to offset sacrifices made

Health citizenship is the cornerstone of public health and essential to controlling this pandemic

- **Pandemics remind us we are all in this together**
 - Citizenship as a “to do” action-oriented verb, not a noun designating some form of entitlement (see HCWHOSTED.org Citizenship Pledge)
- **Variants remind us that health disparity and the presence of an immune compromised population effects us all - likely incubators for mutation**
- **Masking, physical distance and vaccination messages need to appeal to the public in a way that is aligned with core American values**
 - **Values that supersede a “I will protect me: you protect yourself” sense of individual responsibility and the freedom to do as one likes, society be damned**
 - This is a long-standing challenge in the US: Covid -19 reminds us we have a lot of work ahead

THE END
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INSIGHT



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