

Covid-19 vaccine confidence among BIPOC youth in Newark Summary V1

Project Ready and United Way of Greater Newark, along with other local community organizations, recently collaborated with members of Brown University School of Public Health to understand Newark teens' unique thoughts and with respect to Covid-19 vaccines and to learn how best to support teens' informational needs during the pandemic.

From January to March, 2022 vaccinated and unvaccinated youths in Newark were invited to participate in the study through pre-existing relationships between Project Ready, United Way of Greater Newark, local schools and youth organizations. Youth could participate by completing a short online survey, joining a 1-hour online focus group or both. Although most teens who participated in the survey and focus group were vaccinated (3 unvaccinated for the survey; 1 unvaccinated for the focus group), the study engaged both female and male youths of diverse ages (range 14 to 18).

So, what did we find about participating youths'...?

- **Emotions:**
 - The pandemic is taking a deep emotional toll on teens. While they feel better now that the vaccines are helping save lives, they also feel frustrated, scared, and exhausted due to all the restrictions and prolonged delay of being normal again.
- **Thoughts about COVID-19 vaccines *before* getting vaccinated:**
 - Vaccines protect them and their loved ones from getting sick... “for a little bit”. There was confusion as to how long immunity lasted and why some people who were vaccinated still got sick.
 - Teens worried about short-term and long term side effects, about vaccines being rushed to market, and about being used as test-subjects (or other uncertainties about the “truth” in the context of their experience and history as a Black American)
 - Teens did not believe conspiracy theories mentioned but still noted concern about them (e.g., zombies, infertility)
- **Thoughts about COVID-19 vaccines *after* getting vaccinated vaccine (if applicable):**
 - Teens felt more confident to engage in activities and feel protected
 - But confidence was tempered by acknowledgement that vaccination is just one piece of the puzzle and it was still important to respect social distancing, be careful in large groups, etc. Some teens were unable to feel confident and feared they could do all the “right things” (be vaccinated, wear a mask, wash hands) and still contract Covid.
 - But in general, teens feel a bit safer and like there were more options of activities open to them. Almost a sense of normalcy.
- **Perception of the COVID-19 information landscape:**
 - Teens are synthesizing diverse messages of diverse quality from diverse messengers both online and in-person. Some messages include misinformation about the safety of vaccines (e.g., vaccines will cause people to turn into zombies or lead to infertility) while others conveyed facts about how vaccines lower ones' chances of contracting Covid or becoming seriously ill from Covid.
 - In general, most teens (who participated in focus groups) seemed quite savvy to the information landscape and had a sense of which stories or messengers they could trust. However, some found sorting out fact from fiction to be more challenging.
 - Although teens often actively sought information online, they were very perceptive to the advice and information they received from their parents, peers, and family doctors.

- **Ideas on how to provide information about vaccines to youth in Newark:**
 - Teens were very eager to receive more information about vaccines and had lots of ideas of what information should be relayed, by whom, and where
 - In general, many teens were keen to receive further information from schools. They very much wanted the information to be developed or delivered by medical professionals who could explain the science behind vaccines and answer their questions in a honest and credible way.
 - Teens were interested in two-way communication with experts and a space – online or in person – where they could ask questions and discern fact from fiction

What's next?

With the insights gleaned from this research, Project Ready and United Way of Greater Newark hope to develop community-based communications and engagement materials to address determinants of vaccine confidence and uptake in our local community – both for the ongoing pandemic but potentially future pandemics or community challenges.