

March 2021

At a glance: COVID-19 vaccine research insights

This research is part of an ongoing series that looks into New Zealanders' attitudes and public sentiment towards the COVID-19 vaccine.

Background

Horizon Research, in association with the School of Population Health, University of Auckland, have been commissioned to survey New Zealanders' attitudes and sentiment towards COVID-19 vaccines.

Four distinct but related online surveys were undertaken:

- 1,451 respondents between 24 and 28 September 2020
- 1,438 respondents between 1 and 4 December 2020
- 1,317 respondents between 16 and 19 February 2021
- 1,350 respondents between 26 March and 1 April 2021

Key research findings

The following are some of the key insights in the March findings, compared with previous findings:

Accepting a vaccine

- There is demand to access the vaccine early, with 15 percent (an estimated 612,200 adults) stating they would take it immediately if it was available.
- Across the past seven months of research, the percentage of those likely to take a vaccine remains steady, with 69 percent of respondents prepared to take a COVID-19 vaccine.
- While people's intention to accept or not accept a COVID-19 vaccine remains steady, the number of those who said they were unsure or unlikely to take a vaccine and who needed assurances about vaccine safety overall has fallen 11 percent since December 2020 to 40 percent.

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Barriers to uptake

- Over the past seven months of research, the number of people in the general population who will definitely not take a vaccine remains unchanged. This number is unlikely to change greatly and is predicted to remain at about 9.4 percent.
- 20 percent of respondents (including the 'definitely not' 9.4 percent) are unlikely to have a COVID-19 vaccine if offered (an estimated 798,000 adults). This remains steady.
- The number of respondents who were unsure if they would take a COVID-19 vaccine is similar to the September and December results, with 11 percent unsure, and marginally higher than the February results (7 percent).
- The percentage of Māori and Pasifika who are unlikely to take a vaccine has dropped substantially from a peak in December 2020 – 27 percent to 18 percent and 34 percent to 9 percent respectively. However, those who will likely take a vaccine has not changed as significantly.
- Those who are unlikely to take the vaccine are likely to believe that the vaccine is not free.
- The main reasons for not taking a vaccine continue to be about long-term effects, effects on health and that it might not be effective. Noting that concerns about side-effects have declined slightly, while concerns about long-term effects are now the main reason for not taking a COVID-19 vaccine.
- People in Groups 3 and 4 of the rollout plan have a better understanding of what group they fall into, whereas people who are in Groups 1 and 2 were less sure of what group they are in.

Confidence in the vaccine

- Around two-thirds of respondents were confident that any vaccine made available in New Zealand would prevent COVID-19 infection or severe death/illness from COVID-19.
- This has not changed since December 2020 when it was 67 percent.
- Confidence in COVID-19 vaccines meeting safety and quality standards is 70 percent and has remained steady since December 2020.
- New Zealanders appear to be requiring less reassurance on clinical trials and side-effects than seen in the December 2020 and February 2021 research, but both of these remain major considerations for those who are unlikely to take a vaccine.

Factors that can influence uptake

- Factors that can influence vaccine acceptance remain similar to previous surveys but focus more on the benefits of the vaccine rather than testing and approvals

These include:

- Helping to protect all New Zealanders
- The vaccine is free.
- Helping to end the COVID-19 pandemic more quickly.
- Helping to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection and the prospect of further lockdowns and economic harm.
- Being vaccinated will protect me from the effects of COVID-19.

Communication and information needs

- There continues to be a need for more information to help people decide whether to take the COVID-19 vaccine; in particular for Pasifika.
- The key assurances/messages most sought by those currently not choosing to take a vaccine are about long-term side effects and safety (58 percent and 40 percent respectively).
- When asked what information people needed about the roll-out plan, respondents who had not yet had a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine said they wanted to know more about:
 - the vaccine's side-effects and what would happen if they had an adverse reaction.
 - where and when to get a vaccination, how to make an appointment/book for a vaccination and whether they had a choice of location.
 - how the vaccine works and what is in it.
- Of those who have already received a vaccine, 92 percent felt they received enough information about their vaccination.
- Television New Zealand (TVNZ) is by far the most common source of information about the COVID-19 vaccine.