

# COVID-19: Science scepticism may be reinforced by UK rush to approve vaccines

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Former director of public health Professor John Ashton has said that scientific scepticism may be reinforced by the UK's rush to approve COVID vaccines for public use and the apparent political desire to be

the first out of the blocks in contrast to our European neighbours.

Writing in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, Prof Ashton says that to risk the trust of the public for the sake of a couple of weeks propaganda advantage could prove to be unforgivable should [vaccine](#) uptake fall below that required for the ubiquitous 'herd immunity' as a result of giving oxygen to the sceptics.

"In this age of scientific rationality, superstition and anti-science still run deep," he writes. "When an overwhelming majority of the public welcomes the arrival of COVID vaccination, it is salutary to remind ourselves of the main arguments deployed against its value and use."

As well as the readily understood fear of injections, Prof Ashton writes that other objections have included that vaccination is 'unchristian', that it is an infringement of personal liberty and that it is part of a more general suspicion of scientific medicine.

In his paper, Prof Ashton draws on the experience of the Victorian anti-vaccination leagues which were set up in the 19th century to campaign against [smallpox vaccination](#) and which offer a history lesson on the breakdown of trust between the government and the public.

**More information:** John Ashton, COVID-19 and the anti-vaxxers, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1177/0141076820986065](#)

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