

Study finds U.S. first responders have mixed feelings about COVID-19 vaccine

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Dr. Alberto Caban-Martinez testing a firefighter. Credit: University of Miami Leonard M. Miller School of Medicine

Firefighters and emergency medical services workers are at high risk of exposure to COVID-19 while on the job and pose an additional risk of

transmitting the virus to others. Although vaccines are a promising public health tool for reducing COVID-19 transmission, little has been known about the perceptions of the COVID-19 vaccine among first responders.

To provide insight, a University of Miami Miller School of Medicine-led study queried a national sample of U.S. firefighters and emergency medical services workers through an anonymous online survey. The study results, published online Feb. 1 in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, revealed that more than half of the [first responders](#) who replied were uncertain about or reported low acceptance of the [vaccine](#).

"Through the national sample of firefighters and emergency medical services workers, we gained insight into the workforce's hesitancy about the COVID-19 vaccine," said study lead and senior author Alberto J. Caban-Martinez, D.O., Ph.D., M.P.H., associate professor of [public health](#) sciences in the Division of Environment & Public Health at the Miller School. "We can leverage this study's information to design workplace interventions that educate and encourage our first responders to receive the COVID-19 vaccine."

Demographics determine perceptions

Of the 3,169 respondents to the survey, 48.2% expressed high acceptability of the COVID-19 vaccine, 24.2% were unsure, and 27.6% reported low acceptability. The results also revealed key demographic characteristics—such as age, race, ethnicity, education, [marital status](#), and job ranking—for each group of respondents.

Additionally, across all ten geographic regions of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the southeast (43.1%), the southwest (32.7%) and the west (34.1%) had the highest proportion of first responders who

showed low COVID-19 vaccine acceptability.

"An important predictor we discovered from our study was that first responders who had not reported receipt of the influenza vaccine in the prior season had higher odds of being unsure about or not wanting to receive the COVID-19 vaccine," Dr. Caban-Martinez said.

In the study, the co-authors note the importance of tailoring public health campaigns for educating those sub-groups of firefighters and emergency medical [service](#) workers who identified as unsure or expressed low COVID-19 acceptability.

More information: Alberto J. Caban-Martinez et al. COVID-19 Vaccine Acceptability among U.S. Firefighters and Emergency Medical Services Workers, *Journal of Occupational & Environmental Medicine* (2021). [DOI: 10.1097/JOM.0000000000002152](https://doi.org/10.1097/JOM.0000000000002152)

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