

COVID conspiracy theorists: Concerned only about own health but reluctant to vaccinate

March 4 2021



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COVID-19 conspiracy theorists are more concerned about their own health and less concerned about the health of others, according to a study led by University of Queensland researchers.

Professor Jolanda Jetten from the UQ School of Psychology said the research found [conspiracy](#) theorists were also more likely to respond to COVID-19 with self-focused strategies rather than strategies that assist society as a whole, such as vaccination.

"People who more strongly endorsed COVID-19 [conspiracy theories](#) reported greater concerns about their own safety and lower concerns about the safety of close others, compared to people who didn't endorse the conspiracy theories as strongly," Professor Jetten said.

"Conspiracy theorists were more likely to focus on ways of helping themselves such as stockpiling, and less likely to respond to community-focused strategies like hand-washing and social distancing.

"Furthermore, people who believed conspiracies later reported more reluctance to take a COVID-19 [vaccine](#), in part because of their relatively self-focused attitudes.

"We started this research wanting to find out if COVID-19 conspiracy theorists are primarily motivated by concern for others—like social justice activists—or primarily concerned for themselves.

"The overall picture suggested that compared to other people, conspiracy theorists are relatively self-oriented."

The research team surveyed 4245 people from eight nations, and three months later followed up with 1262 of those people from three nations.

Professor Matthew Hornsey from UQ's School of Business said the findings had troubling implications for public health and safety.

"Responsible behavior from individuals—including widespread uptake of a vaccine—remains our best hope of defeating this and future

pandemics," Professor Hornsey said.

"Vaccine hesitancy is particularly strong among conspiracy theorists, and suspicion about the pending vaccines may be high enough to threaten herd immunity.

"Understanding this phenomenon may help inform interventions designed to increase societal resilience in the face of current and future pandemics."

The study is published in the *European Journal of Social Psychology*.

More information: Matthew J. Hornsey et al. To what extent are conspiracy theorists concerned for self versus others? A COVID-19 test case, *European Journal of Social Psychology* (2021). [DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2737](https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2737)

Provided by University of Queensland

Citation: COVID conspiracy theorists: Concerned only about own health but reluctant to vaccinate (2021, March 4) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-covid-conspiracy-theorists-health-reluctant.html>

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