

Vaccine hesitancy poses threat to efforts to end pandemic

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Although demand for COVID-19 vaccines currently seems high, vaccine hesitancy could pose a major threat to public health efforts to end the pandemic, according to an editorial published today in the journal *Science*.

The authors, including David A. Broniatowski, associate director of the

George Washington University Institute for Data, Democracy & Politics, point out that [public sentiment](#) towards vaccines are volatile in the face of events such as the recent controversy surrounding the AstraZeneca vaccine clinical trial data. For example, some people could develop safety concerns due to the news reporting about the AstraZeneca vaccine and then turn down the chance to get an approved COVID-19 vaccine—thus putting them at risk.

Vaccine hesitant people may have anxiety over safety concerns, or they might belong to a community that historically has mistrusted the medical establishment, according to the editorial.

Unfortunately, public health officials might not address their concerns. The editorial notes that people who are hesitant about getting the COVID-19 vaccine are often dismissed as anti-science. At the same time, the vaccine hesitant can be influenced by [false information](#) posted on [social media](#) or the internet by anti-vaxx activists and organized anti-vaxx groups, the authors said.

"Vaccine hesitant people are targeted by anti-vaxxers and ridiculed by some health care providers." Broniatowski said, "They are therefore doubly at risk."

How can vaccine hesitancy be addressed?

Broniatowski co-authored the [editorial](#) with Professor Heidi J. Larson, Director of The Vaccine Confidence Project at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

"Messages about vaccines must be delivered in a way that is empathetic to avoid stigmatizing people who have questions about the [vaccine](#). Particularly in the context of COVID-19, with all its uncertainties, people need to be reassured, and feel that their concerns are heard,"

Larson said. "And, if there is one thing we have learned in all our research, people's concerns can change. Listening needs to be ongoing."

More information: Volatility of vaccine confidence, *Science* (2021).
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