

# Public trust in CDC, FDA, and Fauci holds steady, survey shows

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NIAID Director Anthony Fauci. Image: NIAID

With more than two-thirds of American adults vaccinated with at least one dose of an authorized COVID-19 vaccine, the top U.S. health agencies retain the trust of the vast majority of the American public, as

does Dr. Anthony Fauci, the public face of U.S. efforts to combat the virus, according to a new survey from the Annenberg Public Policy Center (APPC) of the University of Pennsylvania.

The survey revealed growing [public confidence](#) in both the safety and effectiveness of vaccines to prevent COVID-19.

But after months of attacks on Fauci in conservative and [social media](#), the survey found that people who said they rely on conservative and very conservative [media](#) rather than other sources were more likely to have less confidence in Fauci's trustworthiness on COVID-19 and more likely to accept misinformation about him and misinformation and [conspiracy theories](#) about the authorized COVID-19 vaccines and the novel coronavirus.

The survey also found that a growing number of Americans—more than 1 in 3—believes that the coronavirus was created by the Chinese government as a biological weapon.

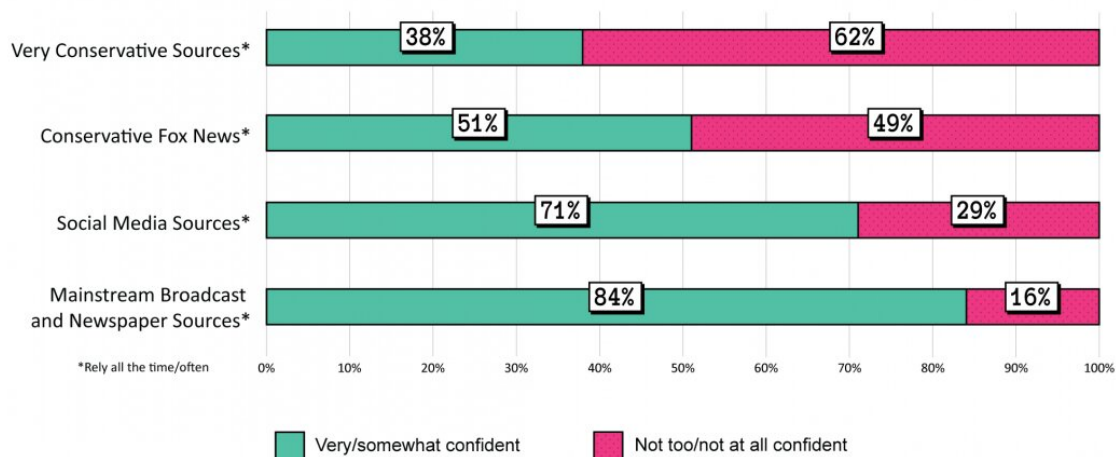
"Our analysis of the data shows that there is good news and bad news here," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center. "Those who underestimate the lethality of COVID-19 or the safety of COVID-19 vaccination are less likely to accept a COVID-19 vaccination. The same is true of those who believe COVID-19 conspiracy theories. By contrast, those who trust health authorities are more likely to seek vaccination. Deceptive messages that undermine trust in a health expert such as Dr. Fauci are deeply worrisome."

The latest Annenberg Science Knowledge ([ASK](#)) survey was conducted among 1,719 U.S. adult respondents from June 2—June 22, 2021. Data were weighted to represent the target U.S. adult population. The margin of error is  $\pm 3.2$  percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The

panel survey is a follow-up to an [April 2021 ASK survey](#) with 1,941 respondents. (See the [Appendix](#) for additional data.)

## Confidence in U.S. health authorities

**Confidence in Dr. Anthony Fauci providing trustworthy information about preventing and treating Covid-19 by reliance on media sources**



Source: Annenberg Public Policy Center survey, June 2-22, 2021

Credit: University of Pennsylvania

The ASK survey found that the most trustworthy source of information for treating and preventing COVID-19 is the doctor or nurse who is an individual's primary health care provider:

- Primary health care provider: 83% are confident their primary health care provider is providing trustworthy information about COVID-19;

- Food and Drug Administration: 77% are confident that the FDA, which authorized emergency use of the COVID-19 vaccines available in the United States, is providing trustworthy information about treating and preventing COVID-19—statistically about the same as the 75% in April and up significantly from 71% in August 2020 in an earlier Annenberg Public Policy Center survey;
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 76% are confident that the CDC is providing trustworthy information on COVID, about the same as in April (75%) and August 2020 (72%);
- Dr. Anthony Fauci: 68% overall are confident that Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is providing trustworthy advice on COVID-19, statistically about the same as in April (71%) and August 2020 (68%).

## **Conservative media and lower confidence**

For more than a year, some prominent hosts in the conservative media have attacked Fauci's credibility. Fox News's Laura Ingraham falsely [claimed](#) on June 2, 2021, "Much of what Fauci said about this virus, the drugs that could treat it, and the measures that could be taken to slow the spread was untrue. He knew it was untrue."

The survey found that those who indicated that they rely on conservative and very conservative media have less confidence in U.S. health authorities providing trustworthy information about COVID-19—especially Fauci.

**Among people who said they rely all the time or often on ...**

- Very conservative media sources such as Newsmax, One America News (OAN), Gateway Pundit, Parler, or Telegram: 55% are confident about trustworthiness of the FDA, 52% are confident about the trustworthiness of the CDC, and only 38% are confident in the trustworthiness of Fauci.
- Conservative media such as Fox News: Nearly 7 in 10 are confident that the CDC (68%) and FDA (69%) are providing the public with trustworthy information on COVID-19, but just over half (51%) have confidence that Fauci is doing so.
- Mainstream broadcast and print news media such as CBS, ABC, and NBC News, the *New York Times*, the Wall Street Journal news pages, and the Associated Press: 87% are confident in trustworthiness of the CDC and FDA, and 84% in Fauci.
- Social media such as Facebook: 80% are confident that the CDC and FDA are providing the public with trustworthy information on COVID, and 71% have confidence that Fauci is providing trustworthy information.

## Confidence in COVID-19 vaccines

In June, a growing majority of the U.S. public said the COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective:

- 78% of the U.S. public believes it is definitely or probably true that COVID-19 vaccines are effective in preventing COVID-19, up significantly from 74% in April;
  - Those who say this is definitely true grew to 46%, from 38% in April.
- 76% of the U.S. public believes it is definitely or probably true that it is safer to get the COVID-19 vaccine than to get COVID-19, about the same as the 75% in April;

- Those who say this is definitely true grew to 54%, from 49% in April, a significant change.
- In the presence of statistical controls, the more ideologically conservative that people described themselves as, the less likely they are to believe that it is true that it is safer to get the COVID-19 vaccine than to get COVID-19.

## Conspiracy beliefs

The survey asked respondents about misinformation and conspiracy theories.

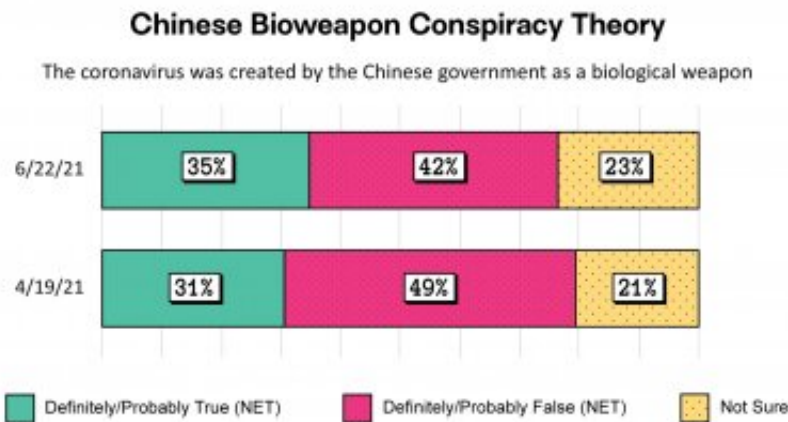
Bioweapon conspiracy theory: Over 1 in 3 people (35%) said it was true that the coronavirus was created by the Chinese government as a biological weapon, up slightly from 31% in April. Another 42% said that statement was false and 23% were not sure. (Although the origin of the coronavirus is still uncertain, there currently is [no evidence](#) it was created by the Chinese as a bioweapon.)

In the presence of statistical controls, those who say they rely on conservative media such as Fox News or very conservative media such as OAN are more likely to believe this conspiracy theory. Those who say they rely on mainstream media are more likely to reject this theory.

Among the instances in which a conservative media outlet legitimized the Chinese bioweapon theory was Tucker Carlson's Fox News show on June 30, 2021, which [featured an interview](#) with a Chinese "coronavirus whistleblower" who claimed that COVID-19 was a "biologically engineered weapon that got out of control..." And on June 8, 2021, conservative personality Steve Bannon hosted Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R., Ga.) on his podcast "War Room: Pandemic," where [she claimed](#) that Fauci was sending "American tax dollars" to the Chinese lab in Wuhan "to fund this research that was creating ... a virus that can



spread rapidly among a population, make people sick and kill them... [with] these viruses that they experiment with like some sort of Dr. Frankenstein experiments: These are bioweapons."



Source: Annenberg Public Policy Center survey, June 2-22, 2021

In addition, while most respondents knew that a vaccine conspiracy theory involving Bill Gates and microchips was false, a worrisome number either thought it was true or were unsure:

Gates/microchip conspiracy theory: 75% correctly said it was false that the vaccine against Covid-19 developed with support from Microsoft founder Bill Gates contains [microchips](#) that can track the person who has been vaccinated, but 1 in 4 people either said this conspiracy theory was true (11%) or were not sure (14%). None of the authorized Covid-19 vaccines contain microchips and while the Gates Foundation has a partnership with BioNTech, the foundation says it [did not directly invest](#)

in either the Pfizer/BioNTech or Moderna Covid-19 vaccines. In the presence of statistical controls, those who say they rely on conservative media or very conservative media are more likely to believe this claim.

## Misinformation

- **Fauci and vaccines:** Asked if it was true that Dr. Anthony Fauci of the NIH "has NO financial stake" in any Covid-19 vaccine, only 37% said it was true – a decline from the 42% who said it was true in April. Another 32% thought it was false to say Fauci had no financial stake in a Covid vaccine, and 30% were not sure. (There is [no evidence](#) Fauci has a financial stake in a Covid-19 vaccine.)
- In the presence of statistical controls, those who indicate that they rely on conservative media or very conservative media are more likely to say this is false – in other words, to reject the idea that Fauci has no financial stake in any vaccine. Those who say they rely on mainstream news are more likely to say this is true. **Give you Covid-19:** 75% correctly said it was false that taking a Covid-19 vaccine can give you Covid-19 – [it can't](#) – but 1 in 4 people said it was true (14%) or were not sure (11%);
- **Change your DNA:** 71% correctly said it was false that the Covid-19 vaccine changes people's DNA – [it does not](#) – but nearly 3 in 10 people thought it was true (12%) or were not sure (17%).

## The lab leak theory

As scientists search for the origins of SARS-CoV-2, more than half the survey respondents said they believe the virus came from a lab in Wuhan, China – and got out through either a deliberate or an accidental



leak. When asked which statement was closest to their view:

- 20% said the coronavirus was deliberately leaked from a Wuhan, China, laboratory;
- 33% said the coronavirus accidentally escaped through carelessness or incompetence from the Wuhan lab;
- 13% said the coronavirus did not originate in a lab in Wuhan, China;
- 34% said they were not sure.

## **Vaccination and prevention**

Asked about prevention and vaccination, 70% of respondents said they have gotten a Covid-19 vaccine, up from 47% in April. The other 30% (442 people) said they have not been vaccinated.

Of those 442 people who have not been vaccinated,

- 76% said they had the information they need to decide if they want to get vaccinated, and 24% said they did not have it;
- 75% said they were not likely to get vaccinated (333 people) and 25% said they were likely to be vaccinated.
- Those who were not likely to be vaccinated (333 people) were asked to give their reasons why and select all that applied. Due to multiple responses, the results total over 100%. Their top five reasons:
  - 61% said the vaccines were still too untested or they were waiting to see what happens – which increased significantly from the 48% who gave this reason in April;
  - 44% are worried about allergies and side effects;
  - 43% don't trust the government;
  - 36% don't trust the scientists and companies that make the vaccines;

- And 32% are "just not concerned" about coronavirus/Covid-19.

For the survey Appendix containing the methodology and additional data, [click here](#).

Provided by University of Pennsylvania

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