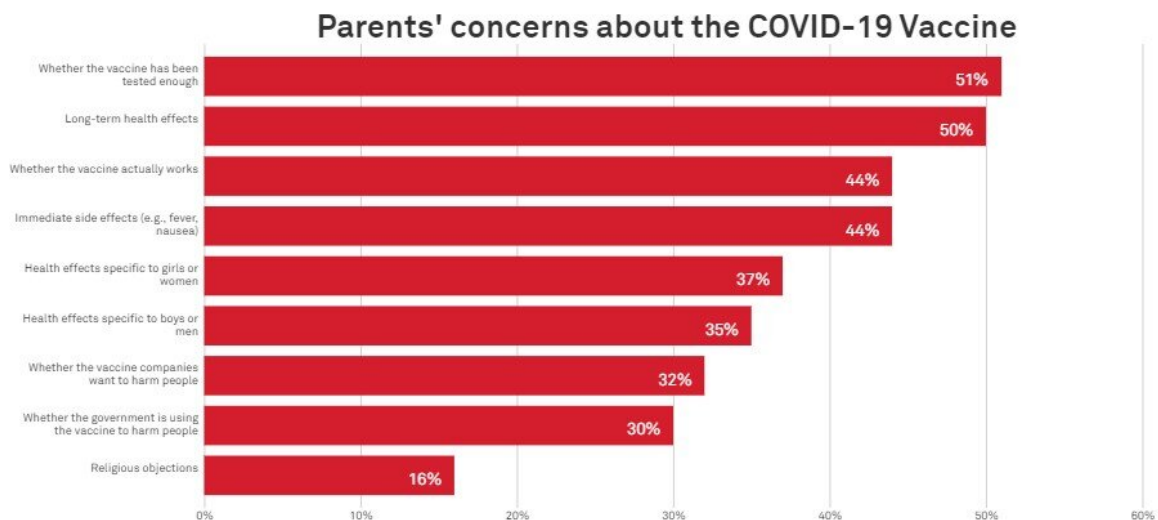


Why parents are hesitant about vaccinating their kids

August 12 2021, by Peter Ramjug



Why do parents, especially mothers, continue to have misgivings about the COVID-19 vaccine for their children, even as youngsters made up 15 percent of all new infections as of early August?

Their chief concern is [vaccine safety](#), according to a [U.S. survey](#) by researchers from Northeastern, Harvard, Northwestern, and Rutgers that sheds new light on specific parental worries.

The study found that doubts about whether the [vaccine](#) has been tested enough was the most pressing concern, as cited by 51 percent of parents who won't allow their children to be vaccinated. It was followed closely by the potential for long-term health effects (50 percent) and the newness of the vaccines (46 percent).

The June to July survey of 5,000 parents listed 10 possible hesitancies and asked respondents to rate each as either a major concern, a minor concern, or no concern. Religious objections to vaccines and the government using them to harm people were of no concern to most people.

[A prior Northeastern study](#) found that parents held a more favorable view of COVID-19 immunizations for their children than they had earlier in the year. However, researchers had not honed in on particular hesitancies until now.

Decisions by parents on whether their kids are vaccinated "becomes increasingly important as kids are going back to school," says David Lazer, university distinguished professor of political science and computer sciences at Northeastern, and one of the researchers who conducted the study.

"And we do see more and more children getting infected with the Delta variant, so there are clearly consequences to not getting vaccinated," he adds.

Specifically, data from the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) found "a continuing substantial increase" of COVID-19 cases among children. They now account for 15 percent of all infections.

"As of August 5, nearly 4.3 million children have tested positive for COVID-19 since the onset of the pandemic," AAP says. "Almost 94,000

cases were added the past week, a continuing substantial increase. After declining in early summer, child cases have steadily increased since the beginning of July."

The Northeastern survey found that while a majority of parents shared concerns about the COVID-19 immunizations in general, sharp splits emerged according to political party, gender, and age.

By a 14 percentage-point difference, Republicans cited insufficient testing as more of a major concern than Democrats did. They were also considerably more worried about the long-term health effects, how new the vaccine is, and whether it actually works.

"Clearly there have been more concerns raised on the right about the COVID vaccines than on the left," says Lazer. "That's also getting reflected in decisions involving children."

Partisan vaccination divides are nothing new, Lazer says. There was a time when Democrats had concerns about children's shots for measles, mumps, and rubella. "But over the last decade, we've seen a migration of that concern from the left to the right," Lazer says.

Among moms and dads, a higher percentage of mothers rated those same four worries as a major concern than fathers. Moms were more likely to report questioning whether the vaccine has been tested enough as a major concern than dads (58 percent to 44 percent) and more likely to cite how new the vaccine is (52 percent to 39 percent).

The mom-dad divide is consistent with a [March 2021 Northeastern survey](#) that uncovered a wide gender gap between mothers and fathers over who would vaccinate their kids if the option had been available at the time.

"Now that vaccinations for children over age 12 are authorized for emergency use, we can see that mothers are more concerned about these issues than fathers," researchers wrote in the latest survey.

Maternal concerns persist despite assurances from health authorities that vaccines are safe for [children](#).

Northeastern's Lazer notes that while COVID-19 vaccines are new, they have received enormous scrutiny.

"The reality is we're not done learning things, but the evidence highlights that if there are any side effects of the vaccines that we don't know about, they're likely to be quite rare and less consequential than the actual disease that the vaccine is preventing."

Provided by Northeastern University

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