

Youngest kids least willing to get COVID-19 jab

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In a large school-based survey of students from 9 to 18 years old (Years 5 to 13), researchers from the University of Oxford, UCL and the University of Cambridge have discovered that the younger you are, the

less likely you are to want a COVID-19 vaccination.

Writing in *EClinicalMedicine*, the authors present the results of the OxWell School Survey 2021, finding that 36% of nine-year-olds are willing to have a COVID-19 vaccination, compared to 51% of 13-year-olds, and 78% of 17-year-olds. Those less willing to have a vaccination also often come from the most socioeconomically deprived backgrounds, feel less belonging to their school community and think they have probably had COVID-19 already.

Associate Professor Mina Fazel, Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, said: "Our survey findings show that children become more willing to have the COVID-19 vaccine as they get older. Younger children more often defer to their parents, or primary caregivers, for decisions about healthcare and vaccination, but our data shows how important it is for good quality, accessible information to be provided to better enable our younger populations to understand more about the COVID-19 vaccine and its effects."

On the survey question of vaccine hesitancy, the study included over 27,000 students from 180 schools across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Merseyside. This is the only large-scale study to ask children and adolescents about their willingness to be vaccinated against COVID-19. The research highlights a need for more resources to help young people feel confident and encouraged to take the COVID-19 vaccine, should it be made available and offered to them.

The researchers conclude that it is important to provide information to those communities and individuals who are not naturally connected with their schools, as well as making sure that the vaccination can be offered in a variety of different locations to improve access to those who might find it difficult to get to vaccination sites because of location or timing constraints. There may be some young people who value their privacy

and may prefer to be able to have a vaccination without letting others around them know about their choice to get vaccinated.

As vaccination programs for COVID-19 are rolled out to school populations, more available resources are needed to ensure school students feel the vaccine is safe. In addition, health messaging about vaccine safety and its effects on children:

- needs to be targeted to both school-aged children, and also to their parents/caregivers,
- must be delivered and provided in a format, and in locations, where diverse members of the population will be able to see it,
- and should be effectively shared by trusted sources on social media, as survey findings show that the young people who are most hesitant about having the vaccine use social media more.

Associate Professor Fazel adds, "Young people might not want their peers, their teachers, or even their parents to know about their choice to get vaccinated. It could be that they are worried what their friends think, for example, and what they may need is a way to get vaccinated while feeling safe and comfortable. We must ensure these opportunities are provided for."

Dr. Simon R White, senior research associate, University of Cambridge, said: "Our data shows that there are similarities with adult populations in that those from more deprived socioeconomic backgrounds are more hesitant to have the [vaccine](#). Therefore, targeting parents and caregivers with information and materials, which specifically address the worries they might have for their [children](#) is important."

Professor Russell Viner, UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health, said: "Our findings suggest it will be essential to reach out and engage with [young people](#) from poorer families and communities with

lower levels of trust in vaccination and the health system. A school-based vaccination program, as planned in England, is one way of helping reduce these health disparities. However, the teenagers who are least engaged with their [school](#) communities may need additional support for us to achieve the highest uptake levels."

Provided by University of Oxford

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