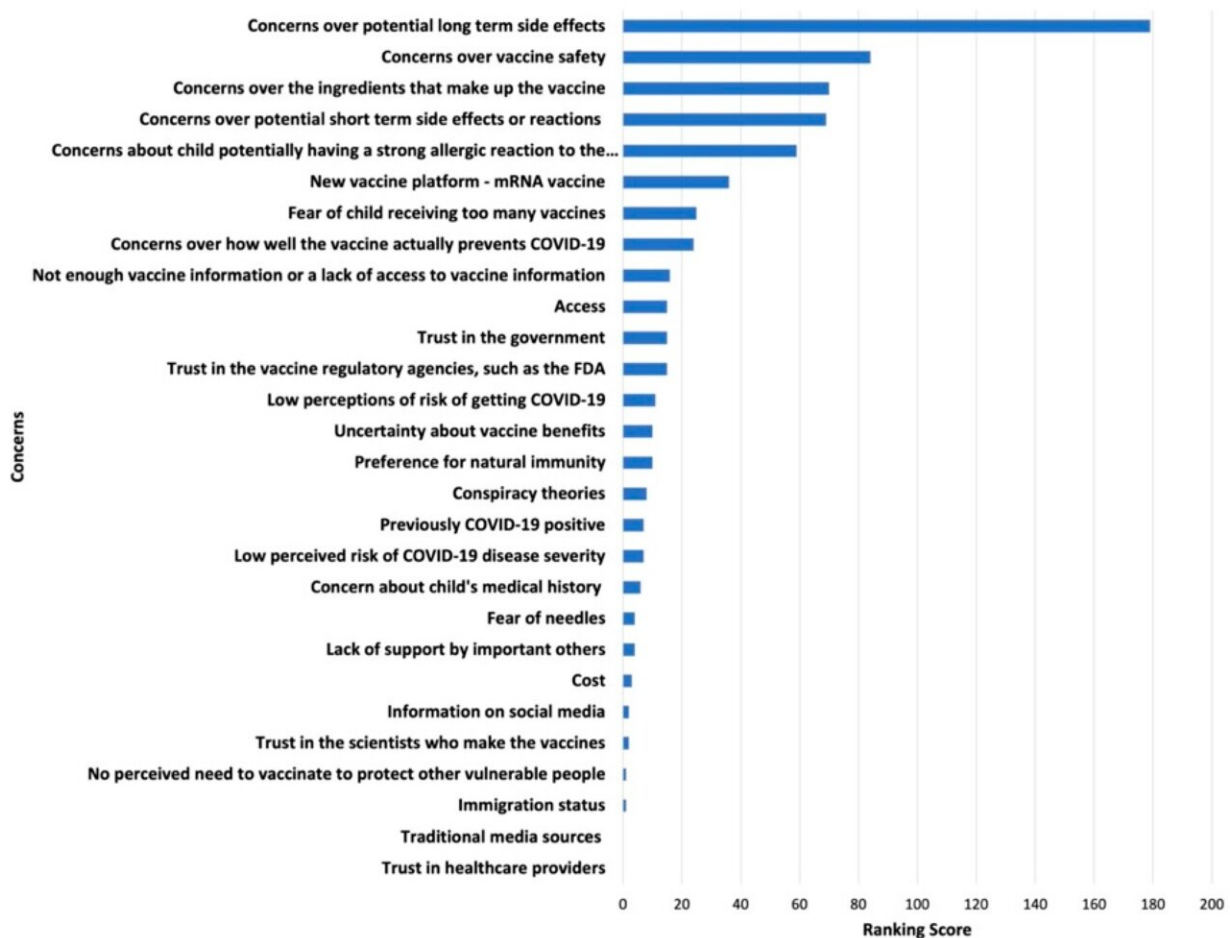


# Study identifies top concerns of parents in vaccinating their adolescent children

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Top parental concerns for vaccinating adolescents against COVID-19. Credit: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2022). DOI: 10.3390/ijerph19074212

Confidence in health authorities' vaccine recommendations, the social benefit and a sense of collective responsibility to protect oneself and others were ranked among the top motivators of Southern California parents willing to vaccinate their adolescent children against COVID-19. According to a recent study led by the University of California, Irvine researchers, concerns over potential side effects, and skepticism over vaccine safety and efficacy were some of the chief issues expressed by parents hesitant to vaccinate their adolescent children against the virus.

Findings, published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, come at a time when adolescent vaccination has stalled at 53 percent, as of the end of 2021, with rates varying significantly across states and communities. An estimated 9.5 million 12- to 17-year-olds still need to be vaccinated, and [public health officials](#) fear that vaccine uptake in children under 5 may have similar rates—setting the stage for even lower rates of vaccination among adolescents 17 and under.

"Vaccinating adolescents is critical to preventing community spread of COVID-19 and is the best preventive measure available to offer safe in-person schooling. It's imperative that we understand the reasons why they—and their parents—might be hesitant about the vaccine," said corresponding author Suellen Hopfer, Ph.D., assistant professor of health, society and behavior at UCI's Program in Public Health. "We need their insight to design effective and accessible public health messaging, which could alleviate common concerns about [vaccine safety](#) and efficacy."

The findings were based on a series of surveys and focus groups with nearly 50 sets of parents and adolescents in Southern California between February 24 and March 15, 2021, to assess vaccine-related perceptions, attitudes and knowledge.

Among the 46 percent of parents that indicated they were willing to vaccinate their [adolescent children](#), many expressed high confidence in the recommendations of health authorities, high perceived risk of getting COVID-19 infection and collective responsibility to vaccinate their children. Among the 11 percent that were not willing to vaccinate their adolescents, many expressed low confidence in the vaccine's efficacy and safety, mistrust in [regulatory agencies](#) and public health authorities, and low perceived risk of getting COVID-19.

Parents who expressed greater worry about the vaccine's effects also had concerns for younger (i.e., preteen) and physically smaller children being able to handle the [immune response](#) induced by the vaccine, as well as concerns over short-lived immunity and a lack of protection against emerging variants.

"Healthcare practitioners, [school administrators](#) and [public health](#) officials can help alleviate the concerns of patients and their parents by reminding them of our rapidly changing risk environment, where mandates are in flux and variants can emerge," Hopfer said. "Some of the most effective messaging we've seen—both for the COVID-19 and other adolescent vaccines, such as the HPV vaccination—are patient-centered and non-confrontational. They could also address structural determinants of vaccination, such as employer policies that encourage paid time off to vaccinate children, local community vaccine opportunities and school sites offering vaccination. Such messaging and scenarios can build trust and meets patients where they are in terms of questions and concerns."

**More information:** Suellen Hopfer et al, Adolescent COVID-19 Vaccine Decision-Making among Parents in Southern California, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph19074212](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19074212)

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