

# Those who support Black Lives Matter tend to be less hesitant about vaccines, study finds

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Efforts to encourage vaccination might do well to take advantage of the positive feelings and actions between different social groups, according to a study of attitudes toward vaccines among supporters of the Black

Lives Matter movement.

The study by UCLA psychologists, published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*, found that across all racial, ethnic and income groups, people who expressed support for the BLM movement were less hesitant about receiving COVID-19 vaccines than those who did not. The evidence suggests that altruistic feelings about interactions between members of different social groups might account for reduced [vaccine](#) hesitancy.

"We found that support for BLM or other anti-racism activities can have far-reaching, possibly unintended yet positive public health outcomes," said first author Tiffany Brannon, a UCLA assistant professor of psychology.

"Efforts to get people vaccinated for COVID-19 or other diseases usually involve campaigns rooted in medical facts," Brannon said. "Our work suggests that promoting pro-social attitudes—concern between groups, seeing things from the perspective of another group, and using privilege to be good allies to less advantaged groups—could complement these efforts."

Brannon and Riley Marshall, a UCLA doctoral student, began with the idea that systemic racism and COVID-19 are "twin pandemics," a concept supported by historical and epidemiological data. Because both issues are rooted in interconnected historical and contemporary racial and ethnic disparities, the researchers hypothesized that they could also have intertwined solutions.

They predicted that a person's support for BLM and other indicators tied to BLM protests and discourse—such as Google searches—would relate to less hesitancy about vaccines.

To test their hypothesis, they designed three studies. The first examined the relationships among BLM protest attendance numbers, Google searches and news reports for a six-week period in 2021. The study used data about people's attitudes toward vaccines from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey. Brannon and Marshall found that as interest and participation in BLM activities increased, vaccine hesitancy declined.

The second study analyzed whether there were links among people's support for BLM support, vaccine hesitancy and pro-social intergroup attitudes among racial and ethnic minority and white respondents. The researchers used data from an American National Election Studies survey that asked respondents questions about their political affiliation and attitudes toward protests, other social groups, racism and vaccines.

The researchers found that support for BLM was associated with lower vaccine hesitancy across all groups. One possible reason, according to the study, is that those supporting the movement also held pro-social attitudes toward different groups.

In the third study, the researchers attempted to replicate the findings of the first two but using data from a different source, the Pew Research Center. The results were very similar to the second study: lower [vaccine hesitancy](#) across all social groups among people who expressed support for BLM.

Marshall said the correlations could be because people expressing concern for others—through [support](#) of BLM, for example—translates into a willingness to get vaccinated, also out of concern for others. The authors conclude that promoting pro-social attitudes between groups may be especially important when dealing with complex public health issues such as COVID-19 that have drastically different effects on different racial and ethnic groups.

"This work shows the importance of broadening our scope in trying to understand vaccination behaviors," Marshall said. "Pro-social attitudes may play a key role in encouraging individuals to consider the health of those around them when making such decisions, and these attitudes can come directly from our interactions with and concern for others."

**More information:** Tiffany N. Brannon et al, Twin pandemics, intertwined (intergroup) solutions: Support for mitigating racism benefits vaccine hesitancy, *Social Science & Medicine* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.115768](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2023.115768)

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