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Study finds significant vaccine distrust within incarcerated populations, increasing risks

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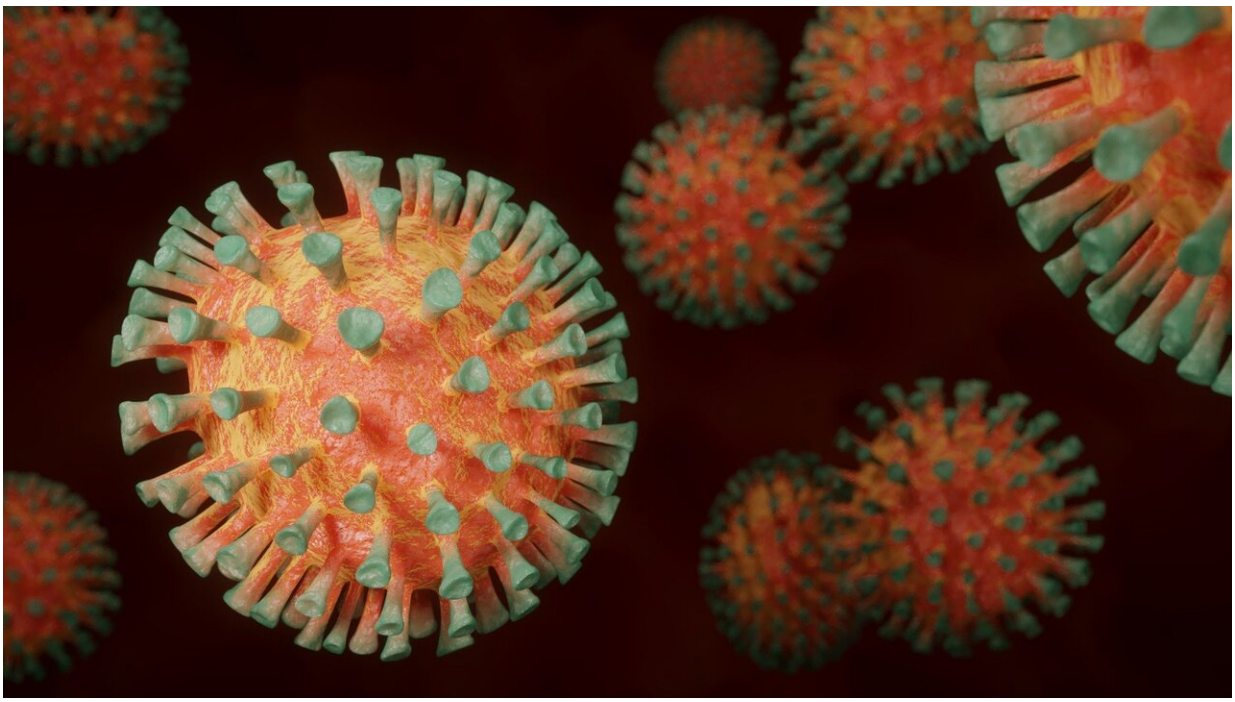

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Fewer than half of inmates in jails and prisons surveyed in a study by the CDC and University of Washington said they would accept a COVID-19 vaccine, while the majority either said they wanted to wait before getting the vaccine or would refuse one.

"This is a population already at risk for COVID-19, and outbreaks among incarcerated people can worsen inequities in COVID-19 outcomes as well as contribute to spread in the surrounding community," said lead author Dr. Marc Stern, affiliate assistant professor of health services in the UW School of Public Health. "So culturally and health-literacy informed interventions are needed to help them feel more confident about getting vaccinated."

The study conducted by CDC researchers and led by Stern was published Wednesday on the CDC's *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*. The researchers surveyed more than 5,000 inmates, men and women, in late 2020 from three prisons and 13 jails in Washington, California, Florida and Texas.

Among those asked about their willingness to receive a vaccine, only 45% said they were willing. More than 45% said they would refuse, and nearly 10% said they might or weren't sure they would receive it.

The most common reasons the participants gave for vaccine hesitancy fell into the response categories of waiting for more information or to see others take it first, and efficacy or safety concerns. The most common reason for given for refusal was distrust of the health care system, correctional or government personnel and institutions.

The survey was conducted before vaccines were available, but at the time Black and younger respondents were the least willing to get the vaccine. The researchers added that a lower willingness to receive a vaccine among Black participants was "not unexpected given historical mistreatment and higher rates of distrust" of these institutions.

"People of color are subject to a 'double whammy'—they are at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19 and they are disproportionately incarcerated, living in facilities where they are more likely to become

infected," Stern said.

"I hope this study sheds light on the need to find ways of assuring high levels of vaccination of incarcerated individuals," Stern added, "not just for their own health, but for the health of the community. Vaccinating incarcerated individuals not only decreases the risk that officers and other staff will bring COVID-19 home to their family, friends and community, it is also an efficient way to vaccinate a large number of people who are otherwise hard for public health providers to reach once they return to their communities."

More information: Marc F. Stern et al. Willingness to Receive a COVID-19 Vaccination Among Incarcerated or Detained Persons in Correctional and Detention Facilities—Four States, September–December 2020, *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (2021). DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7013a3

Provided by University of Washington

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