

Majority of 15–19-year-olds wanted COVID jab

October 22 2021



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Unconcerned for themselves—but willing to protect others. These attitudes were expressed by many teenagers on being asked whether they wanted to get vaccinated against COVID-19. The study, from the

University of Gothenburg, shows that a majority were in favor of the idea.

The study, published in the scientific journal *Vaccine: X*, is based on questionnaire responses from 702 adolescents in Sweden, aged 15–19, between July and November 2020. The survey was thus carried out before the country's vaccination program began.

The study was led by University of Gothenburg researchers in collaboration with colleagues at University West, Karolinska Institutet and Umeå University. The study participants came from various parts of Sweden, and the results are both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

The questionnaire survey results show that 54.3 percent were willing to be vaccinated, while 30.5 percent were undecided. Anxiety about getting vaccinated, which was more marked in girls than in boys, was a factor associated with reluctance to get vaccinated.

Many of the adolescent respondents stated that they had pondered the pros and cons of the COVID vaccine. Overall, their attitude was positive, while they said they needed to know more about it. In many cases, this perceived lack of knowledge was crucial to their decision.

Skepticism passed on from parents

One misgiving expressed was the rapid development and fast-tracking of the vaccine; here, respondents mentioned their worry about serious side effects. Some referred to the mass vaccinations against swine flu in 2009/10, when in some cases the vaccine caused narcolepsy.

This particular aspect took Stefan Nilsson by surprise. An associate professor and senior lecturer at the University's Institute of Health and Care Sciences at Sahlgrenska Academy, Nilsson is the study's first and

corresponding author.

"They were small children when the swine flu vaccinations came along, so it must have been their parents or other elders who influenced them, or else they've read about it. Clearly, that experience of the swine flu vaccine influences the younger generation as well," he says.

At the time of the data collection, there were no reports of COVID-related deaths among young people in Sweden. For their own part, moreover, many of the teenage respondents were unafraid of becoming infected and falling ill.

Wish to protect others

Many, on the other hand, voiced altruistic motives for getting vaccinated and thereby protecting others whose health was more fragile. A further indication that the adolescents were willing to get the jab for other people's sake was that this attitude was found to be linked to the practice of social distancing.

"The results suggest what steps need taking to make it easier for young people to make an informed decision ahead of getting vaccinated. They need factual information that the risks of COVID's adverse effects are greater than the risks of any side effects of the jab," Nilsson says.

"And the information needs to be spread through information channels that reach adolescents. What's more, it's important for there to be discussion forums where the young can meet experts who can discuss and answer their questions."

More information: S. Nilsson et al, To be or not to be vaccinated against COVID-19 – the adolescents' perspective – a mixed-methods study in Sweden, *Vaccine: X* (2021). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jvacx.2021.100117](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvacx.2021.100117)

Provided by University of Gothenburg

Citation: Majority of 15–19-year-olds wanted COVID jab (2021, October 22) retrieved 20 September 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-majority-year-olds-covid-jab.html>

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