

## New Mexico Statewide Parent Vaccination Messaging Survey Identifies Strategies to Help With Outreach for Vaccination of Children

### Executive Summary

BSP Research conducted a statewide survey of New Mexico parents and primary caregivers focused on better understanding parents' attitudes toward the vaccination of children. The study focuses on parents who still have unvaccinated children in the home. It also contains oversamples of the Hispanic and African American population, two populations who have had relatively low vaccination rates of children. The goal of this survey is to provide data to create evidenced-based strategies to improve outreach efforts aimed at New Mexican parents hesitant to vaccinate their children or who have faced challenges with the process. This executive summary provides the main findings of the research with an eye toward actions that can support the state as New Mexico continues to be a leader in vaccinations nationally and accelerate the vaccination of young children.

### Vaccination Up-Take among Parents and Causes of Hesitancy for Vaccinating Children

- Across the full sample, **77% of parents reported they were currently vaccinated, 23% were not.** Vaccinated parents identified “protecting their children and other family members” as one of the most important reasons to get vaccinated (60%). Over a fourth (27%) of vaccinated parents reported that they got a vaccine because it was **required** for school or work, indicating that vaccination requirements are effective. Furthermore, 26% of respondents reported getting the vaccine after their doctor said they needed to, reaffirming the power and critical role of the medical professional community in the vaccination efforts.
- **At the time of the survey, 42% of parents under the age of 12 planned to get their children vaccinated right away, 36% are waiting to hear how the vaccines are working before vaccinating their child, and 10% are waiting until it is easier to schedule an appointment. The remaining 13% are more resistant to vaccinating their children:** 6% indicate they will only vaccinate their child if it is a requirement of the school or childcare provider and 7% definitely do not plan to vaccinate their child.
  - While 52% of Democrats plan to get their children vaccinated right away, only 33% of independents and 24% of Republicans plan to do so; 21% of Republican parents do not plan to vaccinate their children at all.
  - Unvaccinated parents are also three times more likely to indicate that they will not vaccinate their children than vaccinated parents.
- If an updated COVID-19 vaccine is necessary, **half of parents in the state indicated they will definitely have their child take an updated vaccine once per year, with another 29% reporting that they might do so. Conversely, 13% of parents will not have their child take a COVID-19 vaccine every year.**

### Concerns about the safety of the vaccine and possible side effects are major sources of hesitancy among parents, as is lack of trust in government:

- The highest concern among parents are the potential side effects of the vaccine, such as heart inflammation. For parents with children under 12, 82% cite concern about side

effects. Additionally, concerns for the side effects in children are particularly high among unvaccinated parents, mothers, African Americans parents, and residents of rural counties in the state.

- **Roughly, 26% of parents note, “there has not been enough COVID-19 vaccination research conducted with children”** as another reason for hesitancy. The next most commonly cited concern among parents is that “COVID-19 vaccines do not have full FDA approval yet.” These types of concerns reinforce the need to provide parents with current factual information.

## Obstacles and Challenges Identified in the Survey

Despite the tremendous success of New Mexico’s vaccination program, the survey suggests there are areas for improvement, which could yield even higher uptake. Below are some of the findings from the survey in this area:

- A combined 23% of parents who have not vaccinated their children report that difficulty with the online registration process, long wait times to get a vaccine, or scheduling an appointment has prevented them from vaccinating their child/ren. **Having community members available to help with the online registration process or making appointments would help 72% of parents vaccinate their children.**
- 11% of parents who have not vaccinated their children said they tried to get their child a vaccine but could not get one or get an appointment.
- 11% of parents who have not vaccinated their children said that childcare and work schedules made it hard to schedule, or get a vaccine for their child. **More flexible hours, including weekends and evening hours, at vaccine locations would make getting children vaccinated easier for 76% of parents.**
- 8% of parents who have not vaccinated their children said the nearest vaccine location is too far or inconvenient, and 53% of parents with children under 12 are concerned that it will be too difficult to get to a location that vaccinates children. **Providing transportation to vaccination locations would help 73% of parents get their children vaccinated.**
- 49% of parents with children under 12 are concerned about the cost of the vaccine for their children. **Continuing to stress to parents that the vaccine is free will help overcome this issue.**
- **Language is a serious obstacle for many New Mexican families.** In fact, over half of immigrant parents are concerned that they might not be able to get information in a language that they understand.
- Finally, the immigrant community continues to express concern for needing a social security number or government issued ID in order to get their child vaccinated. There is also concern that their immigration status will be impacted or brought into question by getting their children vaccinated. **We must provide focused messaging in languages other than English to immigrant families to reassure them that anyone can get a vaccine regardless of immigration status and that no social security numbers or government issued IDs are required.**

## Parents are Highly Worried about COVID-19, but This Does not Translate Directly to Motivation to Vaccinate Children

The survey reveals that parents are very worried about the health consequences of COVID-19, particularly for their children.

- 53% of parents are very worried that they will get seriously sick from the coronavirus.
- An even higher percentage of parents are very worried about their children getting seriously sick from the coronavirus, with greater concern among parents with children under the age of 12 – 68% compared to 50% among parents with children 12-18.
- Nearly half (46%) of parents are more worried now about their family’s health being affected by COVID-19 than they were a year ago.

Interestingly, this high concern about the consequences of COVID-19 does not directly translate into motivation for vaccinating children. **Most notably, more parents report that getting a vaccine makes them worried about getting seriously sick due to COVID-19 than parents who report it would make them less worried - 38% compared to 36%.** We believe that this finding is a result of the perception among many New Mexicans that the vaccine can make you sick with COVID-19, a critical inaccuracy and attitude that must be addressed with correct information.

Following the rise of the delta variant and efficacy of the vaccine over time has undoubtedly affected how parents view the trade-off between the side effects associated with a COVID-19 vaccine and the prospect of your child getting sick with the virus.

- **71% of the sample are concerned that there are “so many breakthrough cases that a vaccine might be worth the side effects”**, including 40% who are very concerned.
- The survey also found that **67% of parents are concerned that they may need to miss work to get their children vaccinated or if the side effects cause their children to miss school.** Finally, 78% of parents said that getting sick leave time from their employer in the event their children have vaccine side effects would make getting their children vaccinated easier.

**Messaging that addresses the underlying fear of the virus while stressing that any side effects of the vaccine are much less severe than the actual virus could be highly effective.** However, it is critical to address the challenges working parents will face if their children must miss school due to short-term effects of the vaccine.

## Strategies to Help Achieve Wider Vaccination of Children in New Mexico

- **60% of parents report that being able to get free meal free tickets, or a gift card to family-oriented businesses or a cash incentive (a \$100 bill) after their child is fully vaccinated would make them more likely to vaccinate their children.** These incentives are particularly effective in the survey for parents who live in rural areas of the state and younger parents between the ages of 19-34.
- These interventions/incentives can significantly increase vaccination for high priority sub-groups: **51% of self-identified Republicans and 41% of unvaccinated parents would be more likely to vaccinate their children if they were able to get an incentive.**
- **A fourth of parents (25%) prefer to receive the vaccine in their doctor’s office, with a slightly higher 27% preferring at their child’s doctor’s office.** A high percentage (27%)

of Native American parents prefer to get their children vaccinated at a clinic at their reservation or tribe/pueblo.

- 72% of parents reported that holding vaccination clinics at their place of employment, or their children's school, day care, or sports events would help them get their children vaccinated.

## Messages and Messengers That Have Traction in New Mexico

The survey focused a significant amount of time with respondents on testing messages intended to motivate parents to vaccinate their children. Parents were given a series of messaging themes and then asked if a particular message made them more likely to want to get a COVID-19 vaccine for their child or children.

- One of the strongest overall messages is: **“A COVID-19 vaccine will make my child safer and much less likely to get sick from COVID-19.”** This message has nearly universal effectiveness across sub-groups of the state, with 57% of the sample indicating that the message makes them much more likely to want to get their child a vaccine. This theme was particularly effective for non-Hispanic white parents, rural residents of the state, and among fathers. This was also the strongest performing messaging theme among Republicans.
- The second strongest performing message is: **“Over the past year and half, COVID-19 has robbed our children of many important experiences, like graduation, playing sports, and being able to go to school in person. The best way to make sure our children continue to have these experiences is to get them vaccinated now.”** Overall, 54% of the sample indicating that the message makes them much more likely to want to get their child a vaccine, including 49% of Republicans.

The survey identifies messages that have traction among specific segments of the overall parent population in New Mexico. For example, the following message that focuses on clinical trial research performed particularly well with African American and Native American parents: **Pfizer's clinical trial research has found that full vaccination of children ages 5 to 11 proved effective in protecting 9 out of 10 children from COVID-19. The vaccine is safe and effective for our children.**

In regards to messengers, the survey tested a wide range of potential messengers who might be able to persuade parents who are hesitant to vaccinate their children to do so.

- **Consistent with the last vaccination survey, members of the medical professional community continue to be highly trusted when it comes to information about COVID-19 vaccines.** More specifically, 57% of parents trust Medical professionals (both doctor and nurses) “a great deal” on the issue of COVID-19 vaccines. Trust in medical professionals is particularly high among racial and ethnic minorities, led by 74% of African American parents who trust medical professionals “a great deal” on vaccines.
- The survey found that messenger categories test better among racial and ethnic minorities when the doctors are from their own racial or ethnic group. We therefore suggest that images used in creative material promoting the vaccine should be diverse and ideally feature local medical professionals from each respective community.

- **A child's health care provider or pediatrician was second overall among most trusted messengers tested in the survey** and had very consistent performance across the full sample. Health care providers and pediatricians are particularly well trusted messengers for parents with 5-11 years old children.
- Utilization of New Mexico's parents who have already vaccinated their children in messaging could also be effective. First responders and pharmacists who work in the community were also rated as highly effective and trusted messengers.

Parents were also asked whether a medical professional had suggested that they vaccinate their child. **40% of parents said that their child's doctor strongly recommended that they get their child vaccinated**, whereas 12% suggested that they "wait and see" before vaccinating their child or children. Another 21% have talked to their child's doctor about the vaccine but that the doctor did not provide a recommendation, and 20% have not had this discussion with their child's doctor.

The survey also asked respondents their views regarding several interventions aimed at improving vaccination uptake, below are the main findings:

- 77% of parents support employers requiring their employees get vaccinated, wear masks and/or get frequent COVID-19 tests.
- 71% of parents support requiring all students and school staff get vaccinated to continue attending school in person.
- 69% support local policies allowing vaccinated people to use restaurants, bars, or other indoor spaces.

## Survey Methodology Statement

BSP Research conducted a statewide survey of New Mexico parents and primary caregivers. Overall, the survey interviewed 750 parents/primary caregivers from November 9, 2021 – November 19, 2021 through a combination of web-based and telephone interviews (both cell and land-line). The study is focused on parents of children who have not yet vaccinated all of the children in the home, and has oversamples of the Hispanic and African American population, two populations who have had relatively low vaccination rates of children. The survey was available in English and Spanish based on the preference of the respondent and had a median length of 20 minutes. Post-stratification weights were implemented using a raking algorithm to balance the sample to the 2019 Census ACS estimates for gender, age, education, nativity, and geography. The survey has an overall MOE of +/- 3.5%. The survey was supported by the Con Alma Health Foundation and the development of this report was supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in a grant provided to the UNM Center for Social Policy.