

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

Authors:

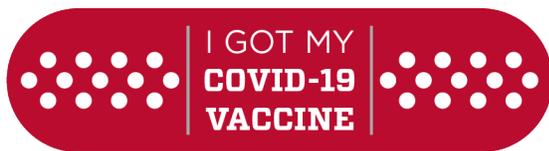
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Introduction

BSP Research conducted a statewide survey of New Mexico parents and primary caregivers to better understand parents' attitudes toward the vaccination of their children. The study focuses on parents who still have unvaccinated children in the home. It also contains oversamples of the Hispanic and African American populations, two populations with relatively low child vaccination rates.

This survey aims to provide data for creating evidence-based strategies to improve outreach efforts, specifically for those New Mexican parents hesitant to vaccinate their children or who have faced challenges with the process. This report provides the main findings of the research while maintaining a focus on actions that can support the state as New Mexico continues to be a leader in vaccinations nationally.

Vaccination Up-Take Among Parents and Drivers to Hesitancy for Vaccinating Children

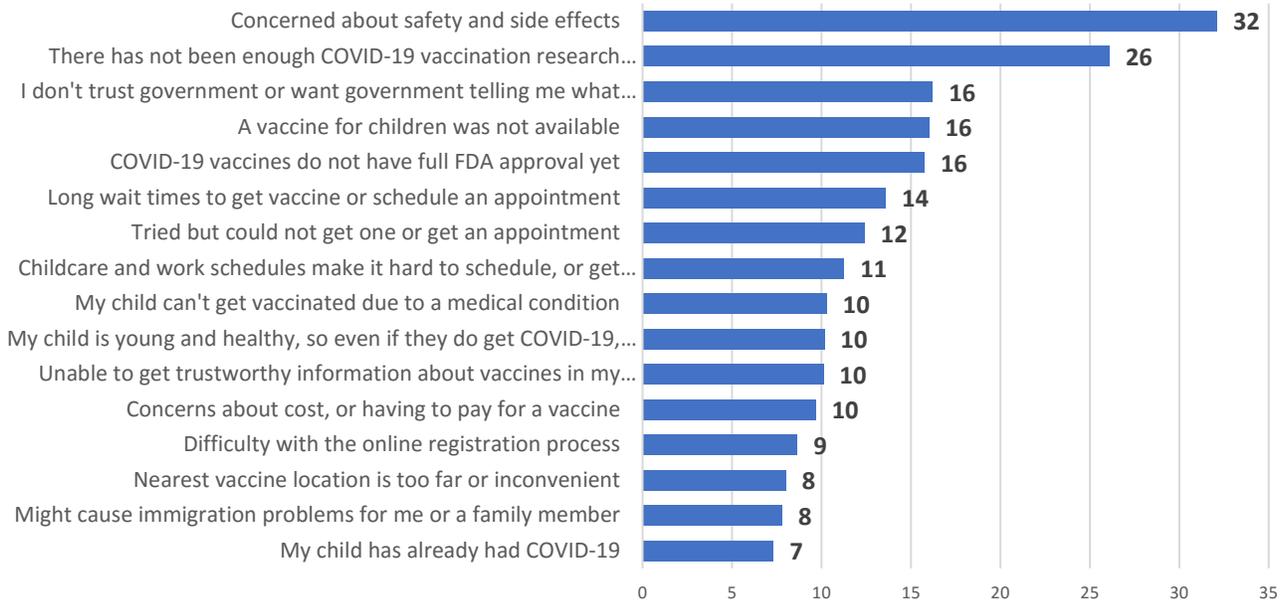


The survey began by asking respondents for their COVID-19 vaccination status. Across the entire sample, **77% of parents reported they were currently vaccinated, 23% were not.** Vaccinated parents identified “protecting their children and

other family members” as one of the most important reasons to get vaccinated (60%), followed by “to make sure I stay healthy.” 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.

Unvaccinated respondents were asked to identify the main reasons they decided not to get a COVID-19 vaccine. The most commonly provided reason was concerns about the vaccine's safety and possible side effects (52%). Additionally, a large portion (19%) of respondents noted the concern that not all of the COVID-19 vaccines have full FDA approval yet. One method of combatting this concern is to continue to provide the public with the research showing that most vaccinated Americans (both children and adults) have very minor side effects.

People have not vaccinated their children for many different reasons. What are the most important reasons you have not vaccinated one of your children?



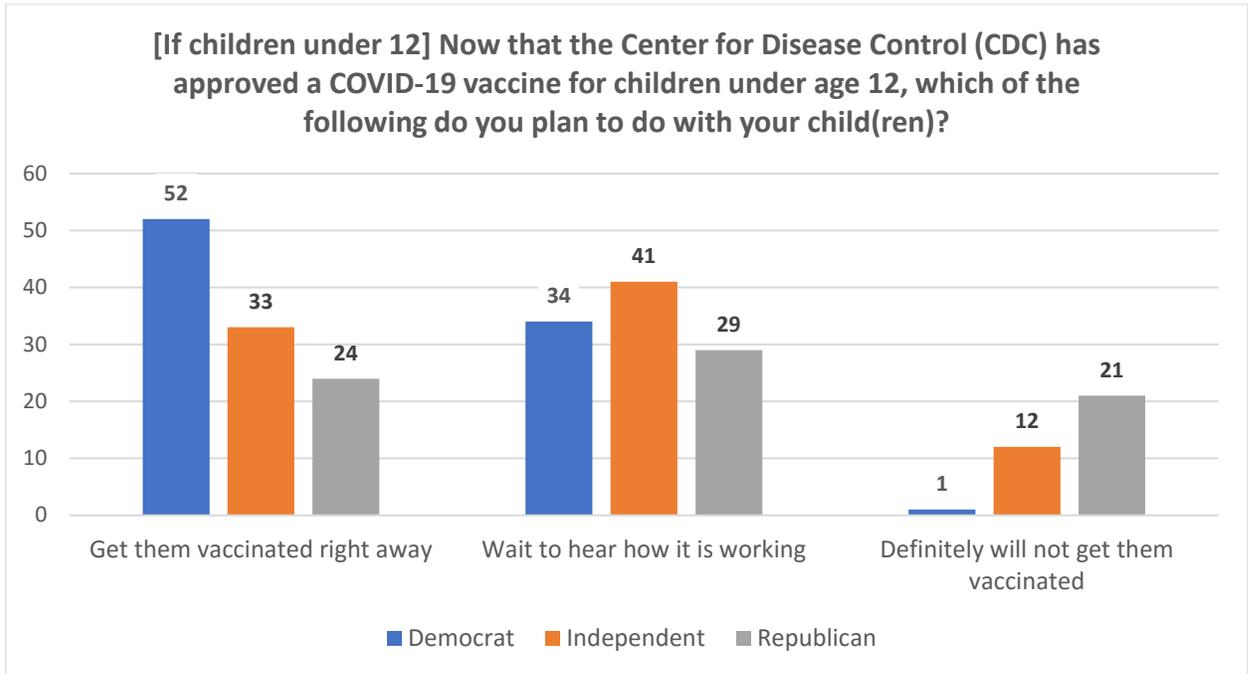
However, it will be more challenging to persuade some of the New Mexico population. For instance, one-third of the state's unvaccinated population (33%) report that their lack of trust and desire not be told what to do by the government is a reason for not becoming vaccinated.

33% REPORT A LACK OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT

At the time of the survey, 42% of parents with children under the age of 12 planned to get their children vaccinated right away, 36% were waiting to

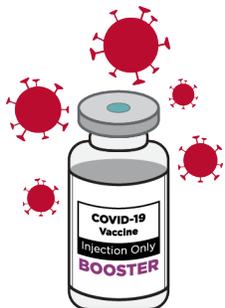
hear how the vaccines are working before vaccinating their child, and 10% were waiting until it is easier to schedule an appointment. The remaining **13% were more resistant to vaccinating their children:** 6% indicate they would only vaccinate their child if required by a school or childcare provider, and 7% who do not plan to vaccinate their child at all.

- 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 the parents in the state indicated they would 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.**

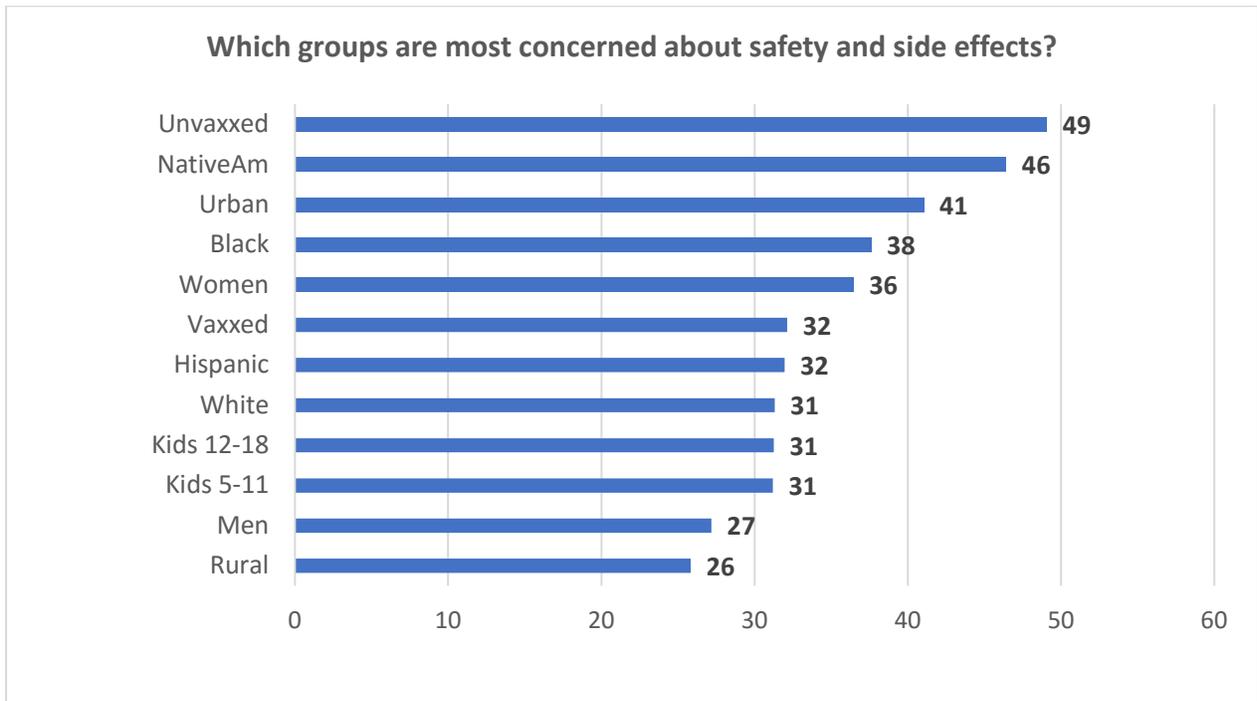
When we look at internal variation across the statewide sample, we find that partisanship continues to be a significant factor in vaccination attitudes. For example, while 52% of Democrats plan to get their children vaccinated right away, only 33% of independents and 24% of Republicans plan on doing so. Conversely, 21% of Republican parents do not plan to get their children vaccinated, compared to 12% of independents and 1% of Democrats.



There is also a strong correlation between parents' vaccination status and their likelihood of vaccinating their children. Unvaccinated parents are three times more likely to indicate that they will not vaccinate their children compared to parents who are vaccinated themselves. With an increasing realization that booster shots will be needed to fully protect both adults and children, the survey asked parents about their views on annual boosters. Half of the parents in the state will have their child take an updated COVID-19 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.

The primary focus of the survey is to increase the vaccination uptake of children in the state. With this in mind, we asked parents with unvaccinated children over the age of 12 why they have not yet vaccinated their children, and parents with children under 12 how concerned they would be about a similar set of issues.

The data identifies that parents are highly concerned about the safety of the vaccine for their children and need reassurance that there has been enough research done with children to verify that the vaccines are effective and pose no safety issues. More specifically, as reflected in the figure below, roughly one-third (32%) of parents with unvaccinated children over 11 years of age indicate that “concerns about safety and side effects” are major reasons for their hesitancy. Concerns with the side effects for their children are particularly high for mothers, African American parents, and residents of rural counties in the state. The sub-group of unvaccinated parents in the state are the most concerned with side effects.



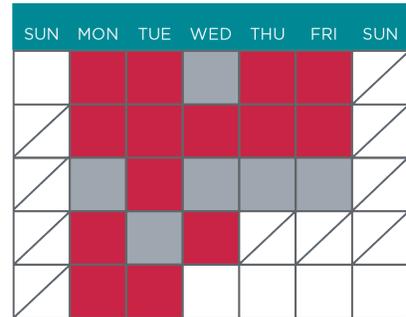
Roughly, 26% noted, “there has not been enough COVID-19 vaccination research conducted with children.” The next most commonly cited concern among parents is that “COVID-19 vaccines do not have full FDA approval yet.” This reinforces the need to provide parents with factual information.

The parents of younger children have a similar set of concerns. Synonymous with the entirety of respondents, the deepest concern among parents with children 5-12 years old is the potential side effects of the vaccine for children (82% of these parents are “concerned”/47% are “very concerned”), including heart inflammation. This is particularly concerning to mothers and residents of rural areas in the state.

Obstacles and Challenges Identified in the Survey

Despite the tremendous work that the state of New Mexico has completed with its vaccination program, the survey suggests areas of improvement to yield 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.** Over half of immigrant parents are concerned that they might not get information in a language they understand.
- Finally, the immigrant community continues to express concern for needing a social security number or government-issued ID 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.**



The survey also asked respondents what would make them feel more comfortable with getting their child vaccinated. Respondents could choose as many items from a list provided to them as they liked; below are some of the most commonly cited items:

- More clear information from agencies, i.e., Center for Disease Control (CDC) or Food and Drug Administration (FDA), telling us that it is safe and effective for kids **54%**
- More time to learn about vaccine side effects and long-term effects on children **42%**
- More information from my, or my children's, doctor **40%**
- Hearing from parents and people I know whose children have been vaccinated **30%**
- Hearing from school and community leaders **23%**

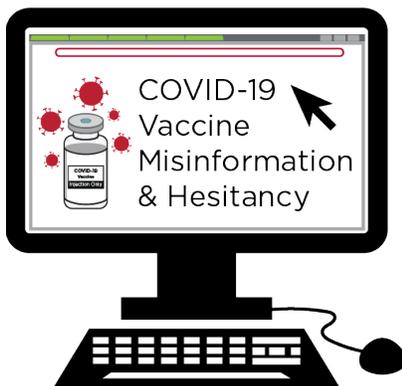
The survey suggests that making clear information from official sources available to parents is the most crucial step to make parents more comfortable vaccinating their children, including more information directly from their child's doctor.

Roughly, a third of respondents indicated that hearing from parents, and others in their personal network, who have had their children vaccinated would make them more comfortable vaccinating their children. Encouraging families who have been through the vaccination process to reach out to other parents in their network to encourage them to start the process for vaccination and answer questions they might have can be effective.

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

The survey reveals that parents are apprehensive about the health consequences of COVID-19, particularly for their children. Thus, messaging should stress that any side effects of the vaccine are much less severe than the actual virus to be highly effective. Below are some of the main findings from this section of the survey.

- 53% of parents are very worried that they will get seriously sick from the coronavirus.
- An even higher percentage of parents are worried that their children will get seriously sick from the coronavirus, with more significant concern among parents with children under the age of 12 (68%) compared to 50% among the parents of 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 serious 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 of the COVID-19 vaccine and the prospect of their 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 that the side effects may cause their children to miss school.** Finally, 78% of parents said that having sick leave time from their employer should their children have vaccine side effects would make getting their children vaccinated easier.

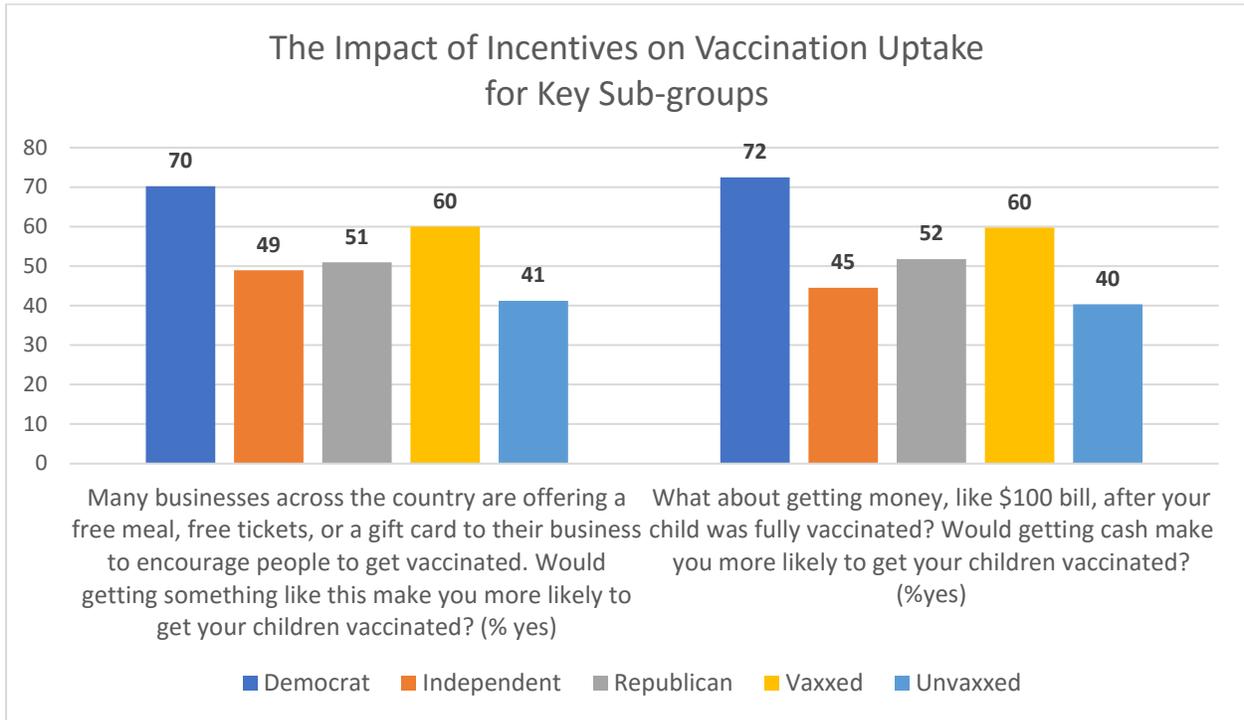
Messaging that addresses the underlying fear of the virus while stressing that any side effects of the vaccine are much less severe than the actual virus could be highly effective. However, it is critical to address the challenges working parents will face if their children must miss school due to the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

Strategies to Help Achieve Wider Vaccination of Children



Will Incentives Improve Vaccination of Children?

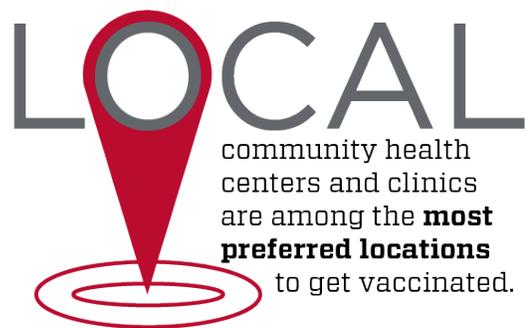
Since the state of New Mexico has had high success with its incentive programs, the survey included questions about whether the prospect of incentives could lead to higher vaccination of children. The survey asked parents if getting two different types of incentives would make them more likely to get their children vaccinated. As reflected in the figure below, both types of incentives have the same impact on the vaccination of children - 60% of parents report that getting free meal free tickets or gift cards to family-oriented businesses would make them more likely to get their children vaccinated. An identical percentage of parents report that getting a \$100 bill once their child was fully vaccinated would make them more likely to vaccinate their children. These incentives are particularly effective for parents who live in rural areas and younger parents between the ages of 19-34.



Although incentives tested more effectively among Democrats and vaccinated parents, these interventions can also significantly increase vaccination for other high-priority sub-groups. For example, 51% of self-identified Republicans and 41% of unvaccinated parents would be more likely to vaccinate their children if they could get a free meal, free tickets, or a gift card to family-oriented businesses.

Where do Parents Want to get Their Children Vaccinated?

The survey included measures of where New Mexican parents would prefer to get their children vaccinated. 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. The other locations with high preference among parents include community health clinics, hospitals/health centers, and clinics set up by their local health department. A high percentage (27%) of Native American parents prefer to get their children vaccinated at a clinic at their reservation or tribe/pueblo.



The wide range of options identified as preferred vaccination locations suggests that having multiple paths available to parents will help with the vaccination uptake of children. This is supported by the high percentage of parents (72%) who agree that holding vaccination clinics on-site at work would help them get their children vaccinated, as well as providing vaccinations at schools, daycares, and children’s sports events (also 72%). A similarly high percentage of parents (73%) said holding vaccination clinics at popular community cultural

events would help them vaccinate their children. The survey also found that 74% of parents believe that making COVID-19 vaccines available when children receive other routine vaccines would help make vaccinating their children more manageable.

Support for Vaccination Requirement Policies

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 to get vaccinated, or wear masks, and get frequent COVID-19 tests.
- 71% of parents support requiring all students and school staff to get vaccinated to continue attending school in person.
- 70% of parents support the state of New Mexico requiring people to get COVID-19 vaccines.
- 69% support local policies allowing vaccinated people to use restaurants, bars, or other indoor spaces.

Messages and Messengers That Have Traction in New Mexico

The survey focused mostly 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 get a COVID-19 vaccine for their child(ren).

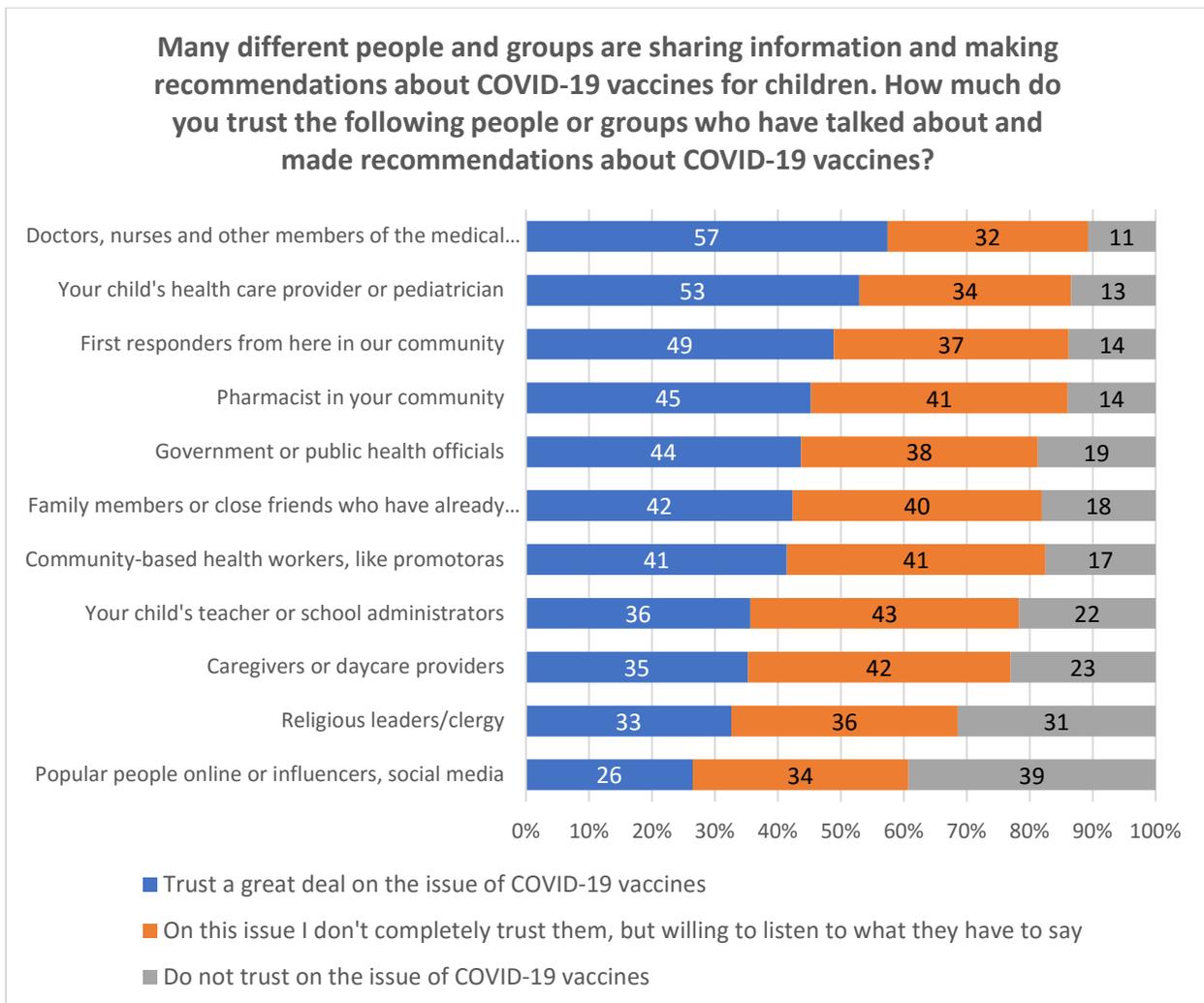
One of the strongest overall messages is: **“A COVID-19 vaccine will make my child safer and much less likely to get sick from COVID-19.”** This message has nearly universal effectiveness across sub-groups of the state, with 57% of the sample indicating that the message makes them much more likely to want to get their child a vaccine. This messaging theme was particularly effective for non-Hispanic white parents, those who live in rural areas of the state, and fathers. This was also the strongest performing messaging theme among Republicans.

The second strongest performing message is: **“Over the past year and a 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 indicates that this message makes them more likely to get their child a vaccine, including 49% of Republicans.

Given the concerns parents have about side effects associated with vaccination of children there is a high need to address that concern with positively framed messaging. The following message was the strongest performing among those focused on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines for children: **Over 100,000 children in New Mexico have already received COVID-19 vaccines. It is clear that there are no major side effects for nearly all children who got a COVID-19 shot here in New Mexico. A total of 80% of parents said that hearing this message made them more likely to get their child vaccinated, including 50% who said it made them much more likely to do so. This message is particularly effective among immigrants and parents who live in rural areas of the state.**

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 exceptionally well with parents who are African American and Native American: **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.**

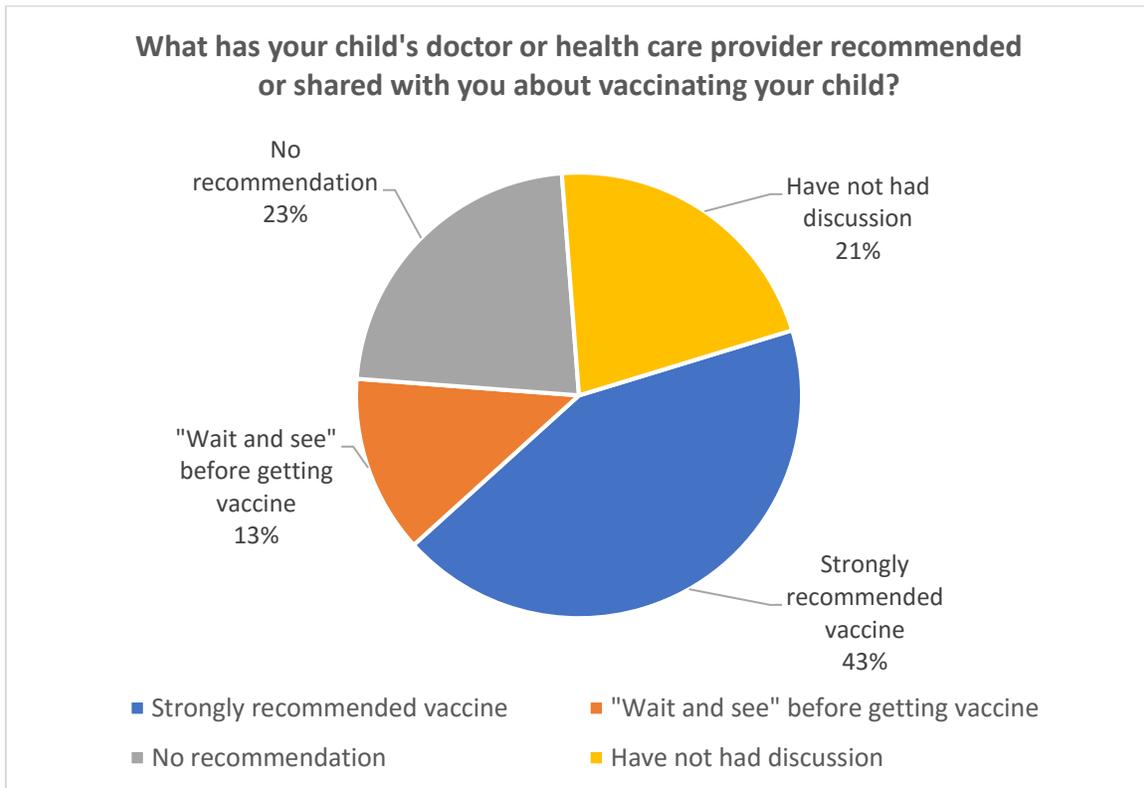
In regards to messengers, the survey tested a wide range of potential messengers who might be able to persuade hesitant parents to vaccinate their children. Consistent with the last vaccination survey, members of the medical professional community continue to be highly trusted regarding COVID-19 vaccines. More specifically, 57% of parents trust medical professionals (both doctors and nurses) "a great deal" on the issue of COVID-19 vaccines. This trust 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 promotional material for the vaccine should be diverse and feature local medical professionals from each respective community.

A child’s health care provider or pediatrician was the second overall most trusted messenger tested in the survey. Although this was consistent across the full sample of respondents, they are particularly well trusted messengers for parents with 5-11-year-old children.

Given the high trust that parents have in their child’s health care provider, we asked all parents whether their medical professional has suggested that they vaccinate their child. As reflected in the figure below, **40% of parents said that their child’s doctor strongly recommended that they get their child vaccinated**, compared to 12% who 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 reported that the doctor did not provide a recommendation, and 20% have not had this discussion with their child’s doctor.



Utilizing parents of vaccinated children in messaging could also be effective, as 40% of parents indicate that while they might not “completely trust friends and family members who have already vaccinated their children on this issue,” they would be willing to listen to them. This is in addition to the 44% of parents who greatly trust their personal network on this issue. Additionally, first responders and pharmacists who work in the community were also rated as highly effective messengers.

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

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

Conclusions

The survey provides an essential frame of reference for the New Mexico Department of Health and other public health leaders working hard to vaccinate children across the state. There is good news in the survey data, including that over 40% of parents with children under 12 plan to get their children vaccinated immediately. However, almost as many parents will take a wait-and-see approach before vaccinating their children and a smaller percentage (13%) are much more hesitant.

The survey provides insights on what can be done to persuade parents who are ideologically resistant or may face obstacles in vaccinating their children. The most significant concern among parents who have yet to vaccinate their children in New Mexico is the side effects associated with the vaccine for children, including the potential for heart inflammation. The survey suggests that concerns with side effects are associated with more than the direct health implications for their children such as the challenges working parents will face if their child has to miss any school requiring that they miss work.

Messaging that stresses that the overwhelming majority of children have experienced very minor side effects and that there has been extensive clinical trial research conducted with children to ensure that the vaccine is safe for all children 5 years of age and older will be vital. Most parents in New Mexico would like to get more clear information from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) or Food and Drug Administration (FDA), telling them that the vaccine is safe and effective for kids; thus, referencing information from these specific entities would be advisable. Pushing employers across the state to provide flexibility to families who may need paid leave to vaccinate their children and deal with the potential minor side effects would also be impactful.

Parents prefer to be able to set up a vaccination appointment with either their doctor or their child's pediatrician. However, parents who want their children vaccinated will ultimately utilize a wide range of options, including having clinics at their children's school or their place of employment to make the vaccination process accessible. Additionally, providing vaccination opportunities over the weekends and in the evenings will help many families with vaccination access.

Finally, the survey identifies that incentives could significantly increase uptake for children, similar to their positive impact for adult vaccinations in the past year. Incentives, whether a cash payment or gift cards to family-friendly businesses, are popular among a wide range of parents, including ideologically hesitant parents. Implementing incentives would therefore be a highly effective intervention.

Our team intends to investigate additional strategies to improve trust in the vaccination process among all New Mexicans, including parents. This will include drawing additional information from this survey to connect the best-performing messages into outreach materials. This, ideally, would improve vaccine uptake and help New Mexico remain a role model for other states during the fight against the COVID-19 virus.

Please see our COVID-19 webpage for more of our research and info-graphics to use for outreach efforts: <https://csp.unm.edu/covid-19/index.html>

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 landline). The study focused on parents of children who have not yet been vaccinated. It has oversamples of the Hispanic and African American populations, two populations with relatively low vaccination rates of children. The survey was available in English and Spanish based on the respondent's preference 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 Con Alma Health Foundation supported this survey, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation supported the development of this report through a grant provided to the UNM Center for Social Policy.

About the Author Team

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