

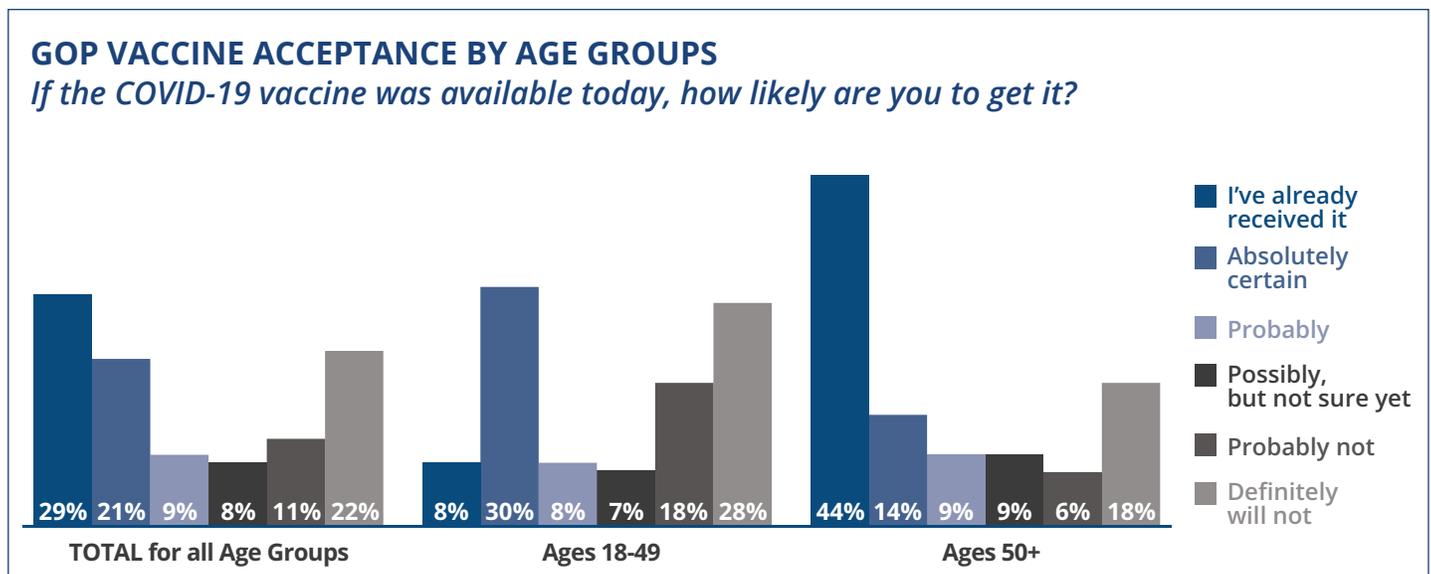
# COVID VACCINES: MOVING FROM CONCERN TO CONFIDENCE

Insights from research with Republican voters, March 2021

In recent polls, people who voted for President Trump have been among the most likely to say they won't get a COVID vaccine. Getting as many Americans vaccinated is vital to ending the pandemic, rebuilding our economy, and getting back to living our lives the way we want to. To determine what it will take to build more confidence, the de Beaumont Foundation, a non-partisan public health foundation, partnered with pollster Dr. Frank Luntz to ask Americans who voted for Trump about their perceptions and concerns.

On March 13, Dr. Luntz moderated a focus group with 19 Trump voters who said "possibly" or "probably not" when asked if they'd get the vaccine. The two-hour session explored words, sentences, phrases, and arguments to determine the messages that are most likely to build trust in the vaccine. By the end of the discussion, all 19 participants said they were more likely to get vaccinated. Using the lessons learned from the focus group, Dr. Luntz polled 1,000 Trump voters March 14-16 to validate the findings and gain additional insights.

In the poll, 78% of Trump voters said they may eventually get the vaccine. Achieving that rate and building confidence among all Americans must begin with listening and understanding. By using the insights, tips, and messages in this document, you can help end the pandemic.



## THE CHALLENGE

### Who Are We Talking About?

According to the poll, these Trump voters are the most hesitant:

- People who say COVID isn't serious
- Women age 18-49
- People without a college education
- Residents of small towns and rural areas

Their perceptions and attitudes are shaped by their worldview about COVID-19, the government, and public health in general. While they believe the virus has been overblown by the media, 96% said they believe it's real. They are not anti-science or anti-vaxxers. Most have received their other required vaccines, and about three-fourths usually or always wear masks when they're outdoors and around other people.

**TRUMP REPUBLICANS DO NOT BELIEVE COVID IS “FAKE NEWS,” BUT THEY DO BELIEVE THE VIRUS IS OVERBLOWN**

*What has been your overall reaction to the media reporting on the pandemic?*

Total	18-49	50+	
11%	15%	9%	COVID is actually much worse than what has been written and said by the media
13%	13%	12%	COVID is somewhat worse than what has been written and said by the media
16%	18%	15%	COVID is accurately reported by the media
55%	51%	59%	COVID is not as bad as what the media said and wrote
4%	3%	5%	COVID is fake news; we shut down our economy and our lives for nothing

**What Are Their Concerns?**

The reluctance of some Republicans to say they'll get a vaccine is caused by many different factors. There are two drivers:

- Potential side effects
- The speed of development

These are the greatest contributors to the perception of safety, which matters much more to hesitant Trump voters than the effectiveness of the vaccine.

**YOUNGER REPUBLICANS ARE MUCH MORE WORRIED ABOUT THE SPEED OF THE VACCINE DEVELOPMENT**

*Which of the following is a more accurate statement about the COVID-19 vaccines ... That they were...?*

Total	18-49	50+	
58%	36%	<b>73%</b>	Developed quickly but with rigorous testing, proper protocols, and required safety precautions, and therefore safe
42%	<b>64%</b>	27%	Rushed in their development, clinical trials, and manufacturing, and therefore unsafe

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

The following recommendations are drawn from the March focus group and poll with Republicans and may be applicable to other audiences as well.

**Be positive.** People want to hear the benefits of getting a vaccine more than the consequences of not getting it.

**Recognize that this is a personal choice.** Trump voters and other Republicans feel strongly that they want to make their own decision and not be told what to do. Don't "sell" the vaccine – instead, provide factual information and answer questions objectively.

**Keep politics out of it.** Trump voters say they trust science, but science has been politicized. Regardless of party affiliation, as soon as someone hears something that sounds political (from either side), they'll tune it out.

**Compare potential risks with proven risks.** To address side effects, acknowledge the concern and then contrast the unknown risks of getting the vaccine with the known dangers of getting the virus.

**Explain the speed of development.** To address the speed at which the vaccines were developed, explain that scientists were able to develop the vaccines faster—not because we cut corners, but because we cut red tape and bureaucracy.

**Stick to the facts.** Stories about the randomness and unpredictability of COVID can be compelling, but when it comes to the vaccine, facts and data are most important. Emotional appeals are much less likely to be persuasive.

**Don't judge, attack, or shame.** This is a time for listening, not attacking or name-calling if someone has questions or concerns. Acknowledge that it's reasonable to have concerns about a brand-new vaccine for a new disease.

**Choose the right messengers.** The most effective sources will be doctors, family, and other people who are already trusted. Young Republicans (18-49) are more likely than older Republicans to be influenced by their peers and their parents. But the most important messengers for all Republicans are doctors -- and specifically their own doctor.

## MESSAGES

### 5 FAST FACTS

These five messages were the most likely to motivate focus group participants and poll respondents to get a vaccine:

- 1 The vaccines are up to 95% effective, even more than the annual flu vaccine, which is typically 40% to 60% effective.
- 2 If enough people are vaccinated, we can prevent 100,000 deaths or more.
- 3 Nearly all doctors who have been offered the vaccine have taken it.
- 4 The speed of the vaccines' development was due to reducing administrative bureaucracy, not bypassing any safety precautions. We didn't cut corners on safety. We cut red tape.
- 5 The phase 3 trials for the three authorized vaccines enrolled tens of thousands of people, and none were hospitalized or died.

## THEMES THAT WORK FOR REPUBLICAN VOTERS

### American freedom:

This is a free country, and Americans should be able to make their own decisions. You deserve the facts, the evidence, and the tools to help you stay safe, and then draw your own conclusions. You should take the vaccine if you choose to, not because someone tells you to.

### Prevention and protection:

Taking the vaccine is like wearing a seatbelt. You never know if you'll get in a car accident, but you always wear one just in case. It's all about prevention and protection. Similarly, getting the vaccine provides you more protection than not getting it.

USE THESE WORDS MORE	USE THESE WORDS LESS
Safe and effective vaccines	Vaccines developed in record time
The benefits of taking the vaccine	The consequences of not taking the vaccine
Science, data, facts	Emotion
Living life as free as before	Preventing restrictions on freedom
Documented side effects of COVID	Unknown side effects of the vaccine
Educate/inform	Persuade/convince
Personal responsibility	National duty
Doctors, nurses, physicians	Politicians, executives, government officials
Researchers, scientists	Pharmaceutical companies
Unsure, concerned, worried, anxious	Hesitant, reluctant, skeptical, anti-vax
Personal choice, freedom of movement	Mandates, requirements
A way to expand freedom	A way to prevent freedom from being restricted

The positive-negative-positive language construct is a powerful way to engage with Republicans. Think about what we get and what we give up. With the vaccine, we get to live our daily lives free of intervention. Without the vaccine, the restrictions on our lives will continue.

The most impactful message is how the vaccine will reduce the government's restrictions on our lives and our freedoms. Without widespread vaccination, mask mandates and personal lockdowns will continue.

The freedom argument is even more motivational than the economic argument. (Leading with "opening the economy" is the wrong approach.)

**SHOWING THE VACCINE IS SAFE MATTERS MORE THAN SHOWING IT IS EFFECTIVE**

*When it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine, what evidence would increase your likelihood of taking the vaccine?*

**58%**

Real-life evidence that the vaccine is safe

**42%**

Real-life evidence that the vaccine is effective

**LEAD WITH THE CARROT, NOT THE STICK**

*When considering if you will get the COVID-19 vaccine, would you rather know...?*

**66%**

The benefits of getting the vaccine

**34%**

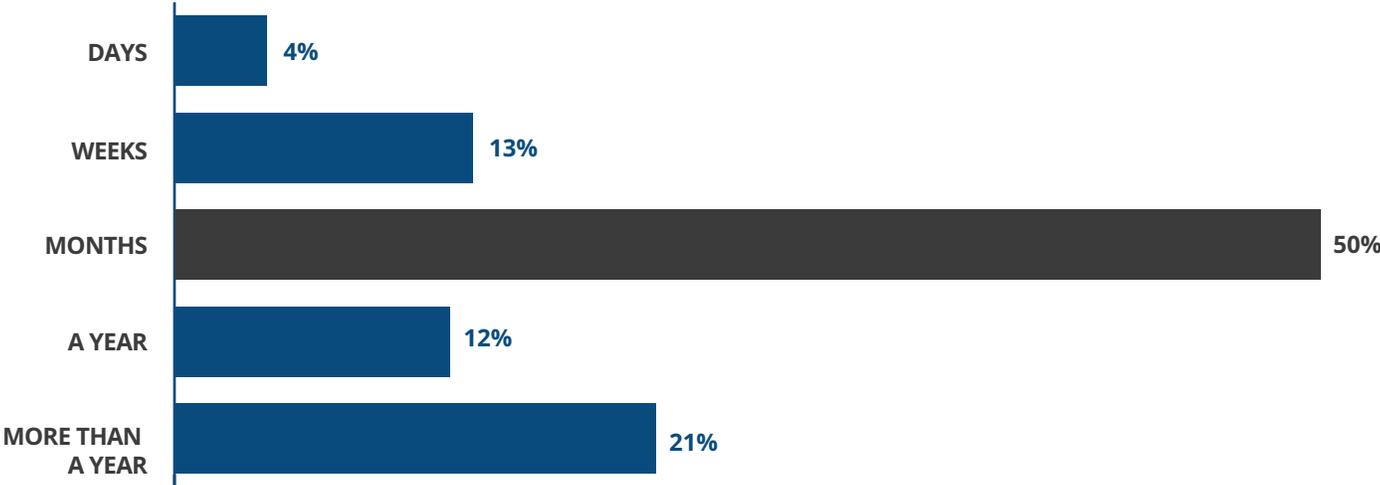
The consequences of not getting the vaccine

**LIKELIHOOD OF GETTING A COVID VACCINE**

A total of 78% said they may eventually get the vaccine, though not all would be willing to make that commitment if it were available to them today.

**AMONG THOSE REPUBLICANS WAITING, A MAJORITY WANT TO WAIT MONTHS TO RECEIVE THE VACCINE**

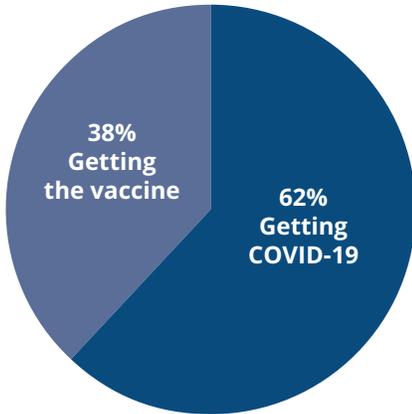
*How long you do plan on waiting before getting the COVID-19 vaccine the moment it is available to you? (does not include those who said they have received the vaccine or are "absolutely certain" they will)*



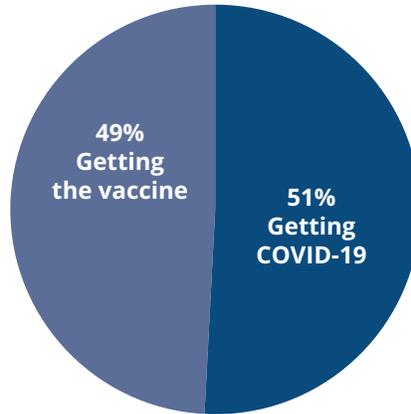
There is an essential age divide between younger Republicans, who are much more hesitant and skeptical of the vaccine than older Republicans. They will require different messages and messengers.

**YOUNG AND RURAL REPUBLICANS ARE AS CONCERNED ABOUT THE VACCINE AS COVID**  
*Based on what we know about the virus, what are you more afraid of?*

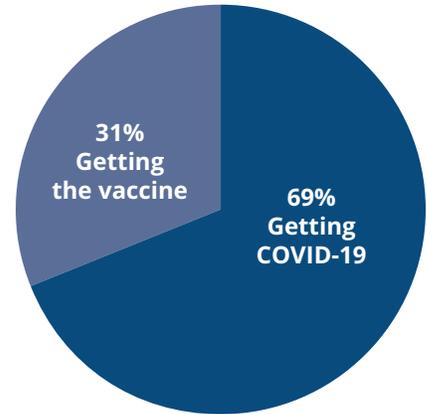
TOTAL for all Age Groups



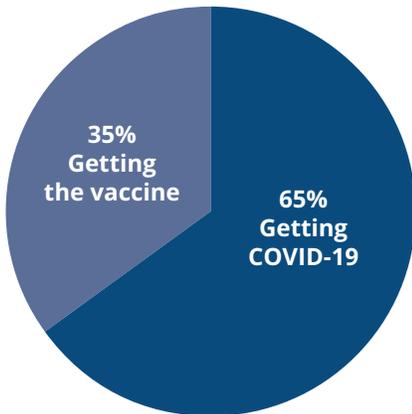
Ages 18-49



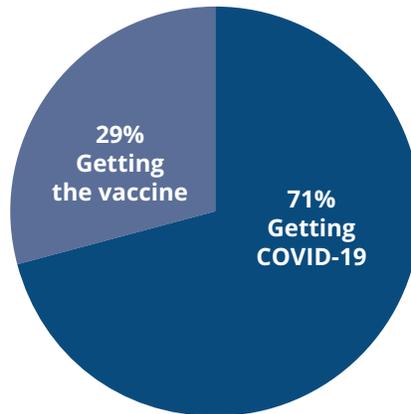
Ages 50+



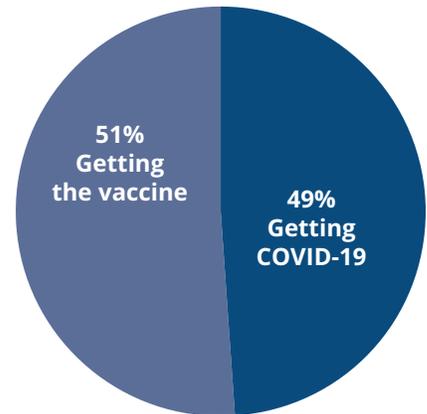
City



Suburb



Small town/Rural



**BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND TRUST**

Trump voters have a desire for unbiased science, data, and facts delivered by doctors, especially their own.

*What's most likely to motivate Republicans to get a vaccine?*

- If I had more data about **long-term side effects** from the vaccine.
- The ability to get back to **living my life the same way as before COVID**.
- If getting vaccinated will guarantee the **economy will fully reopen**.
- If I won't need to **wear a mask** in public or be bothered by people to wear one.
- If my own **personal doctor** recommended getting the vaccine.
- If I'm required to get vaccinated to **fly or travel**.

*What did Republicans say will be the best part of returning to "normal"?*

- Getting rid of the government's ability to **impose their rules** on our lives.
- Not having to wear a **mask or socially distance** when I'm in public.
- People will be less depressed and happier, and able to live **more fulfilling lives**.
- **Hugging and embracing my family and friends** without worry.

**TRUMP VOTERS WANT MORE DATA AND A RETURN TO LIFE PRE-COVID**

*President Biden recently said that everyone in America who wants a vaccine will be able to get one by May 1. What would motivate you to get vaccinated the MOST?*

Total	18-49	50+	
28%	34%	24%	If I had more data about long-term side effects from the vaccine
26%	13%	33%	If getting vaccinated was the only way I was able to get back to living my life the same way as before COVID
21%	18%	22%	If getting vaccinated will guarantee the economy will fully reopen
19%	17%	21%	If I won't need to wear a mask in public or be bothered by people to wear one
16%	14%	17%	If my own personal doctor recommended getting the vaccine
16%	14%	17%	If I'm required to get vaccinated to fly or travel

*(two questions combined)*



## THE PERMANENT IMPACT OF COVID IS THE #1 MOTIVATOR

*Which example of the “randomness” of the virus would you find MOST impactful in deciding if you’d get the vaccine yourself?*

Total	
62%	Many people who’ve had the virus report long-term side effects that impact their daily life, including permanently reduced lung capacity and loss of taste
44%	Tens of thousands of Americans are having trouble moving on with their daily lives because of the lasting effects of COVID
40%	People who’ve had the virus report ongoing extreme fatigue that continues months after the virus
26%	Many top leaders - including President Trump - got the virus in the White House despite it being the most secure place in America and constant testing for everyone on the premises
14%	A newly elected congressman from Louisiana got the virus and died from it despite being 41 years old and in good health
13%	Hope Hicks, an advisor to President Trump, became severely ill from the virus for ten days despite running miles each day, being young, and in good health

*(two questions combined)*

## EFFECTIVE MESSENGERS

All politicians at all levels are ineffective messengers for encouraging the vaccine. Trump Republicans have a deep, unshakeable distrust for the media, politicians, and anyone associated with Washington. Trump voters have still not forgiven Washington (politicians, the media, the bureaucrats, and even Dr. Anthony Fauci) for what they perceive as “politicizing COVID” and turning it into a political weapon used to defeat Trump. They also believe “Big Pharma” held off on releasing the vaccines until after the election to hurt his chances for reelection.

When asked who will influence their decision about whether to get vaccinated, the most trusted is their doctor, followed by their spouse or significant other. When asked if they would be more likely to get the vaccine if Trump or their own doctor recommended it, an overwhelming 81% (and all 19 focus group participants) chose their doctor.

Republicans 50 or older say they would also be influenced by their children, while those age 18-49 would also be influenced by their parents.

**“YOUR DOCTOR” AND “YOUR SPOUSE” ARE BOTH VASTLY MORE PERSUASIVE THAN PRESIDENT TRUMP IN GETTING VACCINATED**

*When it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine, who would you trust the MOST if they recommended you get it yourself? (top two responses combined)*

Total	18-49	50+	
55%	34%	74%	Your doctor
15%	17%	14%	President Trump
13%	21%	5%	Your spouse/significant other
8%	16%	1%	Your parents
3%	5%	2%	Your religious institution
3%	2%	4%	Your child/children
3%	6%	1%	Your employer

*When asked who they distrust the most on this issue — the media, Washington/ federal government, or Big Pharma:*

**55%**  
*media*

**29%**  
*the government*

**17%**  
*pharmaceutical companies*

**THE TRUMP FACTOR**

The influence of President Trump is meaningful and measurable. When asked how much they trust the federal government’s vaccine guidelines, 45% said they didn’t trust them, compared with 34% who said they did. But their answer was different when asked: “Remember that the COVID-19 vaccines were developed during the Trump administration under Operation Warp Speed and that Trump himself has taken the vaccine. How much do you trust the federal government’s vaccine guidelines?” The response to that question was reversed: 48% said “trust” and 31% said “distrust.”

For more communication tips and details about the focus group and poll, visit [www.changingthecovidconversation.org](http://www.changingthecovidconversation.org).

Using the right messages and the right messengers in your communication about vaccines can save lives. We want to know how you’re using these insights and messages, and what else you need. Please let us know by sending an email to [info@debeaumont.org](mailto:info@debeaumont.org).

*SOURCE: Pollster Dr. Frank Luntz led a March 13 focus group on Zoom with 19 Trump voters who said they may “possibly” or “probably would not” get a vaccine. The discussion informed a March 14-16 poll of 1,000 Republicans who voted for Trump in the 2020 election, modeled demographically based on voter turnout. The poll has a ±3 margin of error.*