

Increasing Influenza (Flu) Vaccination Rates Among US Black Adults NFID Survey and Partner Consultation Summary May 2022

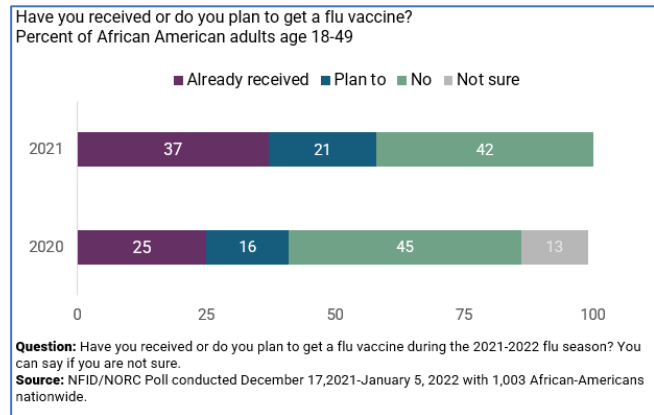
Background

In the US, communities of color are disproportionately impacted by both influenza (flu) and COVID-19. Racial and ethnic disparities in flu vaccination coverage continue across the lifespan, contributing to overall poorer health outcomes in communities of color. According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), compared with flu vaccination coverage for White adults, coverage was 16.3 percentage points lower for Black adults and 17.4 percentage points lower for Hispanic adults during the 2021-2022 flu season.

In December 2021, the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID) conducted a national survey assessing Black adult (age 18-49 years) knowledge and attitudes toward flu and COVID-19 vaccination, including changes since the 2020-2021 flu season as well as a deeper look into the factors that influence vaccine uptake among younger adults. NFID developed a subsequent strategy to leverage the survey results as formative research to develop targeted communications to help raise awareness of the importance of flu prevention and to increase flu vaccination rates among US Black adults age 18-49 years during the 2022-2023 flu season.

Key Survey Results

- **Among Black adults age 18-49 years, a greater number reported getting vaccinated against flu and COVID-19 during the 2021-2022 season** compared to the 2020-2021 flu season survey
- **More than 8 in 10 of those who have or who plan to get vaccinated think it is the best way to avoid flu-related deaths and hospitalizations**
- Among those who have received or plan to get a flu vaccine, **top reasons reported were to protect themselves and/or their families**
- Among those who do not plan to get a flu vaccine or who are unsure, the **most common reasons cited were concerns about side effects, never getting sick with flu, or vaccine efficacy**
- Approximately 4 in 10 Black adults under age 50 years say they would be more likely to get a flu vaccine **if their mother or a Black healthcare professional recommended it**
- **Only 20 percent say the recommendation of a religious leader** would make them more likely to get vaccinated
- Among parents who were not planning to get their child vaccinated against flu or COVID-19, about half say it is because **they are concerned about side effects of the vaccines**
- When receiving information about flu vaccines, **healthcare professionals were the most trusted source of information** for nearly half of Black adults under age 50 years



Consultations

In March-April 2022, NFID conducted consultations with potential new partners with deep connections to US Black audiences, to inform them about the survey results and NFID efforts to elevate the importance of flu vaccines among this population, obtain feedback, and discuss potential collaboration.

NFID conducted outreach to 34 organizations whose missions range from facilitating public health, eliminating health disparities, promoting the interests of professionals, and mentoring within the US Black community. A consultation guide deck was used to summarize the key findings of the survey and provide opportunities for open discussions.

To date, calls have been conducted with the following leading national organizations: BlackDoctor.org, the Center for Black Equity, National Black Nurse Practitioner Association, National Coalition of Ethnic Minority Associations, National Minority Quality Forum, and the People's Institute for Survival and Beyond.

By building relationships and receiving feedback from these organizations, NFID hopes to maximize the reach of targeted messages in increasing flu vaccination rates among US Black communities.



Summary of Key Themes

Increase in vaccine acceptance: Most organizations corroborated NFID survey data about self-reported vaccination rates, having observed increased acceptance for both flu and COVID-19 vaccines in the Black community. One organization leader shared that while they have not seen an increase in vaccination rates, they have noticed an increase in testing behaviors, such as for COVID-19.

“Prevention is becoming a part of the everyday lifestyle.”

Focus on risk mitigation: According to many of the organizations, the Black community has wholeheartedly embraced risk mitigation behaviors—testing, mask wearing, social distancing (when possible)—and has continued to adhere to these, even while other communities begin to de-emphasize such behaviors. This positive behavior, combined with increased public education and news coverage about the benefits of vaccination and continued risk mitigation behaviors is contributing to a shift from vaccine hesitancy to vaccine acceptance. In addition, according to many of the organizations, the Black community increasingly believes the best option is to get vaccinated to avoid risks including hospitalization and death.

“We know that we win when we take care of ourselves and continue to follow risk mitigation behaviors.”

Community engagement and personal stories are critical: Multiple organizations shared that engaging community leaders as trusted messengers is important because they often know their communities best and can provide information directly to community members. While only 20 percent of NFID survey respondents said a religious leader would influence their vaccination intention, organization leaders reported that teaming pastors with clinicians can help spread accurate information within the community. Organizations also cited examples such as workshops held in beauty salons and barber shops since relevant conversations often take place in these settings. Leaders also report that testimonials and personal stories from real people can play an important role in encouraging vaccination.

Side effects and not getting sick among most common barriers to flu vaccination:

Organizations corroborated NFID survey findings that among those who do not plan to get a flu vaccine or who are unsure, one of the key barriers is a concern that the vaccine would cause adverse reactions. They also shared that parents are less likely to get their children vaccinated due to concerns about side effects from the vaccine.

Black healthcare professionals have the greatest influence on flu vaccination behaviors:

Organizations agreed with NFID survey findings that when it comes to receiving information about flu vaccination, healthcare professionals were the most trusted source of information. There are many Black adults who are aware of and still refer to historical events (e.g., the Tuskegee Experiment and Henrietta Lacks), that influence current vaccine decisions. Organizations emphasized that patients feel more comfortable when receiving care from a Black healthcare professional because the patient feels understood and heard. Organizations recommend that Black healthcare professionals inform their patients that they themselves have received their flu vaccine and their other Black patients also get vaccinated. Two organizations pointed out that this may not be true for all communities including the LGBTQIA+ community who may be less likely to trust a healthcare professional.

“If the messenger does not look like us, we won’t retain the information.”

Reaching younger populations through online influencers: Consultations revealed that younger Black adults are more likely to trust information obtained from social media and may not believe healthcare professionals as much as older people do unless they are on social media. Identifying, and working with healthcare professionals who have a strong social media presence can help develop stronger connections with younger audiences and build a peer-to-peer network.

“COVID-19 has allowed us to have more in-depth conversations.”

The Black community is becoming primed for scientific information: While some organizations shared concerns about lower levels of health literacy and limited access to educational materials about vaccination within Black communities, others noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has led the Black community to be more knowledgeable and primed for scientific information. COVID-19 has allowed communicators, healthcare professionals, and influencers to have more in-depth conversations about topics like vaccination. However, one leader also indicated that there is a need to ensure that the

medical community addresses vaccine hesitancy to be able to effectively convey messages to community members. Others pointed out that advocates of natural remedies play a role in spreading misinformation, and they also need to be better educated on this issue.

Family members and tradition influence vaccination rates: Organization leaders noted that concerns about getting a vaccine sometimes stem from family tradition and other members of their family not wanting to be vaccinated. This logic is consistent with NFID survey results which found that mothers had a significant influence on vaccination decisions. One leader emphasized that it is important for people to follow the science and not solely the advice of their family members.

The importance of tailoring messages: Organizations shared how COVID-19 emphasized the need to tailor messages for the Black community. For example, early in the pandemic, many Black adults still needed to be at work in person, so the idea of staying home and social distancing had to be repositioned to “how do you stay safe, while still going to work?” One leader shared that including a Black person in materials like advertisements is not enough. Key messages must also be tailored to reach the audience effectively.

“You cannot just put a Black person in an advertisement—you must change your messaging and emphasis points.”

The need to focus on ‘whole health’ for the Black community: One leader shared that there should be equal concern and investment in treating and preventing diabetes, high blood pressure, and other chronic health issues in the Black community. Vaccination should be included in holistic conversations about health.