

Like their global compatriots, many South Africans remain fearful of Covid vaccines

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In the same week that the World Health Organisation celebrates World Immunisation Week (24-30 April) with the theme 'vaccines bring us closer' to show how vaccination connects us to the people, goals and moments that matter to us most, research conducted locally has revealed that many South Africans are still concerned about the safety and efficacy of Covid-19 vaccinations, potentially impacting vaccine take-up.

According to latest results of the Ask Afrika Covid-19 Tracker study for the period 26 March to 7 April 2021, although perceptions around vaccine safety improved between February and March this year, misconceptions continue to be very prevalent with the most common of these being that the vaccine interacts with your DNA, causes side effects and contains the actual virus.



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The main aim of the pro-bono study, which has been conducted since April 2020, is to understand the socio-economic impact that the coronavirus, lockdown and gradual re-opening of the economy has on South Africans.

In July 2020, more than 60% of respondents were concerned about the likelihood of Covid-19 vaccines reaching South Africa before the end of the year. Eight months later, three out of five respondents have said they will take the vaccine when it is offered to them, indicating a 10% increase in positive sentiment over the past month. However, despite high levels of willingness to receive the vaccine, there is an almost equally high level of concern around getting vaccinated which has also risen in the last month.



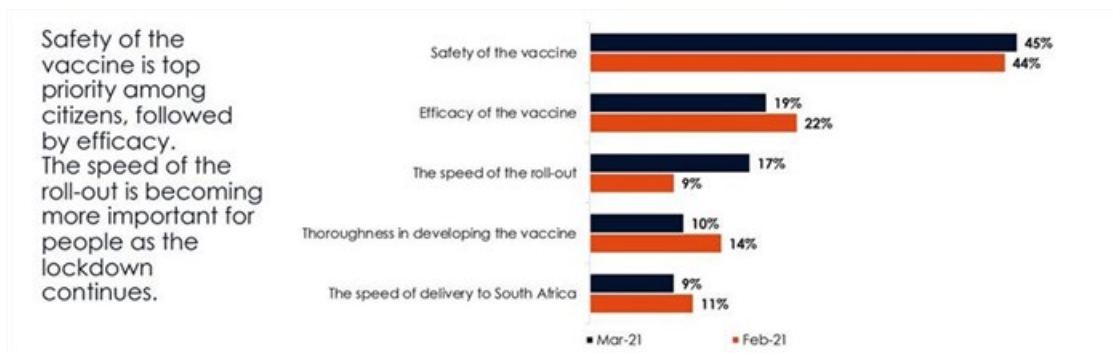
Study finds that not enough South Africans are prepared to be vaccinated against Covid-19

Andrea Rademeyer, Ask Afrika 19 Feb 2021



Asian respondents are significantly more likely to feel ambivalent about getting vaccinated than white respondents, while 55 year-olds and older of all races are significantly less concerned about getting vaccinated than those who are 34 years and younger.

The main drivers behind vaccine rejection are mistrust, particularly around vaccine safety. However, apathy is also an issue, particularly amongst males.



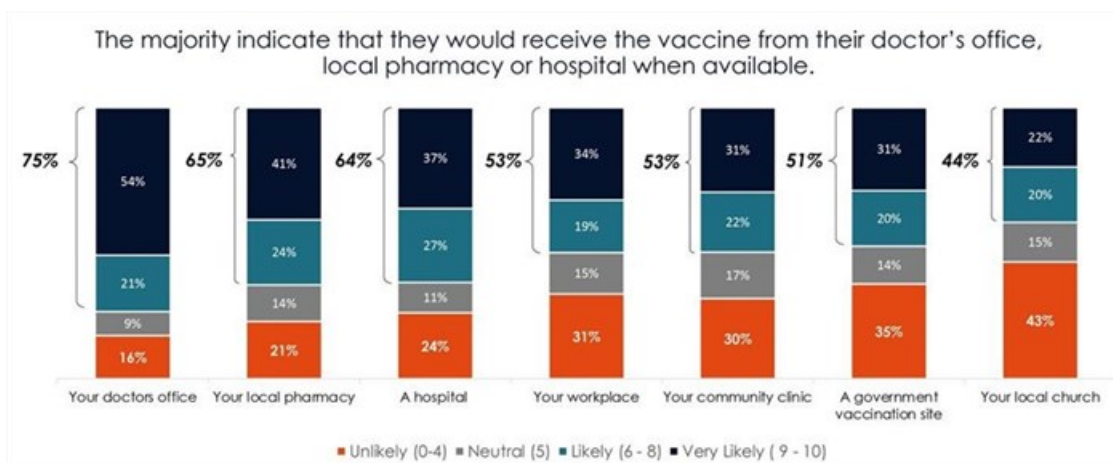
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While vaccine safety is a top priority for South Africans, this is followed by efficacy. However, the speed of the roll-out is becoming more important for people as lockdown continues.

Although confidence in the rollout of the vaccine has declined over the last month, greater awareness levels are bolstering this lack of confidence. In fact, reveals Andrea Rademeyer, founder and CEO of Ask Afrika and the project lead on the Covid-19 Tracker study, awareness of national vaccine efforts have increased as the pandemic has continued.

Those surveyed in the Covid-19 Tracker study strongly believe that the entire African continent should unite in the fight against the virus and that South Africa should develop its own vaccine given concerns that the USA will buy up all the experimental Covid-19 vaccine stock.

The study found that females are more likely to distrust the safety of the vaccine and should therefore be targeted to attempt to improve trust. "Building trust among the doubtful can be accomplished by focusing on the issues most important to them: assuring them of the safety, efficacy and thorough development of the vaccine," says Rademeyer. Health experts, doctors and nurses should be mobilised to get this message across to distrusters.



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In targeting those who are not willing to get the vaccine, she says it's necessary to dismantle misconceptions and fears surrounding the vaccine. The most prolific misconceptions, according to the study, are that the vaccine contains the virus and that it causes side-effects.

Rademeyer recommends that vaccinations should be conducted at official health sites such as doctor's offices, pharmacies and hospitals. "This lends an element of credibility that reassures safety concerns and improves the likelihood of vaccines acceptance," she says, adding that alternative vaccination sites such as workplaces and churches can also be included as there is moderate preference for vaccinations at these sites.

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#VaccinesWork to bring us closer

With the theme 'vaccines bring us closer', World Immunisation Week 2021 (24-30 April) will show how vaccination connects us to the people, goals and moments that matter to us most, helping improve the health of everyone, everywhere throughout life.

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