



CIGNA INTERNATIONAL COVID-19 VACCINE PERCEPTION STUDY

Building Trust and Understanding to Address Vaccine Hesitancy

APRIL 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report looks at data from Cigna's first COVID-19 Vaccine Perception Study which aims to better understand perceptions and attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines around the world.

- Among the respondents 69% globally are following news on COVID-19 vaccines very closely, however, 42% still felt that they did not know enough about the vaccines.
- 62% of people are confident the vaccines will protect them from COVID-19, but the same number is also concerned about side effects.
- There are concerning levels of vaccine hesitancy, with 50% of all respondents adopting a “wait and see” attitude towards receiving the jab.

This research reiterates the importance of clear information on vaccines from trusted sources and we are publishing our research to coincide with World Immunization Week. We delve deeper into the data and consider how to build trust and understanding to address vaccine hesitancy.

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In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially defined COVID-19 as a pandemic, since then there have been months of lockdowns, new waves of the virus and disruption to our lives. While we have all been adapting to our new reality, scientists have worked at speed to develop vaccines to help fight the spread.



Although some governments around the world have been able to bring the spread of COVID-19 under control through strict border policies and lockdowns, these are not sustainable, long-term solutions. We believe that vaccines are the real solution to the pandemic and the only way that we will be able to confidently come together again as families, friends, travelers and colleagues. We've also heard from medical experts around the world that achieving herd immunity through vaccination is the best way to bring the threat of COVID-19 under control and to allow societies to safely open up again.

The good news is that we are making progress and seeing history being made daily as millions of people from every continent receive a jab, which have proven effective in reducing death and hospitalization rates from COVID-19. We can also take some comfort in success stories such as Bhutan, where they gave 93% of their eligible adult population their first jab in just two weeks. However, the reality is that there are still many barriers and challenges ahead for vaccination programs.

Some of these barriers relate to widely reported supply chain issues that have delayed rollout for individual countries as well as COVAX (formerly known as The COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility), which aims to provide equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and will play a crucial role in helping to vaccinate some of the world's poorest countries. The other major barrier to success will be vaccine hesitancy, and this is something that Cigna International is trying to help combat through our sponsorship of *'The Jab'* podcast from *The Economist*, as well as through webinars and factsheets for our customers, the public and our employees.

Our most recent [COVID-19 Impact Study](#) showed the toll the pandemic is having on people around the world. Not only the physical effects of the virus, but the impact on their health, both physical and mental, as well as financial, work, family and social well-being. In this study, we wanted to focus on global perceptions of the vaccines to try to understand more about people's attitude towards vaccination and how this has impacted their willingness to receive it. This research will continue over the coming months so that we can track the trends and changes as the rollout progresses.

Understanding more about how people are feeling about the vaccines will help us to meet the needs of our customers, providing the information and support they need to improve their health, well-being and peace of mind in these unprecedented times.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason Sadler'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large initial 'J' and 'S'.

Jason Sadler, President, Cigna International Markets

UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TO COMBAT VACCINE HESITANCY

On Saturday 17th April, 2021, according to data released by Johns Hopkins University, the world reached a new milestone as the global death toll from this pandemic passed the three million mark.¹ On the same day, the number of adults who had received at least one shot of a COVID-19 vaccine sat at just under half a billion or 6.27% of the world's population.²

It is estimated that every year vaccines prevent two to three million deaths, and the COVID-19 vaccines have already been shown to reduce deaths and hospitalization.^{3,4,5,6} Yet, despite growing sources of data showing the efficacy, safety and positive real-life outcomes of the various vaccines, many people remain hesitant to receive it for a range of reasons.

To understand more about perceptions and attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccines, Cigna International carried out research across 11 markets in March 2021. The first of a planned series, the following report looks at the benchmark data collected from over 13,000 respondents aged 18 or over, and reflects on what this means for the success of the vaccination rollout.

“Vaccination has been a cornerstone of infectious disease control for over 200 years. COVID-19 vaccines give us an opportunity to help consign the impacts of pandemic to history.”

Dr. Peter Mills, European Medical Director,
Cigna International Markets



METHODOLOGY

- Data collected between 16th – 24th March, 2021
- 13,479 respondents
- Aged 18 or over
- Markets: China, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, UAE, UK and USA
- 52% Male and 48% Female

TRUST IN ESTABLISHED VACCINATIONS IS HIGHER THAN FOR COVID-19 VACCINES

Vaccinations against preventable diseases, have been a central part of healthcare systems for over a century with immunization for diseases such as tetanus, diphtheria and polio administered to infants on a routine basis. Confidence in these established vaccines is high, with 77% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that it is important that both their family, and themselves, are up to date with government recommended inoculations.

However, when asked if they were likely to take a COVID-19 vaccine if it was made available to them, only 63% agreed they would, a drop of 14%. However, there are differences between markets, especially between those where the impact of the pandemic has been more, or less, severe.



¹ Johns Hopkins University 2021, *Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center*, Johns Hopkins University, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>>.

² Our World in Data 2021, *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Vaccinations*, Our World in Data, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>>.

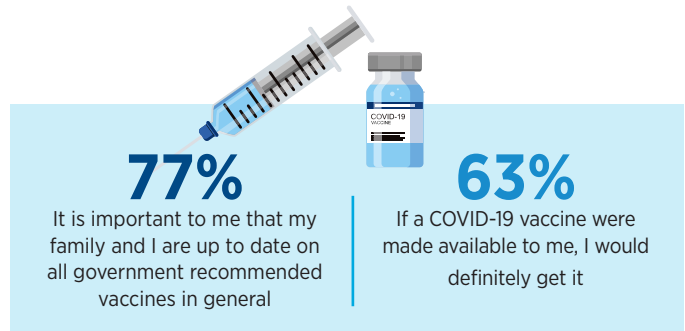
³ Unicef 2021, *Immunization*, Unicef, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://www.unicef.org/immunization>>.

⁴ Moghadas, S.M. et al. 2020, *The impact of vaccination on COVID-19 outbreaks in the United States*, medRxiv, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7709178/>>.

⁵ Pfizer 2021, *Real-world evidence confirms high effectiveness of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and profound public health impact of vaccination one year after pandemic declared*, Pfizer, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-release/press-release-detail/real-world-evidence-confirms-high-effectiveness-pfizer>>.

⁶ Bernal, J.L. et al. 2021, *Early effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccination with BNT162b2 mRNA vaccine and ChAdOx1 adenovirus vector vaccine on symptomatic disease, hospitalisations and mortality in older adults in England*, medRxiv, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://khub.net/documents/135939561/430986542/Early%20effectiveness%20of%20COVID%20vaccines.pdf/ffd7161c-b255-8e88-c2dc-88979fc2cc1b?t=1614617945615>>.

For example, in Hong Kong and Taiwan, where community infection rates have remained low throughout the pandemic, over 70% of respondents said they would “wait and see” until more people got the vaccines first. In contrast, in the UK, where over half of the UK adult population has now been vaccinated, only 17% said the same.⁷



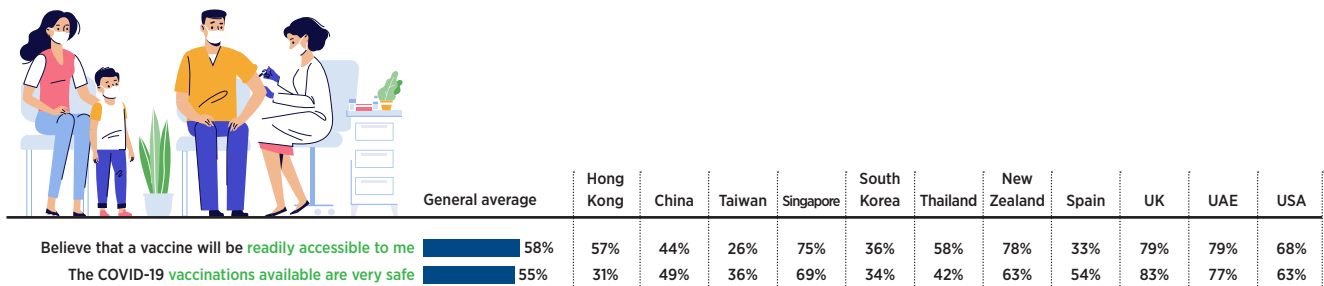
MAJORITY CONFIDENT IN GETTING ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES

While some countries have been quick to grant emergency approval and start rolling out vaccines, others are in the early stage of their local vaccination programs. Governments around the world are also taking a phased approach to providing vaccinations, generally prioritizing those on the frontline or at higher risk, such as the elderly, ahead of the younger generation.

For our global respondents, this variance in rollout was reflected in the fact that just over half (58%) felt confident that a vaccine would be available to them, but this figure rose to over two thirds in five of the markets, New Zealand, Singapore, UAE, UK and USA. Given the nascent nature of the rollout in both New Zealand and Singapore, this is likely related to their confidence in government and healthcare systems.

The UK was also notable for its high level of confidence in vaccine safety with 83% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing to this statement. As most people in the UK are likely to have friends, family members and connections who have already received their first jab, their confidence could be founded on their experience of safely receiving the vaccines.

Strongly agree / agree with the respective statement...



PEOPLE BELIEVE THAT COVID-19 VACCINES PROVIDE PROTECTION

Over the course of the pandemic, governments around the world have brought in various measures to combat the spread of the virus, from mandatory mask wearing, to social distancing measures and full-scale lockdowns. The concern for many is what happens when these restrictions are lifted, particularly if there are still large parts of the population yet to receive a vaccine.

Among our respondents 56% remain worried about contracting COVID-19. However, there was greater concern about transmitting the virus to others, with 75% of people agreeing or strongly agreeing. Notably, New Zealand, which has been celebrated for its COVID-19 response, had the lowest figures in both questions, with just 42% worried about contracting the virus personally and 62% of transmitting to others.



⁷ Gov.UK 2021, Half of all adults in UK receive first dose of COVID-19 vaccine, Gov.UK, viewed 22 April 2021, <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/half-of-all-adults-in-uk-receive-first-dose-of-covid-19-vaccine>>.

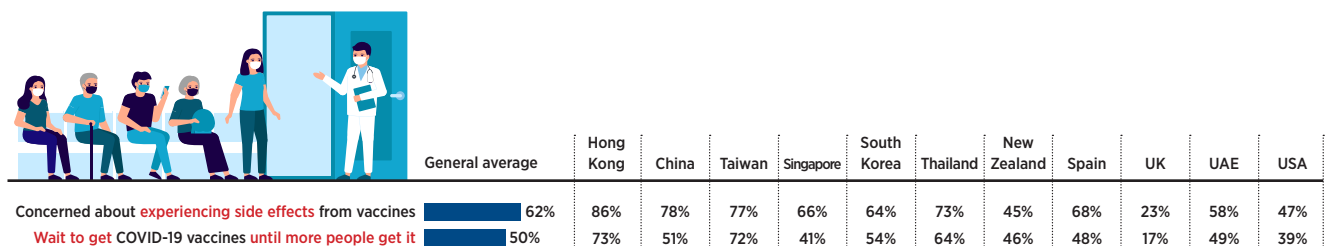


Reassuringly we saw faith in the efficacy of the vaccines, with over 60% of respondents from eight of the 11 markets, agreeing or strongly agreeing that the vaccines can protect them from getting COVID-19, with a global average of 62%. Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand were the only three markets with less positive responses coming in at 44%, 43% and 55% respectively.

CONCERNS ABOUT SIDE EFFECTS AMONG MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS

Safety and side effects are common barriers to the uptake of vaccines and although there is generally a positive attitude towards the efficacy of the vaccines themselves, 62% of respondents still had concerns about the possibility of experiencing side effects.

Strongly agree / agree with the respective statement...



OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE MORE TAILORED INFORMATION TO MEET THE NEEDS OF GENERAL PUBLIC

Among the respondents 69% globally are following news on COVID-19 vaccines very closely, however, 42% still felt that they did not know enough about the vaccines. The two most trusted sources for information were government bodies (65%) and family doctors/GPs (60%), with over one third of respondents seeing information from government bodies as the most trusted source. Private health providers were the fourth most trusted source, showing the need for companies like Cigna to continue to have information readily available for its customers.



“When eligible individuals take the vaccines, we’re helping to protect vulnerable populations and pave the way for the reopening of schools, workplaces, borders and the economy.”

Dr. Dawn Soo, Regional Medical Officer & Head of Wellness, Asia Pacific, Cigna International Markets

DRIVING VACCINE CONFIDENCE CRUCIAL TO ROLLOUT SUCCESS

It is widely accepted among experts in the medical, scientific and public health communities that getting the vaccines when they are available is the best chance we as individuals and communities have to play our part in stopping the spread of COVID-19⁸.

Although many have already taken their chance to receive a vaccine, others remain hesitant for a variety of reasons. As part of the solution to address hesitancy and build greater vaccine confidence, governments, health bodies and health services companies should look to provide tailored and trusted sources of information to reassure groups who currently prefer to “wait and see”.

It is likely, as our research continues, that we will see a shift in trends as more people become eligible and choose to take a vaccine. Our future reports will compare the evolving attitudes to the benchmark data within this report to try to understand more about the global attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccinations and people’s willingness to receive one.

HELPING PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES GET THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

The sustained nature of the pandemic, and the shift it has caused in the fundamentals of how we live and work, presents a major challenge to employers in terms of how they support their employees’ health and well-being.

Our stress care hub offers expert advice on financial, workplace, and family stress; interactive webinars with global partners; and educational visualization technology on the effects of prolonged stress. This hub is constantly growing and, as this research evolves, we will continue to incorporate these insights into our stress assessment tools.

We also have a strong network of mental wellness and specialist experts who are well-positioned to help people create their own stress care plans.

All content is free of charge and available to individuals and employers.

MORE INFORMATION

⁸ CDC 2021, *Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, viewed 22 April 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html>