



FRED HUTCH
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National Minority Health Month
WEEKLY OPED BY SEP HS INTERNS
VACCINE HESITANCY IN INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS
BY LEYA DEREJE AND NATENAEI MEKONNEN

The Virtual Explorers Internship at Fred Hutch is made possible by Pathways to Cancer Research (R25CA221770), a Youth Enjoy Science Award (YES/CURE), from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) at the National Institutes of Health. The contents of are solely the responsibility of the author(s) and the Fred Hutch Science Education Partnership and do not necessarily represent the official views of the NCI or NIH.

Across communities, there are numerous beliefs and opinions surrounding vaccination. The conversation surrounding Covid-19 vaccination was no different, as strong approval, clear concern, and everything in the middle were present after nations began administering vaccination doses began last year.

The seemingly abrupt introduction of Covid-19 vaccine production left many skeptical about getting the vaccine, especially in the early stages of development. Concerns such as the quick turnaround of production and the safety of the vaccine rose to the surface. Vaccine hesitancy proves to be prevalent within society today and is not an unfamiliar subject. Even though vaccine hesitancy is present in all communities, particular people groups display this sense of reluctance to a greater extent, including Indigenous populations. Indigenous communities illustrate a clear reluctance to obtain the Covid-19 vaccines due to a lack of trust, information, and the long history of unethical treatment of Indigenous populations in the healthcare system.

Mistrust of the Covid-19 vaccine is one of the most prominent reasons Indigenous populations are less likely to get vaccinated. Namely, individuals may feel as if they do not know enough about the vaccine to decide to get it. The roots of mistrust come from the unjust healthcare treatment of Indigenous populations. Records show scientists using Indigenous patients for their blood without any consent for experiments and other research. If this dark history of treatment is not addressed, how can someone trust the same system that allowed these events to occur?

Similarly, Indigenous Peoples' experiences of Canadian colonialism have already "deeply influenced their perspectives of the [H1N1] vaccination and pandemic," according to studies, leading to heightened vaccine hesitancy. During the Canadian invasion, European colonies used vaccines as a way of killing Native people. This history left a big scar on the Indigenous people, increasing mistrust surrounding vaccines.

Lack of information surrounding the vaccine is another cause of the high rates of vaccine hesitancy in Indigenous populations. The long-lasting inequality for Native Americans caused them to be at a disadvantage in education about the vaccine. Having access to the news and social media was one of the main ways one could learn more about the vaccine. Especially in rural Indigenous communities, access to these resources may be limited, resulting in knowledge gaps about what is in the vaccine or even where to get the vaccine. This may lead to confusion, with only family and friends to turn to to get your information about the vaccine.

Similarly, misinformation about the vaccine is another primary reason for vaccine hesitancy in Indigenous populations. Put another way, there have been a lot of dangerous attempts of trying to misinform the Indigenous people. "Just now we heard from one Aboriginal person who said white supremacist groups are sending information to Aboriginal people that they shouldn't get vaccinated."³ To instill terror in Indigenous communities in Western Australia, white supremacist organizations, have propagated vaccine falsehoods. Although this happened in another country, spreading misinformation can undoubtedly impact judgments around the world.

Prize Question: What does "Two-Eyed Seeing" mean in Indigenous cultures?
Please respond to Community of Employees for Racial Equity ceere@fredhutch.org



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To best combat vaccine hesitancy, it is critical to understand the complex history of unequal treatment of Indigenous populations in the healthcare system. Increasing education and transparency concerning vaccines are both approaches to look into with the hopes of improving vaccination rates. Addressing the inhumane treatment of Indigenous communities is the first step in abolishing the enduring mistrust held by the healthcare system.

EVENTS NEXT WEEK

Speakers Dr. Socia Love Thurman and Dr. Rosalina James:

Strength of a Nation
12:00PM

Brave Space Discussions: continuation of speakers themes

Thursdays
12:00PM

Prize from Emails

Announced every Friday

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