

New study shows Government COVID vaccine scheme needs to better tackle socio-economic issues to boost uptake

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A new study from Durham University Business School (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/business/>) has revealed that, in order to encourage greater uptake and interest in Covid-19 vaccinations, or encourage adherence to lockdown or isolation guidance amongst reluctant communities and individuals in the North East, the Government's approach must do more to address the socio-economic issues that influence people's thinking.

With analysis undertaken by Professor Richard Harris (<https://www.dur.ac.uk/research/directory/staff/?id=10666>), the study reviewed the results of an online survey, conducted in March across the North East of England by Gateshead Council, which gathered more than 5,500 responses.

A key focus of the survey was to discover the impact of Covid 19 across nine local authorities in the region; how the pandemic had affected people and their families, their employment situations and incomes, as well as gathering their views about a post-pandemic future.

The survey also asked a range of questions focused on personal and household characteristics (such as age, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, disability, sexual orientation, household composition, economic status, industry and occupation sub-groups and location). The purpose of this, Professor Harris explains was to understand the extent to which vaccine hesitancy may be connected with any of these characteristics.

Professor Harris says,

"The study finds that the challenges or reluctancies raised by those who needed to test, or self-isolate, or for those who had expressed vaccine hesitancy were not simply linked to the age or vulnerability of the resident population. There were a wider range of other factors that are important."

From the survey's results, Professor Harris has found that in regards to;

- Gender: male respondents had a 6% higher probability of needing to self-isolate, and were nearly 5% more likely to face a challenge with isolating. Furthermore, they were 4% more likely than women to believe the UK and NHS approved vaccines are "very safe".
- Location: Living in an area with greater levels of socio-economic deprivation was negatively correlated with attitudes on whether the UK Government and NHS approved vaccines are deemed "very safe". Being in a high deprivation area was also associated with a higher (8%) likelihood of facing challenges accessing COVID testing.
- Ethnicity: The non-white ethnic sub-group were less likely to have been vaccinated, were less likely to agree that vaccines were "very safe", and were less likely to be able to make an informed decision on whether to vaccinate at all
- Religion: Those of a Buddhist faith were over 40% less likely to strongly agree that the UK

Government-approved vaccine is “very safe”. As with Buddhists, those from the Jewish community were more sceptical of the safety of a UK Government approved vaccine. Muslims were nearly 15% less likely to trust a UK Government-approved vaccine and even more hesitant about one approved by the NHS, and less likely to strongly agree they could make an informed decision on getting vaccinated

- Disability: Disabled residents were more likely to have received a vaccine, but they were more hesitant about endorsing the safety of approved vaccines and had a lower probability of strongly agreeing they could make an informed decision about vaccination. Disabled respondents also recorded a greater challenge with testing for Covid-19, self-isolating, and getting a vaccine. The greater the disability, the higher the challenge they faced.
- Industry and occupation: Those working in mining or quarrying reported a 47% greater likelihood of needing to test, alongside a 32% higher probability of facing a challenge with testing, and a nearly 29% lower level of vaccination, together with strong agreement (58-62%) that vaccines were very safe. Other notable results included a 31% lower likelihood of needing testing for those working in wholesale distribution, while those in transportation were 29% more likely to need testing. Those less likely to be able to work from home (in skilled trades, caring, leisure & other service occupations, and process, plant & machine operatives) were also less likely to strongly agree that approved vaccines were very safe.
- Sexual Orientation: Gay and lesbian residents were 12% more likely to have received a vaccine and were also more likely to strongly agree that approved vaccines were very safe. Those non-heterosexuals identifying as ‘other’ (not gay/lesbian/bisexual) were nearly 16% more likely to face a challenge in getting a vaccine.
- Households: Those living with their parents were nearly 11% less likely to strongly agree that UK Government approved vaccines were very safe, and other types of households showed greater propensity towards being vaccine hesitant.

The results reveal a number of important findings, and questions for the Government to consider, in order to ensure an effective vaccination and “track-and-trace” programme, to help bring the virus under control and protect the public.

Professor Harris says,

“Overall, these results show that there are complex socio-economic factors associated with willingness to get a test or self-isolate, and levels of vaccine hesitancy - so much so that, in future, to ensure that (re-)vaccination and ‘track and trace’ programmes are successful, we need to take account of other factors such as ethnicity and location and how these might impact vaccine perspectives, rather than simply adopting vaccination programmes that mostly just rely on age as the criteria for roll-outs. A “one size fits all” approach is, at best, a partial solution to increasing vaccination uptake and, at worst a method which risks amplifying existing social inequalities.”

He continues,

“These findings are also relevant for the UK Government to consider in combatting health inequalities and, in particular, the “anti-vaxxer” movement. By gaining a better understanding of what makes certain people hesitant about undertaking Covid-19 tests, self-isolating and taking a vaccine we can reduce concerns and improve uptake rates – improving public health for all.”

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For further information or to request a copy of the research paper, please contact Kerry Ruffle at BlueSky Education – kerry@bluesky-pr.com / +44(0)1582 790701