

Vaccine skepticism has health authorities spooked



As of now, only 19% of the U.S. adult population has received the updated bivalent Covid vaccine, per the latest CDC statistics.

Parents are even more reluctant to opt for the booster for their kids, with only 8% of children having received the shot said to be tailored to new strains of Covid.

At year's end, Pfizer announced massive layoffs in their vaccine division as anticipated uptake of their new Covid booster didn't materialize. BioNTech stock price has plummeted from a high of over 400 in 2022 to around 100 now as vaccine demand craters. Moderna stock has similarly nosedived.

This has health authorities spooked. Instead of a resounding success to revive an already embattled vaccine campaign, the Covid shot has actually undermined Americans' faith in vaccines *overall*.

In a JAMA editorial entitled "Is vaccination approaching a dangerous tipping point", the authors lament:

"Despite the care taken in the development and deployment of vaccines and their clear and compelling benefit of saving individual lives and improving population

health outcomes, an increasing number of people in the US are now declining vaccination for a variety of reasons, ranging from safety concerns to religious beliefs . . . the situation has now deteriorated to the point that population immunity against some vaccine-preventable infectious diseases is at risk, and thousands of excess deaths are likely to occur this season due to illnesses amenable to prevention or reduction in severity of illness with vaccines."

Nowhere in the carefully crafted plea to get doctors to stanch their patients' vaccine resistance is there any *mea culpa*. Maybe there are reasons why, during Covid, people lost trust in the solemn pronouncements of health authorities?

The authors—FDA head Robert Califf and vaccine developer Peter Marks—blame "*a wealth of misinformation available on social media and the internet.*"

Then comes a whopper:

" . . . data from various studies indicate that since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic tens of millions of lives were saved by vaccination."

It's incomprehensible to me that two esteemed doctors with extensive backgrounds in academic research and high positions within government could make such an unfounded assertion in the pages of one of the world's most high-profile medical journals.

Tens of millions of lives?? U.S. deaths from Covid are said to be 1,165,118. That's a terrible toll, although many have criticized the figure as inflated because debilitated patients with complex medical problems died *with* Covid, not of Covid.

Worldwide, the toll is estimated to have been around 7 million deaths. For Covid shots to have saved "tens of millions of lives" they would've had to be pretty darn effective. Were they?

Califf and Marks cite a May 2023 study to buttress their claim. It's a modeling study that is an extrapolated projection of what might've happened if no one got the Covid vaccine in the U.S.

That's like climate projections that predict how many people would die if the average world temperature goes up by 2 degrees C—highly speculative. By their reckoning, 3.2 million additional U.S. people would've succumbed to Covid if the vaccine hadn't come along.

Even if we accept their rather optimistic conclusion that . . .

"The meta-analysis study reviewed here provides evidence that COVID-19 vaccination confers a certain level of protection against poor outcomes in individuals infected with the virus. The study found that unvaccinated patients with COVID-19 are 2.46 times more likely to die from the infection compared to those that are vaccinated."

. . . how is that Califf and Marks can assert that "tens of millions" were saved by the vaccine when vaccine uptake worldwide was sketchy and still "only" 7 million died?

An important caveat embedded within the study: the authors admit that the certainty of their evidence is "low", and that the confidence limits of the 2.46 number, dictated by the arcane laws of statistics, range from as low as 1.71 to as high as 3.53.

In actuality, the authors can only come to the modest conclusion that the risk of

dying in absolute terms from Covid among unvaccinated is 5 per 1000, *and only is reduced to 4 per 1000 with the vaccination!*

Moreover, the data for the projection was compiled *before July 2022*, when the pandemic was at its peak and the vaccines maintained more efficacy against early strains of Covid—which were far more likely to kill people than the attenuated variants of Covid circulating now. Current boosters that Califf and Marks are doubling down on have not shown resounding success at preventing Covid; additionally, we've gotten better at treating patients with severe Covid after learning from our mistakes earlier in the pandemic. And so many people have acquired natural immunity to Covid by now that the rationale for boosters in 2024 is entirely undermined. The difference between the death rates of vaccinated vs. unvaccinated is shrinking and is negligible in terms of absolute numbers.

Finally, in vaccine studies—in fact in studies of *any* therapy where compliance is an issue—there's a *healthy user effect*.

It's mostly health-conscious people who seek vaccines. There are two types of people who eschew vaccination. Admittedly, there were many health-conscious skeptics, or affluent people with political objections to vaccine mandates or religious scruples, who remained unvaccinated. But the vast majority of vaccine-avoiders were poor, elderly, food-insecure, marginalized individuals who undoubtedly were in worse health, rendering them more likely to die of Covid, skewing the results of the studies.

This is not to say Americans' renewed vaccine hesitancy is justified when it comes to traditional shots for measles or polio, for example, which can be deadly. It's an unfortunate unintended consequence of the breach of trust engendered by an arrogant public health establishment.

Consider these missteps:

- We weren't outsourcing dangerous gain-of-function research to the Chinese—until it was revealed we did
- Covid had natural origins from bats or pangolins—until it became apparent that it was bio-engineered and released due to shoddy precautions at the Wuhan Lab
- Disinfecting surfaces prevented transmission of Covid—until it was demonstrated to be worthless
- Those plexiglass barriers—also worthless
- “Fifteen days to slow the spread”—just a pretext to condition the populace for extended lockdowns
- Six feet of separation—arbitrary and insufficient to prevent inhalation of far-traveling aerosolized particles
- Cloth and paper masks were effective barriers against Covid—until they were shown not to prevent transmission or acquisition
- Vaccines could prevent you from getting Covid—until everyone got Covid anyway
- Even if you weren't scared of Covid, it was your responsibility to get the jab to prevent grandpa and grandma from getting it—until it was found *not* to prevent transmission
- Little kids as young as 6 months needed the vaccine—until it was realized that only rarely did a tiny minority of severely immunocompromised children have risk of severe Covid
- Vaccines could reduce the risk of Long Covid—until new studies suggest the

protection is minimal if not non-existent

- The Covid shots were uniformly safe and well-tolerated—until a host of side effects were revealed

Nor is it justified to claim that the vaccines did *no* good. Undoubtedly, they prevented serious disease or death for some, perhaps many at first, especially the frail elderly and those with compromised immune systems. But “tens of millions” of lives saved? This is unwarranted self-congratulation based on over-interpretation of questionable studies.

A program of selective vaccination and sequestration of high risk individuals—à la the Great Barrington Declaration—would’ve been enough to stanch the pandemic and protect the vulnerable.

Instead we shut down vast swaths of our economy, sowed political polarization, compromised the mental health of millions, drove people out of jobs, classrooms and gyms, prevented families from visiting the bedsides of dying loved ones, and committed all kinds of tomfoolery—at the behest of health authorities like doctors Califf and Marks, who now complain that people no longer trust vaccines!

Don’t underestimate the American public—as kids we all learned the story about the emperor’s clothes.