

## Greater Awareness of Long COVID Could Help Speed Up U.S. Vaccination Efforts, New Research Reveals

*Long-hauler stories prompt greater concern among 64% of Americans; about 40% of those unvaccinated say they likely will consider getting the COVID-19 vaccine, including nearly a third of people who are vaccine hesitant*

**(NEW YORK, NY)**—As the United States strives to get at least 70% of its population partially vaccinated by July 4—or soon after—a new survey from Resolve to Save Lives, an initiative of Vital Strategies, suggests that testimonials from people who have experienced long-term complications of COVID-19 (long COVID) may help encourage vaccine uptake.

Based on a general population study conducted from May 21–June 10, 2021, researchers found that nearly a third of American adults (ages 18+) are unaware of long COVID—a series of persistent health problems that often affect people who have had COVID-19, many months after infection. Those who are vaccine hesitant are more likely to be unaware of long COVID (39%) than those who are not hesitant (27%). Republicans (37)% are more unaware of long COVID than Democrats (24%) and Independents (30%).

After learning about long COVID symptoms—which range from fatigue, shortness of breath and chest pain; to “brain fog,” gastrointestinal problems and loss of taste and smell, among many other health issues—and how the condition affects people of all ages, races and ethnicities across the United States, 32% of the unvaccinated respondents said they are more likely to consider getting vaccinated. Forty-two percent of the unvaccinated population reported having little to no concern about long COVID, primarily because they believe there is still too much unknown about the condition or they don’t think they will get COVID-19 at all.

However, after watching a series of video testimonials from people suffering from long COVID (long-haulers), 64% of the survey participants said they are more concerned about the condition. In addition, 39% of the unvaccinated respondents—including 45% of 18- to 29-year-olds, 49% of Hispanics, 43% of African Americans, 35% of Caucasians and 31% of those who are vaccine hesitant—said they are more likely to consider getting vaccinated.

“This research underscores the need for greater public awareness and understanding of long COVID and how people can prevent substantial pain and disability by getting vaccinated,” said Dr. Tom Frieden, President and CEO of Resolve to Save Lives. “We are still learning about this disease and treatments for these, sometimes severe, symptoms. Tens of thousands of Americans are struggling to manage the long-term effects of COVID-19 infection—their challenging, life-altering experiences can help educate and motivate others to protect themselves with vaccination.”

As reported in the Resolve to Save Lives’ Prevent Epidemics team’s recent [In-Depth Science Review](#), there is a wide range of estimates regarding the proportion of COVID-19 survivors who experience long-term symptoms—studies suggest it could be from one in ten to more than one-half. Research is underway to better understand how prevalent, lasting and severe the effects of long COVID will be and how to treat these symptoms most effectively.

In spite of greatly improved vaccine access and a host of incentives, [an estimated 34% of American adults remain fully unvaccinated](#) and the pace of getting shots into arms in the United States has slowed dramatically. “New strategies are needed to reach those who are hesitant—particularly as the Delta variant is putting unvaccinated communities at significantly greater risk for COVID-19 and its complications,” said Erin Sykes, Vice President of Communications at Resolve to Save Lives. “Our research suggests that long-haulers are key messengers who can help move the needle at this critical point in time.”

Other key findings from the nationally representative sample of 1,973 American adults (ages 18+) include:

- Nearly 40% of the respondents reported they are not vaccinated. They tended to:
  - be ages 18-29
  - be female
  - live in the Midwest or South and/or a rural community
  - have a household income under \$50K
  - have an education less than college
  - be Independent or Republican
- African Americans (45%) are more likely to be unvaccinated than Hispanics (39%) and Caucasians (37%).
- Of those who are unvaccinated, 84% are vaccine hesitant, including 41% who say they will definitely not get the vaccine—mainly driven by Republicans and Independents, as well as those living in the Midwest, South and rural areas.
- The potential consequences of long COVID that are of greatest concern to people who are vaccine hesitant include shortness of breath, chest pain and “brain fog”/difficulty concentrating.
- More than half of those who are vaccine hesitant believe the message: *“Getting the COVID-19 vaccine is the best way to prevent COVID-19 and its potential long-term complications.”* Twenty percent of this group say this motivates them to consider getting vaccinated.
- More than half of all Americans are more concerned about long COVID after reading this message: *“In a large study of people with lasting symptoms of COVID-19, more than half had symptoms six months after being diagnosed. And nearly half of those with at least six months of symptoms had not been able to return to pre-COVID levels of work due to their symptoms.”* More than a third of those who are unvaccinated—including 28% of the vaccine hesitant—say this motivates them to consider getting vaccinated.
- More than half of all Americans are more concerned about long COVID after reading this message: *“Older age is a risk factor for severe COVID-19, but most people who develop long COVID are younger, between the ages of 20-50. The risk of developing long COVID does not appear to be linked to the severity of the initial COVID-19 illness. People with mild*

*COVID-19, even without initial symptoms, can develop lasting symptoms.*” A third of those who are unvaccinated—including 27% of the vaccine hesitant—say this motivates them to consider getting vaccinated.

“The COVID-19 pandemic isn’t over in the United States and we need a range of approaches to reach unvaccinated Americans,” Frieden said. “Sharing the sobering stories of long-haulers is a powerful way to help close the vaccination gap.”

**Click here** for a copy of the survey’s summary report and crosstabs.

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### **About Resolve to Save Lives**

[Resolve to Save Lives](#), an initiative of the global health organization [Vital Strategies](#), focuses on preventing deaths from cardiovascular disease and by preventing epidemics. It is led by [Dr. Tom Frieden](#), former director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. To find out more, please visit: <https://www.resolveetosavelives.org> or Twitter [@ResolveTSL](#) and [@DrTomFrieden](#).

### **About Vital Strategies**

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. We work with governments and civil society in 73 countries to design and implement evidence-based strategies that tackle their most pressing public health problems. Our goal is to see governments adopt promising interventions at scale as rapidly as possible. To find out more, please visit [www.vitalstrategies.org](http://www.vitalstrategies.org) or Twitter [@VitalStrat](#).

### **Media Contacts**

Steven Chlapecka, Resolve to Save Lives: [chlapecka@resolveetosavelives.org](mailto:chlapecka@resolveetosavelives.org), +1.917.623.0246  
Christina Honeysett, Vital Strategies: [choneysett@vitalstrategies.org](mailto:choneysett@vitalstrategies.org); +1.914.424.3356