

St. Louis COVID-19 Vaccine Insights

COVID-19 Delta variant message testing in African American youth and young adults
September 2, 2021

Background. African American youth and young adults (n=26) attending a Dance Battle event in St. Louis City on August 10, 2021 responded to three message concepts addressing the Delta variant of COVID-19. On-site vaccinations were available and received by 7 event attendees.

Approaches. Listening: Participants reported vaccination status. Those who were vaccinated were asked about how many of their closest friends have been vaccinated; those not vaccinated were asked whether or not they would get vaccinated while attending the event, and why.

Message Testing: A-B testing was used. Participants read three messages, indicated which one would be most likely to make an unvaccinated person think about getting vaccinated, and explained why. All possible combinations of message order were tested in equal number.

Message concepts. Separate messages (28-34 words each) expressed three ideas: (1) COVID-19 vaccination protects against serious illness and *hospitalization* from the Delta variant; (2) the Delta variant is spreading among *younger* people in St. Louis; and (3) the Delta variant is highly *contagious*. Message concepts, shown below, are hereafter referred to by the shorthand in *italics*.

Top-level findings. Tables 1-4 show all participant responses. Key takeaways include:

1. **Most unvaccinated were opposed to, not hesitant, about vaccine:** Of 11 unvaccinated participants, 8 were not planning to get vaccinated at the event and 3 were unsure about it. Reasons included low trust (“I do not trust the shot,” “I don’t feel comfortable about the vaccine”), low interest (“I don’t want it,” “I don’t feel the need to get one”); perceived ineffectiveness (“it doesn’t keep you from getting infected,” “waiting for a vaccine that can combat all variants”), and lack of information (“I want to learn more”).
2. **Message preference varied by vaccination status:** Choosing between the three message concepts, 78% of unvaccinated participants said the *contagious* message would be most likely to make someone think about getting vaccinated. Among vaccinated participants, only 20% chose the contagious message, while 47% chose the *younger* people message.
3. **Vaccinated participants have vaccinated friends:** Most participants (58%) were vaccinated, and of those, 73% said “most” or “all” of their closest friends were vaccinated.

Implications for action

1. Understand why *contagious* was perceived as most effective by unvaccinated individuals. This message explained that on average, every person infected with the Delta variant would infect 5 others. Participants commented that this was “a scary thought,” “a big number” and “frightening;” they noted that Delta is “much more contagious” and “contagion causes panic.” Further message testing is needed to determine what is driving these reactions (e.g., regret, shame or stigma of infecting others; the potential for out-of-control spread).
2. Vaccine effectiveness messages may not work well with unvaccinated young people. New efforts are re-framing vaccine effectiveness around preventing hospitalizations and serious illness. Our message focused on *hospitalization* was never selected by unvaccinated youth.

How were the data collected?

Setting and attendees

Respondents were attendees at an outdoor Dance Battle hosted by Story Stitchers at Strauss Park in the City of St. Louis. The event was held Tuesday, August 10 from 7pm to 9pm, and attended by about 100 youth and young adults. COVID-19 vaccinations were available at the event. Story Stitchers is an artist collective of minority youth and young adults ages 16-24. Participation in message testing was open to all attendees of the event, regardless of age or race. All participants in the message testing activity were African American. Seven event attendees got vaccinated.

Methods

Two members of the St. Louis CEAL team were on site 6:30 – 9:00 pm to facilitate the activities. From a bin, participants selected an envelope containing a sheet of paper with questions on both sides (Appendices A, B). One side included questions for those who were vaccinated and the other included questions for those not vaccinated. Participants wrote responses on whichever side of the paper applied to them. Both vaccinated and unvaccinated participants read the same three messages about the Delta variant, selected the one they felt was most likely to make an unvaccinated friend of theirs think about getting vaccinated, and explained why they chose it.

The three message concepts were:

- Contagious
It is highly contagious. On average, each person infected with the Delta variant will infect about five other people. That's twice as many as the original COVID-19 virus.
- Younger
It is spreading in St. Louis. Almost all new COVID-19 cases locally are caused by the Delta variant. In July, nearly half (47%) of new cases were among those age 29 and younger.
- Hospitalization
People vaccinated for COVID-19 can still be infected by the Delta variant, but the vaccine protects them from serious illness. Vaccinated people rarely are hospitalized for COVID-19.

Participants placed completed responses back in the envelope and returned it to the team members. Each participant received a \$5 gift card after they completed both activities. Participants could choose between gift cards for Target, Starbucks, McDonalds, or Mission Taco.

Respondents

A total of 26 responses were collected at the event. All participants were African American.

Analysis

The authors of this report reviewed all participant responses and identified recurring themes.

Report prepared by: Karen Skinner, Taylor Butler, Mikayla Johnson, and Matthew Kreuter.
Questions? Please contact Karen Skinner: Karen.Skinner@wustl.edu

Special thanks to Story Stitchers for including the St. Louis CEAL team in its Dance Battle event.

Table 1. Vaccinated participants: Summary of vaccinated peers (N=15)

How many of your closest friends have been vaccinated?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• All of them=5• Most of them=6• Some of them=4• None of them=0

Table 2. Vaccinated participants: Responses to Delta variant message concepts (N=15)

“Contagious” <i>(selected by 3)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One person infecting 5 at one time is a big number and could create a real issue• The idea of infecting other people is a scary thought. Higher chances of being infected will make them want to take more precautions.• Because that has been a common reason I’ve heard a lot of people discuss.
“Younger” <i>(selected by 7)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Almost half are new cases for a lot of young people• They have no idea how sick they will be• What was known of COVID-19 itself was that it was worse for those 65 and older. Now that younger people are at risk, maybe people would take more notice.• This would help them understand it is in our community and effecting our age group• Most of my friends live in St. Louis and are of age to be infected. They would rather have low risk of getting the new variant, than a high risk.• Because this virus is more deadly than COVID-19 and more people are catching this than covid and more people are dying and people need to take action• Because we usually hear about COVID affecting at risk people, but this stat indicates that young and healthy people and get it too!
“Hospitalization” <i>(selected by 5)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It gets straight to the point and doesn't give too high of expectations. It lets others know that nothing can be 100% against COVID since there's so much we are all learning.• Knowing that you can get sick, but get well and go about your every day life, is something people talk about these days.• To protect my at risk friends and family• Because it could prevent hospitalization and serious illness which can be expensive and the vaccine is free.• Because of the info I read and studied

Table 3. Unvaccinated participants: Vaccination intention (N=11)

Do you plan to get vaccinated here tonight?

- Yes=0
 - No=8
 - I do not trust the shot
 - Undecided, the effectiveness
 - Waiting for a vaccine that can combat all variants
 - I don't feel the need to get one
 - Don't feel comfortable about the vaccine
 - I don't want it
 - It doesn't keep you from getting infected
 - I haven't decided yet=3
 - Health Problems
 - Nothing
 - I want to learn more about the vaccine first
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Table 4. Unvaccinated participants: Responses to Delta variant message concepts (N=11)^

“Contagious” <i>(selected by 7)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't believe most reasonable• Because numbers grow fast• Much more contagious• Because contagion causes panic• Because there are more people getting infected• It makes more sense• It's more frightening
“Younger” <i>(selected by 0)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NA
“Hospitalization” <i>(selected by 2)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It talks about the benefits of the vaccine• Because even if you are vaccinated you can still catch and pass covid to others.

[^] 2 unvaccinated participants did not select a message preference

Appendix A. Questions for vaccinated participants

**Answer the questions below if you have
already been vaccinated for COVID-19.**

(If you have not been vaccinated for COVID-19, please flip to the other side)

1. About how many of your closest friends have been vaccinated for COVID-19? (check one)
- All of them
 - Most of them
 - Some of them
 - None of them

2. There has been a lot of talk about the Delta variant, a new version of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Here are three things we know about the Delta variant so far:

A. It is highly contagious. On average, each person infected with the Delta variant will infect about five other people. That's twice as many as the original COVID-19 virus.

B. It is spreading in St. Louis. Almost all new COVID-19 cases locally are caused by the Delta variant. In July, nearly half (47%) of new cases were among those age 29 and younger.

C. People vaccinated for COVID-19 can still be infected by the Delta variant, but the vaccine protects them from serious illness. Vaccinated people rarely are hospitalized for COVID-19.

Of these three facts, do you think A, B, or C would be most likely to make an unvaccinated friend of yours think about getting vaccinated? (Circle one)

A

B

C

3. Why did you choose that one?

Appendix B. Questions for unvaccinated participants

**Answer the questions below if you have
not been vaccinated for COVID-19.**

(If you have been vaccinated for COVID-19, please flip to the other side)

1. COVID-19 vaccinations are available for free at tonight's Dance Battle. Do you plan to get vaccinated here tonight? (Check one)

- Yes
 No
 I haven't decided yet

If **YES:** What made you decide to get vaccinated tonight?

If **NO:** Why not?

If **YOU HAVEN'T DECIDED YET:** What is holding you back?

2. There has been a lot of talk about the Delta variant, a new version of the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Here are three things we know about the Delta variant so far:

- A. *It is highly contagious. On average, each person infected with the Delta variant will infect about five other people. That's twice as many as the original COVID-19 virus.*
- B. *It is spreading in St. Louis. Almost all new COVID-19 cases locally are caused by the Delta variant. In July, nearly half (47%) of new cases were among those age 29 and younger.*
- C. *People vaccinated for COVID-19 can still be infected by the Delta variant, but the vaccine protects them from serious illness. Vaccinated people rarely are hospitalized for COVID-19.*

Of these three facts, do you think A, B, or C would be most likely to make an unvaccinated person think about getting vaccinated? (Circle one)

A

B

C

3. Why did you choose that one?
