

# St. Louis COVID-19 Vaccine Insights

## Message Concept Testing with Youth and Young Adults

July 20, 2021

**Background:** 24 youth and young adults attending a Dance Battle event in the Dutchtown neighborhood of St. Louis City on July 20, 2021 participated in testing 5 message concepts about COVID-19 vaccination.

**Approach:** A-B testing was used. Participants read a page containing 2 of the 5 messages. After reading both, they indicated which one would be more likely to make them think about getting the vaccine, and why. All possible combinations of message pairs were available in equal number and mixed order.

**Message concepts:** Five brief messages addressed themes that had emerged in prior audience research with young people in St. Louis: (1) protecting family as a motivation to get vaccinated; (2) how side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are tracked; (3) the prevalence of vaccine side effects; (4) availability of the vaccine in St. Louis; and (5) progress among Blacks in St. Louis getting vaccinated. All were factual and equivalent in length (65-70 words), with Reading Ease scores of 61-79. All are shown in Appendix A.

### Top-level findings

1. Family matters. A message linking vaccination to protecting one's family members was consistently the most favored concept. In the 10 message pairs in which it appeared, it was selected 9 times as being more likely to make one think about getting vaccinated. Respondents said that the family focus made the message feel personal to them.
2. Explaining vaccine side effects was reassuring. In St. Louis and nationally, concern about vaccine side effects is a major reason people do not get vaccinated. A message explaining how side effects are tracked, and another message reporting the low number of serious side effects detected were both well-received. Respondents said these messages made them "feel safer," "less worried," "at ease," and "more secure."
3. Mixed reactions to race-specific focus on Black progress. One message made a Black-White comparison that showed Blacks in St. Louis getting more COVID-19 vaccinations since May, 2021. Two respondents provided comments: one found the message motivating while the other felt it was divisive. It was tested in 7 pairs and selected only once as the more effective of the two. It is not clear, but worth exploring, whether reactions differed by race and if the message might be better received without the comparison to Whites.

*Detailed findings are shown in Tables 1 and 2.*

### Implications for action

1. Address side effects head-on. Explaining the vaccine monitoring system and presenting data on the rarity of serious side effects was reassuring to many people. These should be points of emphasis in communication/interactions with those hesitant to be vaccinated.
2. Make family protection a central argument for vaccination. While there are nuances to be explored – some are protecting family members in high risk categories, some are protecting children, and for some the protection is general – this framing is consistently well received.

## How were the data collected?

### Setting and attendees

Respondents were attendees at an outdoor Dance Battle hosted by Story Stitchers at Thomas Dunn Learning Center in the Dutchtown neighborhood of south St. Louis City. Story Stitchers is an artist collective of minority youth and young adults, ages 16-24. In addition to music and competitive dancing, the event featured free food and ice cream, a vaccination booth hosted by Dellwood Pharmacy, and a Story Stitchers “Wish Box” booth where young people could anonymously share their thoughts and opinions on various topics. The event was held on Tuesday, June 20, 2021 from 5pm to 7pm, and attended by about 40 youth and young adults.

### Methods

Two members of the St. Louis CEAL team were on-site facilitating message testing during the event. Attendees visiting their booth could select an envelope containing a single page showing two of the five messages (see sample, Appendix B). Participants read both messages, then answered two questions:

- *If you had not received the COVID-19 vaccine yet, which would be more likely to make you think about getting it, A or B?*
- *Why did you pick that one?*

They returned the completed page to the envelope and handed it back to a CEAL team member. Respondents received a \$5 gift card, choosing between four options: Mission Taco, Starbucks, McDonalds, or Target. The most commonly selected gift cards were Starbucks and McDonalds.

### Respondents

A total of 24 responses were collected at the event. Eighteen respondents were considered youth or young adults, and an additional 6 respondents were parents of children between the ages of 16 and 24. Most youth and young adult respondents were Black. Several of the parent respondents were Hispanic, and some expressed a Spanish language preference. Two adult respondents received translation of the sample messages from an on-site interpreter.

### Analysis

We calculated a “Preference Score” for each message concept. This score represented the proportion of times each message was preferred over the other message when included in a message pair. For example, if a message appeared in 10 pairs and was selected as the preferred message 9 times, its Preference Score would be 90%. Thus, preference scores could range from 0-100%, with higher proportions indicating more favorable reactions. Explanations for why one message was chosen over the other are reported verbatim in Table 1. The authors of this report classified each explanation as being either positive or negative about one of the messages in the message pair.

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

**Table 1. Summary of preferences and comments for COVID-19 vaccination message concepts**

Message concept	Preference score <sup>^</sup>	Why did you choose it? (positive/negative responses)
“Family”	90%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...family is important and that would motivate me to get the vaccine to protect them, the people around me, and myself.”</li> <li>• “The main reason I did get it was because of family. I traveled 45 minutes to get it.”</li> <li>• “I received the vaccine for this reason. I want my loved ones to be safe. I encourage getting the vaccine to those who are hesitant.”</li> <li>• “My desire to protect my loved ones is stronger than my trust in statistics”</li> <li>• “The reason why I got the vaccine is to protect my family member. Specially my <u>husband</u> who has medical reason.”</li> <li>• “...as a young person, I interact with friends &amp; family very often. Some of my family/extended family have health risks that make it important for me to get vaccinated.”</li> <li>• “To protect my family so there is no more virus”</li> <li>• “So there is no more people that get the virus”</li> <li>• “Personally compelling; tied to family and protecting loved ones”</li> </ul>
“Tracking”	63%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It makes me less worried about how it will affect my body and provides more reassurance.”</li> <li>• “...I have more security knowing there’s a tracking system. I will still wait.</li> <li>• “...That’s what I’m doing. I’m waiting to see what will happen.”</li> <li>• “...knowing mishaps are so uncommon helps.”</li> <li>• “I don’t know much about this virus. It scares me. Is it even FDA approved? I want to make sure the government isn’t up to anything suspicious”</li> <li>• “...a lot of people are having a lot of scares because of the way people are getting affected by the shot”</li> </ul>
“Rare”	44%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...the statistics. It makes me feel safer that the chances of problems are lower.”</li> <li>• “...it brings awareness to the fact that side effects are rare occasions. I feel like that puts people who are possibly considering the vaccine at ease when they are skittish about it.”</li> <li>• “The side effects seem to be less severe than contracting the virus itself. The number of those who experience side effects are low and make me feel a little more secure with being vaccinated.”</li> <li>• “...it puts me more at ease than thinking about my family. I believe I could still protect my family without getting the vaccine. But knowing mishaps are so uncommon helps.”</li> </ul>
“Everywhere”	25%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I like the fact that you can get vaccinated close to home. Making it convenient to be safe”</li> <li>• “...I had the vaccine and it was easy for me to find a place to get the vaccine.”</li> </ul>
“Progress”	14%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I think by applying it directly to a community that people are a part of makes people want to participate more.”</li> <li>• “... felt very clinical and not like I was a part of the community; wasn’t motivating &amp; I didn’t like that it divides us up by race instead of focusing on common positive aspects.”</li> </ul>

<sup>^</sup> Percentage of times the message concept was preferred over any other message concept in head-to-head comparison

**Table 2. Head-to-head comparisons for each message concept (Read Table L to R across rows).**

Message Concept	Times tested	Times preferred	Preference Score	Head-to-head comparisons <sup>^</sup>				
				Family	Tracking	Rare	Everywhere	Progress
Family	10	9	90%	-	+2	+1	+3	+2
Tracking	8	5	63%	-2	-	E	+2	+2
Rare	9	4	44%	-1	E	-	E	E
Everywhere	8	2	25%	-3	-2	E	-	+1
Progress	7	1	14%	-2	-2	E	-1	-

<sup>^</sup> Each cell shows the net outcome for all pairs in which the row message was compared to the column message. Positive numbers shown in **green** indicate that the row message was chosen that many times more than it was not chosen when compared to the column message. **Red** numbers indicate that the row message was chosen that many times less than it was not chosen when compared to the column message. A **blue** E means that the row and column messages were chosen equally often.

## **Appendix A. Five COVID-19 vaccination message concepts included in testing**

### **“Family”**

Why do people decide to get the COVID-19 vaccination? In short: Family. In St. Louis, 7 of 8 young people who got vaccinated said they did it to protect loved ones like parents and grandparents. Across the U.S., about 1 in 4 people who felt hesitant about the vaccine were convinced to get it by family and friends, and even more said family was the main reason they got it.

### **“Tracking”**

Some people are waiting to get the COVID-19 vaccine because they are worried about possible side effects. Did you know there is a national reporting system that tracks side effects? If a safety concern is found, they can shut down a vaccine, as they did for 11 days with Johnson & Johnson. So far, 186 million Americans have had a COVID-19 vaccine, and side effects have been rare.

### **“Rare”**

Serious side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine are tracked. Of 186 million Americans vaccinated so far, less than 5 people per million get serious allergic reactions, and less than 4 per million get heart problems. Blood clots (3 per million) or a nerve disorder (8 per million) affected some who got Johnson & Johnson’s vaccine, mostly those over age 50. Overall, side effects have been rare.

### **“Everywhere”**

St. Louis is working overtime to bring the COVID-19 vaccine to every neighborhood in the City. All over St. Louis, people are getting vaccinated in schools, churches, parks, community centers, even Busch Stadium. Almost anyone can find a place to get vaccinated within a few minutes of their home or work. It’s never been easier to find and get the COVID-19 vaccine in St. Louis.

### **“Progress”**

All over St. Louis, people are getting vaccinated for COVID-19. Every week, at least 2,000 new people get vaccinated, and that’s just in the City of St. Louis. Uptake of the vaccine is growing fastest among Blacks in St. Louis. Since May 1<sup>st</sup>, more Blacks have been vaccinated (11,423) in St. Louis than any other group – over 2,000 more than the next closest group, Whites (9,352).

**Appendix B. Sample of message testing form.**

**Please read both A and B below, then answer the two questions.**

**A**

All over St. Louis, people are getting vaccinated for COVID-19. Every week, at least 2,000 new people get vaccinated, and that's just in the City of St. Louis. Uptake of the vaccine is growing fastest among Blacks in St. Louis. Since May 1<sup>st</sup>, more Blacks have been vaccinated (11,423) in St. Louis than any other group – over 2,000 more than the next closest group, Whites (9,352).

**B**

St. Louis is working overtime to bring the COVID-19 vaccine to every neighborhood in the City. All over St. Louis, people are getting vaccinated in schools, churches, parks, community centers, even Busch Stadium. Almost anyone can find a place to get vaccinated within a few minutes of their home or work. It's never been easier to find and get the COVID-19 vaccine in St. Louis.

1. If you had not received the COVID-19 vaccine yet, which would be more likely to make you think about getting it, A or B? (Circle one)

2. Why did you pick that one?

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