

Anxiety disorders had no effect on vaccine hesitancy

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Individuals who deal with anxiety are no less hesitant to get the COVID-19 vaccine compared to those without anxiety, according to new research.

The new study led by the University of Waterloo aimed to investigate the relationship between [vaccine hesitancy](#), [psychological factors](#) associated with anxiety, and individuals' reasoning for and against getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

To conduct the study, the researchers surveyed 148 participants with and without anxiety disorders. All participants completed an online questionnaire examining COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy along with other related variables such as conspiracy beliefs, individualism, and intolerance of uncertainty. The researchers also surveyed the top reasons why individuals were motivated to get the vaccine and the top reasons why they were hesitant.

The most common reasons that participants were hesitant to get the vaccine were related to the vaccine's effectiveness and novelty, and fear of adverse effects. In contrast, the most frequent reasons that participants were motivated to get the vaccine were to protect others, to protect self, and to return to a sense of normalcy.

The researchers found that anxious and non-anxious participants did not differ in vaccine hesitancy. However, discomfort with uncertainty predicted greater vaccine hesitancy in non-anxious participants, and in both groups' vaccine hesitancy was predicted by individualistic worldviews, conspiracy beliefs, and a lack of trust in authority.

"People with anxiety difficulties were not more hesitant about the vaccine, rather, the more discomfort they had with uncertainty, the less hesitant they were," said Dr. Christine Purdon, professor of Clinical Psychology at Waterloo. "The opposite was true of those without anxiety, suggesting that discomfort with uncertainty may be an important factor when addressing vaccine hesitancy."

Aliya McNeil, lead author of the study and a master's candidate in

[clinical psychology](#) at Waterloo, adds that the findings could suggest that people without [anxiety](#) disorders are concerned with uncertainty related to the vaccine itself, whereas people with [anxiety disorders](#) might view the vaccine as an opportunity to reduce stress and uncertainty related to the virus. This may indicate that vaccine hesitancy is related to how one values independence.

These findings help shed light on the best way for the [government](#) to promote vaccination.

"Governments and public health departments might want to consider advertising vaccines in ways that activate fewer feelings of individualism," McNeil said. "It's important for campaigns to enhance trust in the vaccine focusing on the scientists responsible for vaccine development rather than large corporations. In addition, by normalizing feelings of uncertainty and providing evidence-based information, governments can guard against the worrying that occurs with vague and uncertain information."

The researchers hope that their findings will help aid in future research that continues to explore vaccine hesitancy and interventions to promote vaccine uptake.

The paper, Anxiety disorders, COVID-19 fear, and [vaccine hesitancy](#), authored by McNeil and Purdon, was published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*.

More information: Aliya McNeil et al, Anxiety disorders, COVID-19 fear, and vaccine hesitancy, *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.janxdis.2022.102598](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2022.102598)

Provided by University of Waterloo

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