



Barriers to Vaccine Confidence:

The Impact of Healthcare Shifts on Vaccine Confidence

AUTHORS

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Introduction

Between 2023 and 2025, the U.S. public health landscape surrounding COVID-19 and influenza vaccination has been characterized by declining uptake, evolving policy guidance, and growing public skepticism toward health institutions. Despite continued recommendations for seasonal influenza vaccination and updated COVID-19 boosters—particularly for older adults and individuals with chronic conditions—vaccination rates among both healthy Americans and high-risk populations have remained modest, with national surveys indicating that fewer than half of U.S. adults consistently receive recommended respiratory vaccines in a given season^{1,2}. During this period, federal vaccination policy shifted away from broad, pandemic-era recommendations toward more targeted, risk-based and shared decision-making approaches, including changes to guidance for healthy children and pregnant individuals, contributing to public confusion and uneven awareness of current recommendations^{3,4}.

These policy changes have unfolded alongside a documented rise in health misinformation related to vaccine safety, efficacy, and necessity, which has been amplified through social media and partisan media environments^{5,6}. Concurrently, public confidence in key health agencies such as the CDC and FDA has declined, with fewer than half of Americans expressing trust in these institutions to effectively manage vaccine guidance and public health communication⁵. This erosion of trust has had measurable consequences for vaccination intent and behavior, particularly among populations without immediate perceived risk, while posing ongoing challenges for individuals with chronic illnesses who remain disproportionately vulnerable to severe outcomes from COVID-19 and influenza^{1,6}. Together, these trends reflect a complex and fragmented vaccination climate in which scientific guidance, policy evolution, misinformation, and institutional trust intersect to shape vaccine decision-making in the post-pandemic United States^{2,7,8}.

Methods

The Academy of Managed Care Pharmacy (AMCP) Research Institute developed a 10-item questionnaire designed to capture patient-reported perspectives on COVID-19 and influenza vaccination, including historical vaccination behavior, recent vaccine uptake, perceived hesitation or confusion regarding current vaccination recommendations, vaccine availability, and understanding of routine annual adult vaccination. The Patient Insight Institute partnered with AMCP Research Institute to administer the survey to a national cohort of adult patients with chronic illnesses who had previously opted in to participate in the Patient Insight Network. Eligible participants resided across the United States and self-identified as living with at least one chronic condition. The survey was fielded in mid-November 2025 using an online survey platform, and 569 responses were collected anonymously to assess vaccination behaviors and attitudes within this population.

Key Insights

Survey results indicate that this chronically ill cohort has historically demonstrated strong engagement with respiratory vaccination, yet recent uptake shows notable declines, accompanied by persistent confusion regarding COVID-19 guidance. Overall, 70% of respondents reported receiving a COVID-19 vaccine within the past two years, and 84% reported receiving an influenza vaccine during that same period, suggesting relatively high baseline vaccine acceptance compared with the general U.S. adult population, in which roughly 55–60% report COVID-19 vaccination and 65–70% report seasonal flu vaccination over similar timeframes².

	COVID-19	Flu
Yes, I've had the vaccine within last 2 years.	70%	84%
Yes, I've had the vaccine since August 2025.	46%	67%
In 2025 I delayed or chose not to get the vaccine due to confusion about what is recommended for me.	18%	7%

However, when focusing on recent vaccination behavior since August 2025, uptake dropped substantially: only 46% reported receiving a COVID-19 vaccine and 67% reported a flu vaccine, mirroring national trends in which updated COVID-19 vaccination lags behind influenza vaccination³. Confusion about vaccination recommendations emerged as a prominent barrier: 18% of participants indicated they had delayed or forgone a COVID-19 vaccine due to uncertainty about guidance, compared with 7% reporting similar confusion for influenza. This pattern aligns with broader evidence showing that changes to COVID-19 vaccine recommendations have not been well understood by the public and have had limited influence on decision-making¹⁰.

Key Findings

Confusion, not access, drives hesitancy

Most adults with chronic illnesses can get vaccines, but uncertainty about COVID-19 guidance and pharmacy offerings is a major barrier.

Recent COVID-19 vaccination lags behind flu

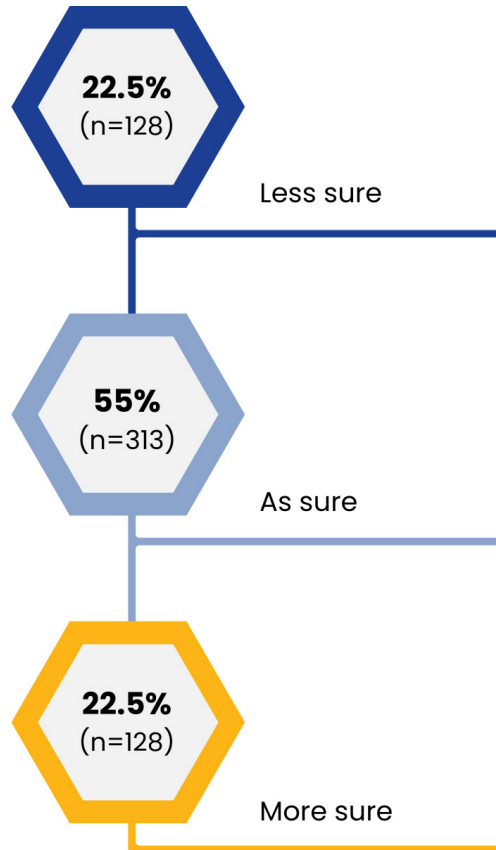
Even populations historically engaged with vaccines show lower uptake for updated COVID-19 shots, reflecting broader national trends.

Clear communication is critical

Targeted, consistent messaging from providers and pharmacies can boost confidence, reduce delays, and improve timely vaccination among high-risk adults.

Structural barriers to vaccination were minimal in this cohort, consistent with national patterns: only 6% reported attempting but being unable to access a COVID-19 vaccine, and 2% reported similar challenges for influenza, reflecting CDC data that fewer than 10% of U.S. adults cite access-related barriers such as cost or convenience for respiratory¹¹. When asked specifically about changes at their usual pharmacy, only 7% reported fewer vaccine options than the previous year, while 35% were unsure, highlighting widespread uncertainty about service availability that may reflect variable pharmacy practices and evolving COVID-19 vaccine distribution policies. Nationally, uptake for updated COVID-19 and influenza vaccines remains well below 50%, with only about 27% of adults receiving an updated COVID-19 vaccine and roughly 42–48% receiving a flu vaccine over the same period³, emphasizing persistent gaps in vaccination even when access is adequate.

Compared to last year, how sure are you about what vaccines you should get this year? (n= 569)



Finally, respondents' confidence in knowing which vaccines they needed revealed mixed perceptions: 55% felt as certain as in the prior year, 22.5% felt more confident, and 22.5% felt less sure. This mirrors broader public uncertainty regarding adult vaccination guidelines following multiple recommendation changes. Collectively, these findings suggest that while access is generally sufficient, uncertainty regarding vaccine recommendations and service availability continues to shape vaccination behavior, particularly for COVID-19, even among populations historically engaged with adult immunization.

Conclusion

Our findings highlight that, among adults with chronic illnesses, historical engagement with COVID-19 and influenza vaccination remains relatively strong, yet recent uptake has declined, particularly for updated COVID-19 vaccines. Confusion about vaccination recommendations and uncertainty regarding service availability at pharmacies emerged as significant factors influencing vaccine decision-making, while structural access barriers were minimal. Comparisons with the general U.S. adult population suggest that these trends—declining COVID-19 vaccine uptake, persistent hesitancy, and mixed confidence in understanding which vaccines are needed—reflect broader national patterns, emphasizing the role of clear communication and consistent guidance in maintaining adult immunization coverage. Together, these findings underscore the importance of targeted public health strategies that enhance patient confidence, reduce confusion, and provide transparent, accessible information to support timely vaccination among both chronically ill adults and the wider population.

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