

**From the NY Times: The Morning
By David Leonhardt
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Many vaccine skeptics have since changed their minds and gotten shots. Here's why.

How to persuade

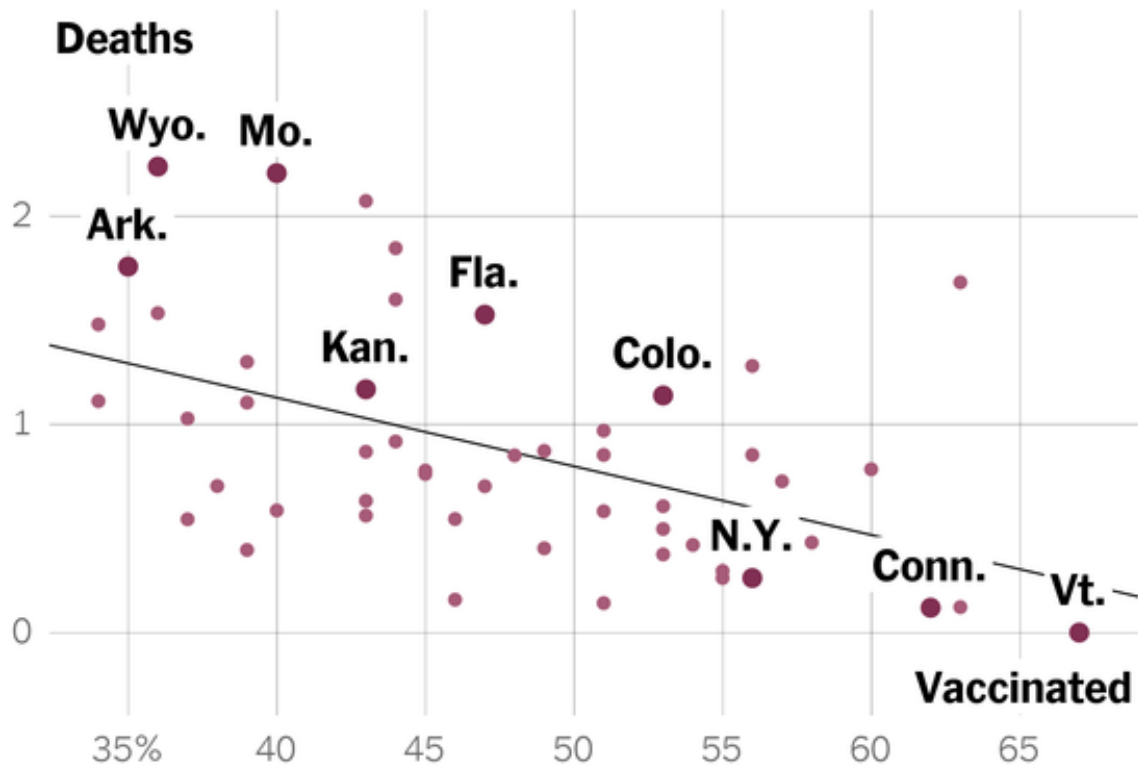
When the Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a poll at the start of the year and asked American adults whether they planned to get vaccinated, 23 percent said no.

But a significant portion of that group — about one quarter of it — has since decided to receive a shot. The Kaiser pollsters recently followed up and asked these converts [what led them to change their minds](#). The answers are important, because they offer insight into how the millions of still unvaccinated Americans might be persuaded to get shots, too.

First, a little background: A few weeks ago, it seemed plausible that Covid-19 might be in permanent retreat, at least in communities with high vaccination rates. But the Delta variant has changed the situation. The number of cases is rising [in all 50 states](#).

Although vaccinated people remain almost guaranteed to avoid serious symptoms, Delta has put the unvaccinated at greater risk of contracting the virus — and, by extension, of hospitalization and death. The Covid death rate in recent days has been significantly higher in states with low vaccination rates than in those with higher rates:

Vaccination status and recent deaths per million residents, by state



Based on current vaccination status and deaths in the week ending July 15.

Source: The New York Times

(For more detailed state-level charts, [see this piece](#) by my colleagues Lauren Leatherby and Amy Schoenfeld Walker. The same pattern is evident at the county level, as the health policy expert [Charles Gaba](#) has been explaining on Twitter.)

Nationwide, more than 99 percent of recent deaths have occurred among unvaccinated people, and more than 97 percent of recent hospitalizations have occurred among the unvaccinated, according to the C.D.C. “Look,” President Biden said on Friday, “the only pandemic we have is among the unvaccinated.”

The three themes

What helps move people from vaccine skeptical to vaccinated? The Kaiser polls point to three main themes.

(The themes apply to both the 23 percent of people who said they would not get a shot, as well as to the 28 percent who described their attitude in January as “wait and see.” About half of the “wait and see” group has since gotten a shot.)

1. Seeing that millions of other Americans have been safely vaccinated.

Consider these quotes [from Kaiser’s interviews](#):

“It was clearly safe. No one was dying.” — a 32-year-old white Republican man in South Carolina

“I went to visit my family members in another state and everyone there had been vaccinated with no problems.” — a 63-year-old Black independent man in Texas

“Almost all of my friends were vaccinated with no side effects.” — a 64-year-old Black Democratic woman in Tennessee

This suggests that emphasizing the safety of the vaccines — rather than just the danger of Covid, as many experts (and this newsletter) typically do — may help persuade more people to get a shot.

[A poll of vaccine skeptics](#) by Echelon Insights, a Republican firm, points to a similar conclusion. One of the most persuasive messages, the skeptics said, was hearing that people have been getting the vaccine for months and it is “working very well without any major issues.”



Zjohdell Hudson going door to door to offer vaccinations in Lincoln, Del., in May. Caroline Gutman for The New York Times

2. Hearing pro-vaccine messages from doctors, friends and relatives.

For many people who got vaccinated, messages from politicians, national experts and the mass media were persuasive. But many other Americans — [especially those without a college degree](#) — don't trust mainstream institutions. For them, hearing directly from people they know can have a bigger impact.

“Hearing from experts,” as Mollyann Brodie, who oversees the Kaiser polls, told me, “isn't the same as watching those around you or in your house actually go through the vaccination process.”

Here are more Kaiser interviews:

“My daughter is a doctor and she got vaccinated, which was reassuring that it was OK to get vaccinated.” — a 64-year-old Asian Democratic woman in Texas

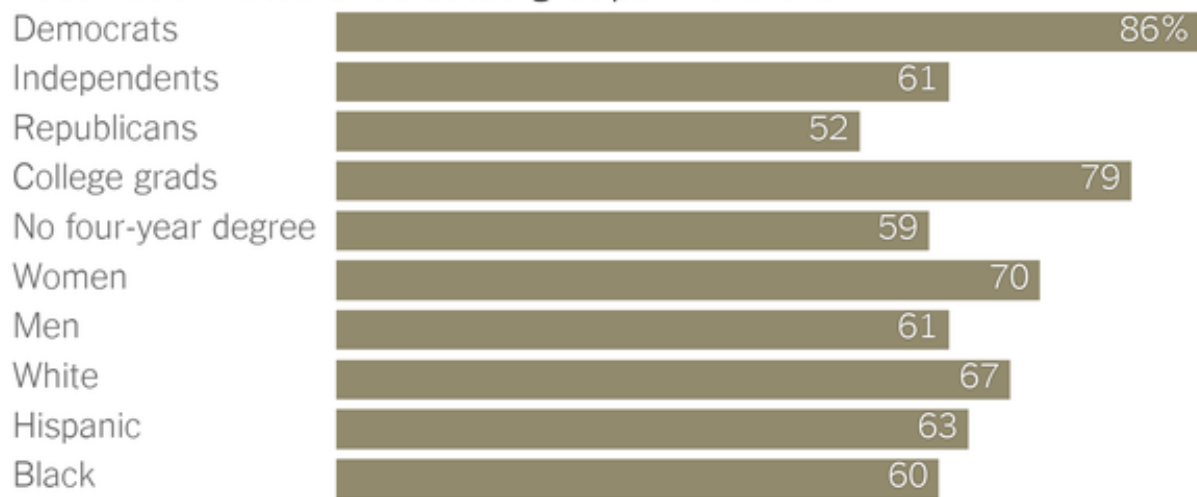
“Friends and family talked me into it, as did my place of employment.” — a 28-year-old white independent man in Virginia

“My husband bugged me to get it and I gave in.” — a 42-year-old white Republican woman in Indiana

“I was told by my doctor that she strongly recommend I get the vaccine because I have diabetes.” — a 47-year-old white Republican woman in Florida

These comments suggest that continued grass-roots campaigns may have a bigger effect at this stage than public-service ad campaigns. The one exception to that may be prominent figures from groups that still have higher vaccine skepticism, like Republican politicians and Black community leaders.

Vaccination rates of selected groups in the U.S.



Based on those who said they had received at least one shot in a June poll.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

3. Learning that not being vaccinated will prevent people from doing some things.

There is now a roiling debate over [vaccine mandates](#), with some hospitals, colleges, cruise-ship companies and others implementing them — and some state legislators trying to ban mandates. The Kaiser poll suggests that these

requirements can influence a meaningful number of skeptics to get shots, sometimes just for logistical reasons.

“Hearing that the travel quarantine restrictions would be lifted for those people that are vaccinated was a major reason for my change of thought.” — a 43-year-old Black Democratic man in Virginia

“To see events or visit some restaurants, it was easier to be vaccinated.” — a 39-year-old white independent man in New Jersey

“Bahamas trip required a COVID shot.” — a 43-year-old Hispanic independent man in Pennsylvania