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High COVID-19 Vaccine Confidence in UK Obscures More Troubling Picture: Survey Finds 18% of Unvaccinated “Unsure,” with Concerns Among Black People, Muslims, and Those in the Most Deprived Communities

To Help Increase Uptake, Surgo Segments the Unvaccinated “Unsure” Respondents Based on their Beliefs and Concerns into The “Watchful” (39%), The “Worried” (29%), The “Disengaged” (21%), and The “Closed-off” (11%)

LONDON, April 13, 2021— A survey conducted by nonprofit Surgo Ventures finds that although a majority of unvaccinated adults in the United Kingdom (82%) would get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as it is offered to them, unvaccinated adults who are unsure (18%) may be hard to persuade due to a range of perceived barriers, from worries about side effects to concerns that the vaccine has not been properly tested on people of their ethnicity.

Surgo administered a nationally representative survey of 3,658 adults from February 18-24, 2021 using [Ipsos MORI's UK Knowledge Panel](#). Using a proprietary framework for analyzing human behavior called [CUBES \(to Change behavior, Understand Barriers, Enablers, and Stages of change\)](#), Surgo divided respondents into psychobehavioral segments, focusing on the specific barriers those segments perceive to getting vaccinated, in order to drive solutions to increase vaccine uptake.

“Although you may hear about high vaccine confidence in the UK, the spread of new variants means we can’t get complacent about achieving full vaccine coverage, especially because there are pockets of society with higher than average levels of uncertainty,” said Dr. Sema K. Sgaier, Co-Founder and CEO of Surgo Ventures and Adjunct Assistant Professor at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. “Our analysis finds a significant proportion of people remaining on the fence who have concerns that won’t be resolved without intentional, personalized approaches to build their confidence.”

Black People, Muslims, and Those in Most Deprived Regions have Concerns

Of all respondents to Surgo’s survey, 38% (1,399) reported having received at least one dose of the vaccine or having made an appointment to receive the first dose at the time they were surveyed. Among the 62% without a vaccine or appointment, 82% reported they would get the COVID-19 vaccine immediately when offered.

Among the 62% without a vaccine or an appointment:

- Breaking down that number down by ethnic group and religion revealed that:
 - **62% of unvaccinated Black respondents¹** said they would not get the vaccine immediately when offered—the highest proportion of all ethnic groups.
 - **42% of unvaccinated Muslims²** said they would not get the vaccine immediately when offered (73% of these ‘unsure’ Muslim respondents are of South Asian origin).
- **Greater London (71%) and North West England (76%) are the regions with the smallest proportion of those who would get the vaccine immediately when offered**, compared to 85% across all other regions of the UK.
- **People in the most deprived regions are most likely to delay:** 71% of those residing in the most deprived regions of the UK (Index of Multiple Deprivation, IMD 1) said they would get it immediately when offered, compared to 91% in the least deprived regions (IMD 5).

Breaking Down the “Unsure” into Psychobehavioral Segments

While demographics are important, Dr. Sgaier stressed that increasing vaccine uptake among the “unsure” is more likely to succeed if we focus on their beliefs and concerns, rather than demographics like ethnicity and religion: “Every person is different, and driven by different reasons or barriers for taking or refusing the vaccine. We need to better understand, respond to and address their real or perceived barriers, so that we can build greater vaccine confidence in the UK.”

To that end, Surgo divided **the 18% of unvaccinated UK adults who reported they were “unsure” about the vaccine** into four psychobehavioral segments:



- **The “Watchful” (39% of the “Unsure” respondents).** The people in this group feel moderate worries around vaccine safety, but they

¹ Among Black people, 77 out of 98 were in the unvaccinated group; the higher rate of ‘Unsure’ in Black unvaccinated compared to White unvaccinated population is statistically significant.

² Among Muslims, 92 out of 115 were in the unvaccinated group; the higher rate of ‘Unsure’ in unvaccinated Muslims compared to Christian or Non-religion populations is statistically significant

also believe in their personal responsibility to get vaccinated and the need for vaccination to get life back to normal.

- **The “Worried” (29% of the “Unsure” respondents).** This group has low confidence in the vaccine: they are both worried about side effects and do not believe in the efficacy of the vaccine in protecting themselves or their loved ones from COVID-19. A significant proportion of this group believes in vaccine conspiracy theories.
- **The “Disengaged” (21% of the “Unsure” respondents).** While they believe in the efficacy of the vaccine, the people in this group do not perceive any risk of COVID-19 to themselves or those around them nor do they feel a responsibility to get vaccinated to protect others.
- **The “Closed-Off” (11% of the “Unsure” respondents).** This group is the most mistrustful and does not feel responsible for the transmission of COVID-19 to others nor the responsibility to get vaccinated to protect others. They are most likely to hold conspiracy beliefs.

How to Persuade the “Unsure”

To persuade those who comprise the “Unsure”—the **“Watchful,” “Worried,” “Disengaged,”** and **“Closed-Off”**—Surgo recommends tackling the specific barriers each segment perceives, through customized, localized solutions that are informed by a person’s own experiences. This may include, but not be limited to:

1. For The “Watchful”

- Barrier(s) to overcome: CONCERNS ABOUT SAFETY, TRUST
- Solutions could include:
 - Emphasise their shared responsibility to get vaccinated to protect others in society
 - Reassure them that large-scale country-wide immunisation programs have seen a very low rate of serious side-effects and that most people who experience any side effects improve in a few days
 - Continue to share information about the increasing number of adults who have already received the vaccine in the UK (now approaching 50% of the population)

2. For The “Worried”

- Barrier(s) to overcome: CONCERNS ABOUT EFFICACY, DISINFORMATION
- Solutions could include:
 - Emphasise that the vaccine will get their family and social life back to normal; encourage their shared responsibility to get vaccinated to protect others in society
 - Reassure that artificial ingredients are just as safe as natural ingredients

- Reassure by sharing accurate information about the vaccine testing/approval process and ongoing monitoring
- Continue to share information about the high and increasing number of adults who have already received the vaccine in the UK

3. For The “Disengaged”

- Barrier(s) to overcome: LOW RISK PERCEPTION, LOW SENSE OF COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY
- Solutions could include:
 - Emphasise that the vaccine will get their family and social life back to normal
 - Reassure by sharing information about the vaccine testing/approval process and ongoing monitoring
 - Alert them about the likely requirement for vaccine passports at work and for travel, especially to other countries

4. For The “Closed-Off”

- Barrier(s) to overcome: ALL OF THE ABOVE
- Solutions could include:
 - Emphasise the risk to the more vulnerable in their reference communities, even if they believe it is a low risk to them personally
 - Reassure that all available vaccines are extremely effective against serious illness and death
 - Continue to share information at a local level and by showcasing individuals from their own communities (as opposed to national authority figures)

Download “UK General Population COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake Survey Summary”([link](#)).

Read Surgo’s U.S. report released on February 19, “U.S. General Population COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake Survey: A Psychobehavioral Approach to Promoting COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake,” [here](#).

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About Surgo Ventures: Surgo Ventures, with headquarters in Washington, DC and a hub in the United Kingdom, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to solving health and social problems with precision. We do this by bringing together all the tools available from behavioral science, data science, and artificial intelligence to unlock solutions that will improve and save lives. We work globally; in the United States, the United Kingdom, and in low- and middle-income countries on issues including COVID-19, tuberculosis, maternal and child health, housing, and more. Visit us at www.surgoventures.org.