

NEW RESEARCH STUDY: 2022

Investigating Generation Z College Students' Health Beliefs and Preventive Behavioral Patterns associated with COVID-19

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Abstract:

Vaccination may be critical to curtailing the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, but herd immunity can only be realized with high vaccination coverage. There is a need to identify empirically supported strategies to increase uptake, especially among generation Z young adults (birth years range from 1995 to 2010) such as ECU college students as this subpopulation has shown lower rates of getting vaccinated and poor adherence to public health recommended preventative strategies such as wearing masks and social distancing. The vaccination rate among ECU college students ranged from 56 to 77 percent in the fall of 2021. This research study investigated two specific issues: (1) examine the core set of health beliefs and preventive health patterns among the current generation Z college student population at East Carolina University; and (2) determine which sociodemographic factors predict whether a generation Z college student gets vaccinated or not with regards to COVID-19. With the assistance of the Center for Survey Research (CSR), our Qualtrics online quantitative and qualitative survey was distributed to 500 ECU generation Z college students ranging from first year freshman to graduate school level from November 1st, 2021 to January 31st, 2022, with a response rate of 10 percent (51 fully completed surveys). The **major findings** from our survey were: (1) **eighty-five (85%)** of our sample were vaccinated against COVID-19; (2) the major factors which influenced students in getting vaccinated were **personal (78%), family/friends (71%), prevention (63%) and school (59%)**; (3) the major factors which did not influence students in getting vaccinated were **mandate (24%), race/ethnicity (4%), religious (2%), and government (2%)**; (4) **more women (50%) than men (33%) felt that moral values** influenced their decision to get vaccinated against COVID-19; and (5) **more students** who identified themselves **politically as independent/leaning independent (31%) and no party affiliation (24%) than democrat/leaning democrat (22%) or republican/leaning republican (20%)** were more likely to get vaccinated for COVID-19. Finally, the key **qualitative themes** for getting more students vaccinated

for COVID-19 involved *(1) providing academic and monetary incentives and (2) presenting true, non-biased talks about COVID-19 to students*. This research study's results are significant because of its potential in dramatically increasing the vaccination rates for Generation Z college students not only at ECU but also across the United States.