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## [Global vaccine hesitancy declining...](#)

New Scientist

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## NewScientist

**Section:** NEWS; News & Technology; Pg. 8-9; Vol. 249; No. 3327; ISSN: 0262 4079

**Length:** 916 words

**Byline:** [Adam Vaughan](#)

**Highlight:** People in richer nations are becoming more willing to have a covid-19 shot, matching attitudes in poorer countries, reports [Adam Vaughan](#)

## Body

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WHEN Margaret Keenan became the [first person](#) to receive a covid-19 vaccine outside a trial last December, she was among the [7 in 10 people surveyed globally](#) who said they would be willing to receive a dose. But the significant minority unwilling to have a vaccine led public health experts to worry about how such hesitancy might hamper efforts to achieve herd immunity.

The good news is that with more than [400 million people](#) around the world having received at least one dose of a vaccine, attitudes are changing.

[One survey](#), which included Japan and the UK, found that in 11 of 14 high-income countries, the number of people who "strongly agreed" they would get vaccinated increased by at least 9 percentage points between November 2020 and last month. Seven of these countries saw a rise of at least 20 percentage points.

Meanwhile, the proportion of their population who "strongly disagreed" with getting a vaccine dropped or stayed stable. None of the surveyed countries saw a rise in unwillingness to get vaccinated.

The survey also found that the number of people who were worried about side effects fell or remained constant in all nations over the same period.

"It's been exciting to see people are seeing this vaccine can get us out of this situation," says Jeffrey Lazarus at the University of Barcelona in Spain. He says the dial on attitudes may be shifted again by new incentives, such as the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently advising that [some vaccinated people in the US can mix in households](#) without face masks or social distancing.

"People are human, they need incentives. Some people say, 'I'll save my life, save my family, help society.' Others say, 'This is great, we can go for dinner if we're all vaccinated.' We need to reach people on all levels," says Lazarus.

Recent studies showing the impressive real-world safety and [effectiveness of vaccines](#) may also help assuage some people. Before roll-outs began, these were two of the most commonly cited reasons for vaccine hesitancy.

## Global vaccine hesitancy declining...

In some places, however, there is a risk that willingness to be vaccinated is set back by the halt in use of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine in several countries over blood clotting fears (see "...but Europeans get cold feet amid vaccine controversy", right).

The European Medicines Agency concluded last week that the vaccine's benefits outweigh the risk of side effects, sparking many countries to resume its use.

AstraZeneca has also since published promising safety and efficacy results from human trials in the US, in which no risk of blood clots was reported.

Nevertheless, the suspensions will alter public attitudes, says Lazarus. "We needed to investigate, but we didn't need to suspend use."

In the UK, vaccine hesitancy has receded as the country's rapid vaccine roll-out continues, with nearly [28 million](#) people now having received at least one dose.

Last September and October, Daniel Freeman at the University of Oxford and his colleagues found that [16.6 per cent of people in the UK were very unsure about getting a vaccine](#) and 11.7 per cent were strongly hesitant. Now, he says, based on unpublished data from 15,000 people surveyed between January and February, things are looking better.

"There has been a noticeable increase in vaccine acceptance in the UK since the vaccination programme began, which is really positive," says Freeman.

Figures vary depending on the survey, but one data set shows that the share of people in the UK who have received a vaccine already or who would take a vaccine if offered stood at 93 per cent in early March, up from 78 per cent in December, according to the UK's Office for National Statistics (ONS).

"That is really good," says Helen Bedford at the UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health in London. She thinks a combination of factors are shifting views. "When you start seeing your family members being immunised and they're absolutely fine, that's reassurance," she says.

However, Bedford notes that the ONS figures show that young women are more hesitant to receive a vaccine than their male peers. People from ethnic minorities also appear less willing to have one. A [study of 19,000 healthcare workers in England](#) found that 36.8 per cent of black staff were vaccinated compared with 70.9 per cent of white workers.

While the hesitancy among young women is a surprise to Bedford, she says the difference by ethnicity was predictable since there has been a similar trend with previous vaccination programmes. She says more preparation should have been done to have trusted local leaders and healthcare workers change minds in some communities.

One bright spot comes in the world's poorer countries. On average, 80.3 per cent of people in 10 low and middle-income countries said they would have a covid-19 vaccine when it became available, according to [a study](#) of 46,000 people, surveyed between June 2020 and January this year. That is a much greater proportion than in some high-income countries, such as the 64.6 per cent willing to get one in the US.

The average acceptance across the 10 countries masked differences ranging from 66.5 per cent in Burkina Faso and Pakistan to 96.6 per cent in Nepal. "I think it's good news, conditional on getting people to follow through with their intention," says Mushfiq Mobarak at Yale University, an author on the study. "For the remainder, the data gave us some clues on the sort of messaging we should highlight. [It is] telling us they're concerned about safety and efficacy."

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