

# Information key to COVID-19 vaccine acceptance

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Glen Nowak, director of the Center for Health and Risk Communication at the University of Georgia, co-authored a Perspective article addressing one of the most pressing topics facing the United States: achieving high acceptance of a vaccine for COVID-19.

The article, "When Will We Have a Vaccine?—Understanding Questions and Answers about COVID-19 Vaccination," was published Sept. 8 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It is co-authored by Barry R. Bloom of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, and Walter Orenstein of the Emory Vaccine Center at Emory University School of Medicine.

The Perspective calls attention to the activities and outcomes that need to be achieved before a COVID-19 [vaccine](#) is recommended and available for use in the United States. It notes that many people, including [health](#) care providers and journalists, are asking, "When will we have a vaccine to protect us against COVID-19?" Nowak and his co-authors point out those who ask that question really are asking three questions:

1. When will the public be able to have confidence that available COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective?
2. When will a COVID-19 vaccine be available to the [general public](#)?
3. When will COVID-19 vaccination rates be high enough that society can return to a pre-pandemic world?

"Our perspective article provides advice on what is needed to achieve high confidence in COVID-19 vaccines," said Nowak, a professor at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication. "In the U.S., billions of dollars have been invested in developing COVID-19 vaccines, including five that are currently being tested with people. However, it is not enough to have a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine. Most people need to be willing to be vaccinated. To achieve that, we need visible COVID-19 vaccine education efforts that involve transparency, engagement and dialog."

Nowak noted that investments and efforts in [health care provider](#) and public education about a new vaccine usually do not happen until there is a vaccination recommendation. Those efforts typically receive relatively little government funding and often only focus on health care providers.

"Oftentimes, it is assumed by many experts that new vaccines will speak for themselves. That is, their benefits are so obvious and important people will want to get vaccinated," Nowak said. "What usually happens, though, is health care providers and the people who should receive the new vaccine have many questions and concerns. They want to know how safety was determined and how well the vaccine will protect them."

The *NEJM* Perspective article is intended to provide guidance to federal and state government agencies and [health officials](#) who are hoping new COVID-19 vaccines will be widely accepted by the public. This includes the U.S. Department of Health

and Human Services, the Federal Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Nowak said a broader, more in-depth approach needs to be taken starting now when it comes to communicating and educating people about the COVID-19 vaccines. Officials need to be transparent and communicate often about how vaccines are being evaluated for safety and effectiveness as well as how it was determined which groups of people should receive the first available doses.

There also need to be steps taken now that will help get as much acceptance as possible when the vaccine is ready, especially for those who are first in line to get it. This can be done through trusted health care professionals and user-friendly materials that provide safety and effectiveness information.

"As much as we all want the COVID-19 pandemic to end, we can't assume fast and widespread acceptance of COVID-19 vaccines," Nowak said. "We need to build trust and confidence in how these vaccines were developed and tested if we expect to achieve high acceptance."

**More information:** Barry R. Bloom et al. "When Will We Have a Vaccine?"—Understanding Questions and Answers about Covid-19 Vaccination, *New England Journal of Medicine* (2020). [DOI: 10.1056/NEJMp2025331](https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp2025331)

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