

Committee on Energy and Commerce
Opening Statement as Prepared for Delivery
of
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations Chair Diana DeGette

Hearing on “A Shot at Normalcy: Building COVID-19 Confidence”

May 26, 2021

Today, we continue our oversight of the nation’s COVID-19 response efforts.

Throughout the pandemic, this Subcommittee has conducted robust oversight over a range of critical issues, including vaccine development and distribution challenges.

As we enter a new phase of the pandemic, today’s hearing addresses one of the most consequential COVID-19 issues this Subcommittee has examined: the pressing need to increase COVID-19 vaccine confidence and uptake in the United States.

Because if not enough people actually get vaccinated, the massive investments made to develop these vaccines, and the extraordinary efforts to make them widely available, will never reach their full potential.

Fortunately, we are making significant progress. In just five months, more than 160 million Americans have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Over 85 percent of American seniors have received at least one dose.

And, in the two weeks since FDA authorized Pfizer’s vaccine for children ages 12 to 15 years old, more than 2 million children in this age group received their first dose.

Thanks to the millions of Americans who have chosen to get a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, we now have a shot at returning to normalcy. So if you want to take off your masks, get together with friends and family safely, or go on vacation, then join these millions of Americans—and go get vaccinated.

But here is the bad news: We are not out of the woods yet.

Although it is easier than ever to get a vaccine, millions of Americans remain unvaccinated—and immunization rates in many places remain alarmingly low.

In some states, fewer than 40 percent of the population has received even a single dose. And, since peaking in mid-April, we have seen a decline in the number of daily doses administered across the country.

This is worrying, and it will take a collective push to reach the Biden Administration’s goal of 70 percent of American adults having at least one shot by the Fourth of July.

That's why this Subcommittee has been working tirelessly to support vaccination efforts nationwide—including by holding today's hearing exploring why some Americans have, so far, not gotten vaccinated.

So why are some people still not getting vaccinated?

Polling indicates that many unvaccinated Americans have safety concerns or unanswered questions about how the vaccines work.

Compounding these problems, rampant misinformation and outright lies are spreading on social media platforms—in many cases, igniting viral hoaxes and fueling vaccine hesitancy.

But low vaccine confidence is not the only reason for the slowing uptake.

Some unvaccinated Americans—especially in rural areas and communities of color—still confront access challenges, such as the inability to take off work or obtain a vaccine from a trusted source.

Additionally, far too many Americans—particularly younger adults—do not have the sense of urgency or motivation to go get vaccinated.

Clearly, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It often takes the right message from the right source, delivered at the right time. We will need a variety of strategies and incentives to overcome the range of reasons keeping unvaccinated Americans on the fence.

Thankfully, our witnesses here today can shed light on these challenges. I look forward to discussing what is working and what more needs to be done to increase vaccine confidence and uptake.

At the end of the day, I hope that any American watching this hearing who is unsure whether to get vaccinated takes away these key facts:

If you are worried about the vaccines' safety, you should know that hundreds of millions of doses have now been administered throughout the country. The data is in. The vaccines are safe.

If you are unsure about the vaccines' effectiveness, you should know that extensive, real-world data is available and shows the vaccines are extraordinarily effective. They prevent hospitalization and severe illness, and they save lives.

And, if you question the benefit of getting vaccinated, you should know that fully vaccinated Americans can resume their pre-pandemic lives without wearing a mask or physically distancing. So, if you get vaccinated, you can start getting back to normal life.

May 26, 2021

Page 3

These facts are not in dispute. The only question is how we can help unvaccinated Americans get their shots. I am confident that if we work together, in a bipartisan fashion, we can build trust and increase uptake—and make our shot at normalcy a reality.