

Honest, factual information is key: A look at how older adults view vaccinations

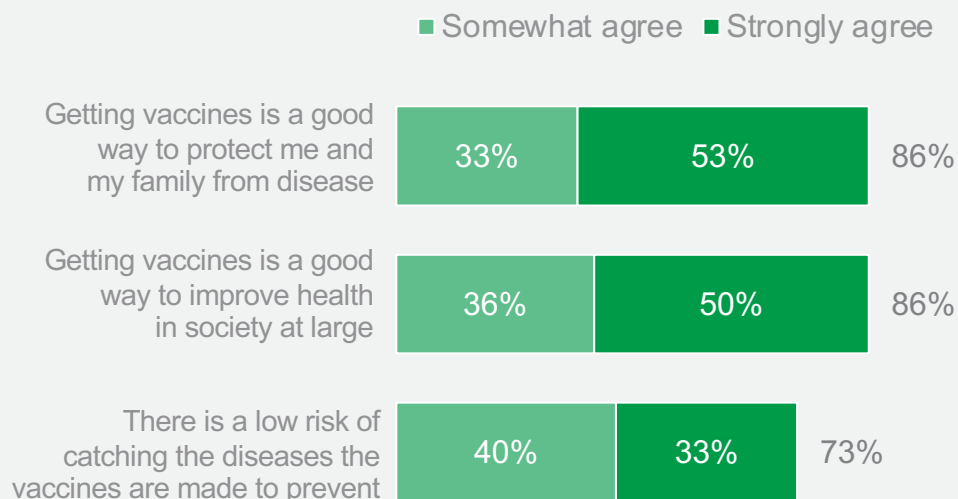
2020 AARP Vaccine Survey of Adults
Ages 50 and Older



Most older adults believe vaccines are generally safe.

Nine in 10 (91%) older adults ages 50-plus say vaccines in general are safe (somewhat safe, 47%; very safe, 44%), especially among those with higher levels of education (a bachelor's degree or higher). Additionally, older adults believe vaccines are a good way to protect themselves and their family (86%) as well as society at large (86%), and they believe they have a low risk for catching the disease from the vaccine itself (73%).

Beliefs about vaccines

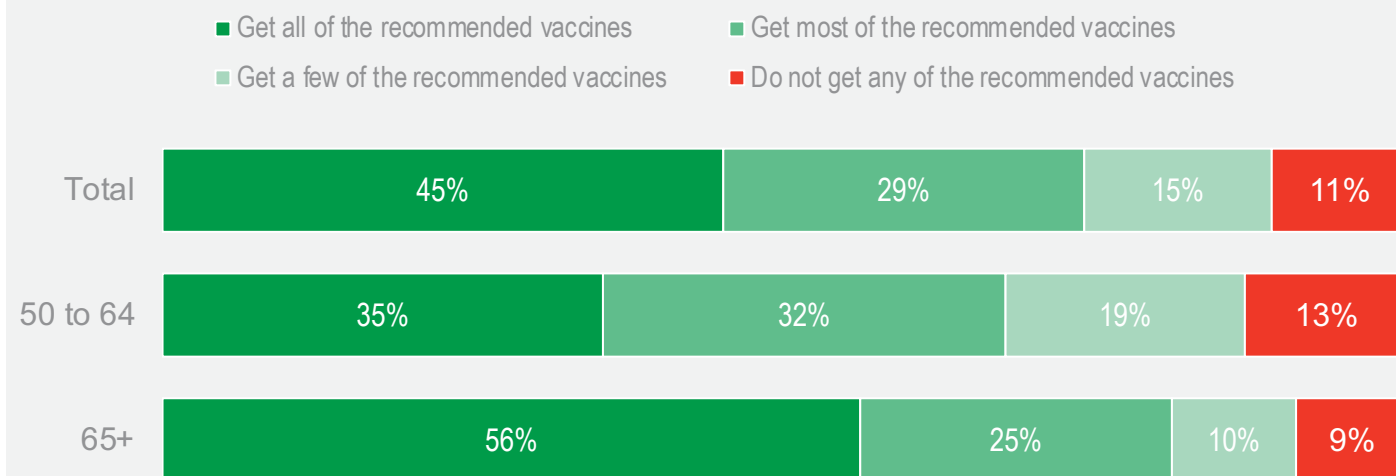


A recent survey on vaccinations illustrates **variations in beliefs among adults ages 50-plus**. This understanding may **provide insight on possible strategies** to help older adults make **informed decisions regarding vaccinations**.

While most say vaccines are safe, not all older adults get the vaccines recommended by their doctor or health care provider.

Less than half (45%) of all adults ages 50-plus report they get all of the vaccines their doctor or health care provider suggests, and a quarter (26%) say they only get a few or none of the recommended vaccines. Those ages 65-plus are significantly more likely than those ages 50 to 64 to say they get all of the vaccines their doctor or health care provider recommends (56% vs. 35%).

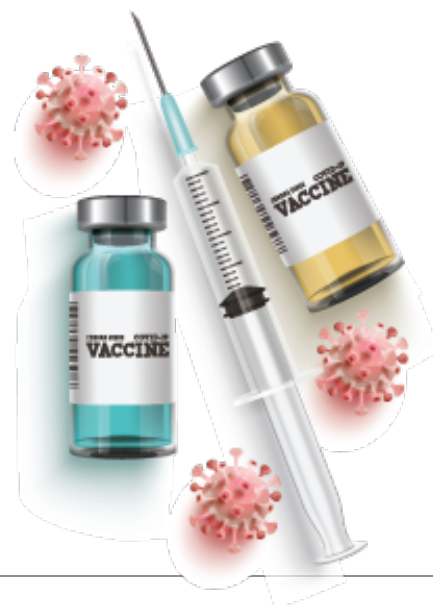
Percent getting all recommended vaccines



When prompted with a list, most say they trust their health care provider on information about adult immunizations.

Just over half (53%) of older adults say they don't know whom to trust when it comes to information about adult immunizations. However, when prompted with a list, the majority (74%) say their doctor or health care provider is their most trusted source for information about adult immunizations. Still, even when prompted, one in 20 (5%) older adults say they don't trust any source regarding adult immunizations, and one in 10 (9%) adults ages 50 to 64 say they don't trust anyone on the topic.

	Total	50-64	65+
Your doctor or other health care professional	74%	69%	79%
I don't trust any sources on this topic	5%	9%	1%





Most ages 65-plus say they get a flu shot every year; however, nearly one-third of the 50-64 year old adults say they never get one.

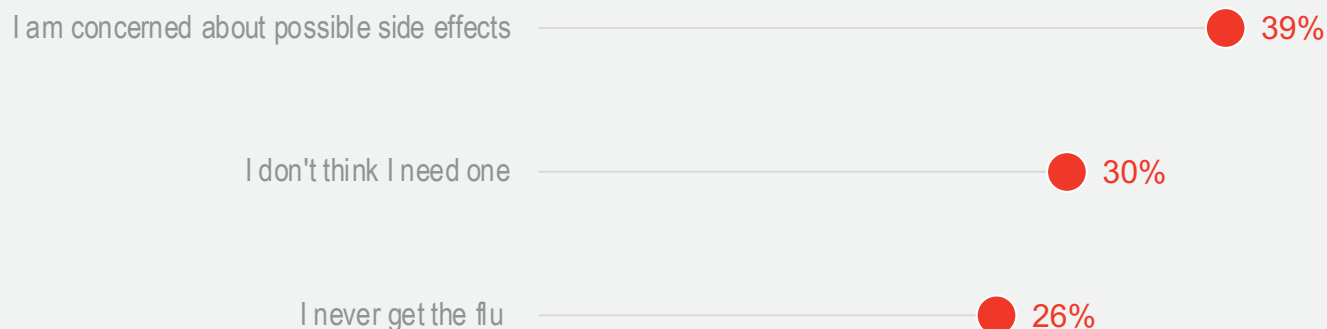
Six in 10 (61%) adults ages 50-plus say they get a flu shot every year or almost every year. Notably, there are sizable age differences in flu shot utilization. For example, slightly less than half (48%) of those ages 50 to 64 report getting a flu shot every year compared to three-quarters (75%) of those ages 65-plus. Notably, a sizable portion of older adults do not ever get a flu shot. Nearly one-third (31%) of those ages 50 to 64 say they never get a flu shot, and about one in eight (13%) adults ages 65 or older skip the shot.

	Total	50-64	65+
Get a flu shot every year or almost every year	61%	48%	75%
Get a flu shot some years but not others	9%	12%	6%
Rarely get a flu shot	7%	9%	5%
Never get a flu shot	22%	31%	13%

Concern about possible side effects tops the list of reasons cited for vaccine hesitancy.

Among those who do not regularly get a flu shot, most say they don't because they are concerned about possible side effects (39%). This is particularly notable given the long history with the flu vaccine. Three in 10 (30%) say they don't think they need one and a quarter (26%) say they don't get flu shots because they never get the flu.

Reasons for only sometimes, rarely or never getting a flu shot



We see similar responses when we ask those who said it is unlikely they will get a COVID-19 vaccine. At the time of the survey (September/October 2020), six in 10 (59%) older adults who said it was unlikely they would get a COVID-19 vaccine cited a concern about possible side effects as a reason for hesitancy. Older adults also cited possible risks from a new vaccine (52%) and lack of trust in the government (47%) as reasons for hesitancy.

Concern about possible side effects tops the list of reasons cited for vaccine hesitancy for both influenza and COVID-19.

Reasons for being unlikely to get the COVID-19 vaccine



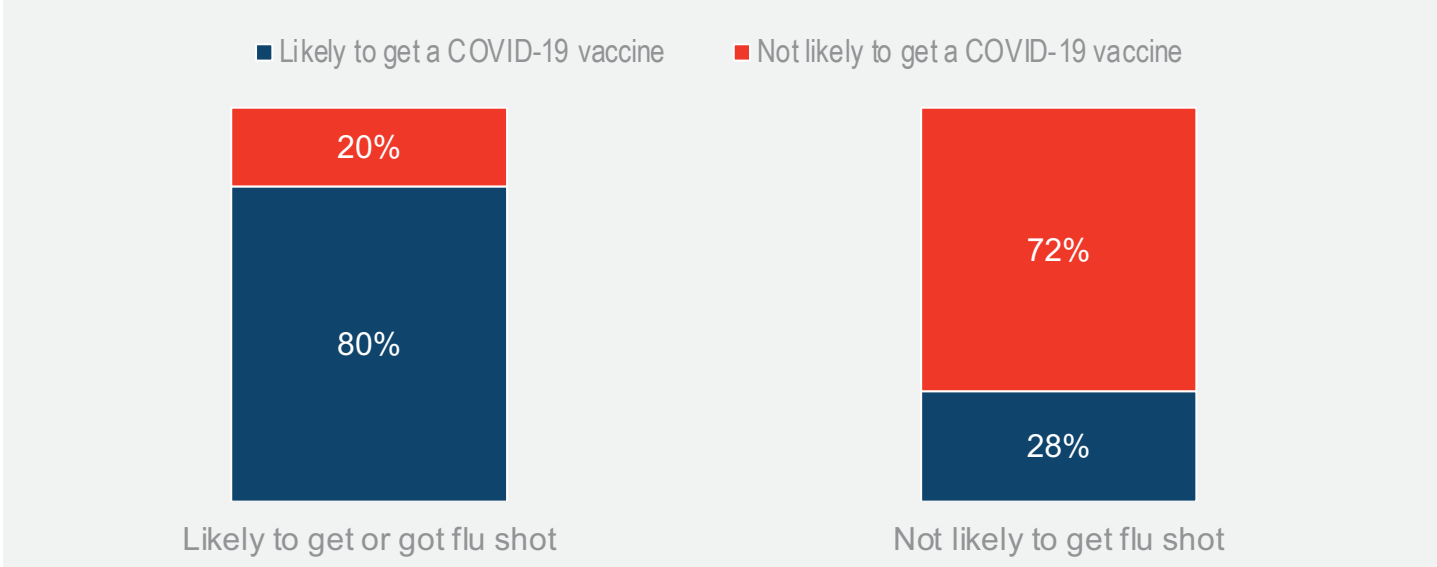


A tendency to forego the flu vaccine may explain why some say they will not get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Many who are unlikely to get a flu shot are also unlikely to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

Hesitancy toward vaccines in general may explain why some say they will not get the COVID-19 vaccine. Seven in 10 (72%) older adults who say they are unlikely to get a flu vaccine this year also say they are unlikely to get a COVID-19 vaccine. Still, those who do get the flu vaccine have some additional hesitancy about the COVID-19 vaccine. One in five (20%) older adults who say they are likely to get (or already got) a flu shot this year are hesitant to get a COVID-19 shot.

Likelihood of getting COVID-19 vaccine
By likelihood to get flu shot



Some older adults do not get other commonly recommended vaccinations. However, overall vaccine compliance is highest among those ages 65 and older.

Using a vaccine compliance scale that comprises several questions related to reported actions regarding vaccines like flu and pneumonia, we see older adults ages 65 and older are significantly more likely to say they have gotten or plan to get several recommended vaccines (a score of 4 or 5 out of 5 on the scale). Nearly three in 10 (28%) of those ages 50 to 64 scored a zero or one on this scale meaning they either do not follow their doctor or health care provider’s recommendations on vaccines and/or they do not plan to get most (if any) of the vaccines listed. Comparatively, about one in seven (14%) of those ages 65 and older scored a zero or one on the scale.

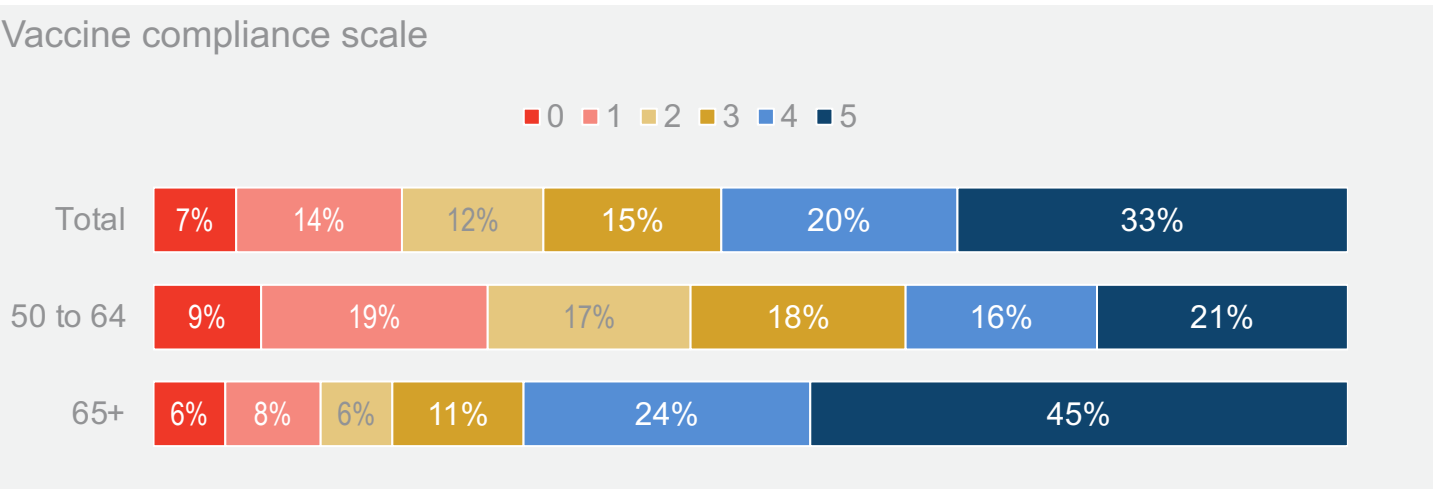
Vaccine Compliance Scale (1 point each)

- ✓ Get a flu shot every year
- ✓ Get all/most vaccines recommended by doctor or health care provider

Have gotten/plan to get vaccines for

- ✓ shingles
- ✓ pneumonia
- ✓ Tdap

*Scale created by AARP Research





While some adults ages 50-plus are reluctant to get a vaccine, generally, they see the merits of vaccinations.

High beliefs, but low actions: Vaccine attitudes and beliefs do not necessarily correspond to reported actions, especially for those ages 50 to 64.

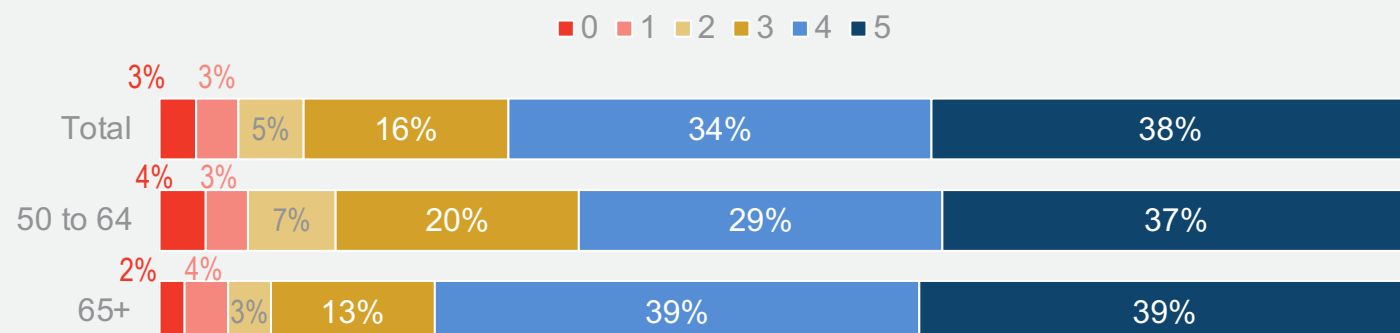
This vaccine attitude scale comprises several questions related to attitudes about vaccines in general as well as the future COVID-19 vaccine (asked September/October 2020). Similar to the compliance scale, more older adults (ages 65-plus) scored high (a 4 or 5 out of 5) on this scale. Interestingly, though, only a small portion of adults ages 50-plus scored extremely low: Only about one in 10 (11%) scored a 0, 1, or 2 out of 5. This result suggests that while some adults ages 50-plus are reluctant to get vaccinated, generally, they see the merits of vaccinations.

Vaccine Attitude Scale (1 point each)

- ✓ Vaccines are safe
- ✓ Vaccines protect me and my family
- ✓ COVID-19 vaccine will be effective
- ✓ Vaccines provide few benefits' (disagree=1)
- ✓ Not sure who to trust when it comes to vaccines (disagree = 1)

*Scale created by AARP Research

Vaccine attitude scale





Implications

Though most older adults have positive attitudes towards vaccines, many do not get the recommended vaccines and are unsure whom to trust to provide accurate and honest information about adult immunizations. In fact, most adults 50-plus who are hesitant about getting a flu vaccine are also hesitant about getting a COVID-19 vaccine. Those who are hesitant largely say it's because they are concerned about possible side effects. The information in this study could help health care providers develop strategies to encourage these older adults to get the recommended vaccines.

To ensure that older adults make informed decisions regarding vaccines, health care providers – the most trusted source for vaccine information — can play an important role in providing comprehensive and straightforward information about vaccine benefits, safety, effectiveness, and possible side effects.

Methodology

This AARP Vaccine survey was conducted online from September 28 through October 12, 2020 with a total sample of 1,722 adults ages 50-plus. This national survey was conducted using NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak probability-based sample. AmeriSpeak is designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. All data are weighted by age, gender, and race according to the most recent Census population statistics. The margin of error for the national survey is ± 3.53 percent.



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