

Manjunath: COVID-19 misinformation leads to vaccine hesitancy, sickness, and death

Suma Manjunath

Summertime, and the livin' ain't easy in Texas as COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths continue to rise to record levels.

Despite the increasing availability and access to COVID-19 vaccines, only about 54% of eligible Texans, 12 years of age and older, are fully vaccinated, according to Texas Department of State Health Services [data](#). A recent analysis by the [Texas Tribune](#) found some of the neighborhoods in Harris, Dallas, Tarrant, Bexar, and Travis counties with the highest Hispanic and Black populations are some of the lowest vaccinated areas. The data also show Hispanic and Black populations combined account for more than half of all cases and deaths, particularly in the state's large cities.

Also, a recent Episcopal Health Foundation [survey](#) revealed 73% of Black Texans and 55% of Hispanic Texans are very concerned about another COVID-19 wave hitting the state.

Texans remain hesitant for various reasons, including misinformation about the virus and the vaccines. Misinformation leads to mistrust in the Food and Drug Administration emergency use authorization process. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention points out researchers [did not cut corners](#) on safety and efficacy and continue to use new and established monitoring systems to ensure safety.

Another common concern is any potential side effect. Side effects with all vaccines are normal, [according to the CDC](#), such as with the flu shot. Side effects mean your body is building protection and they should go away in a few days. If they do not, see your healthcare provider.

Those pushing government conspiracies contribute to life-threatening hesitations. The vaccines are just vaccines, not tracking microchips. Bill Gates, cell phones, and government agencies [cannot track us with microchips](#) that cannot fit through the end of a needle.

One group infamously proclaimed the [vaccines turn us into walking magnets](#). This also is [false](#), not just because common sense tells us so, but also because the vaccine does not contain aluminum (generally speaking, aluminum is not magnetic) or other materials that attract metal objects. And, the vaccines do not contain [aborted fetal tissue](#).

Folks also have concerns about the vaccines causing infertility. The [American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists](#) says those claims are unfounded and are not supported by scientific evidence. FYI: social media posts spread the myth the virus' spike protein has a protein similar to the syncytin-1 protein expressed in human placenta. Not so. They are not the same.

And if you heard the vaccines will alter your DNA and maybe mutate you and your future kids, well, you were [misinformed](#). The vaccines do not interact in any way with your DNA. The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna mRNA vaccines and the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen viral vector vaccine use genetic material to tell our cells to start building protection against the virus, and that material never enters the cell nucleus that keeps our DNA.

Every day one person's hesitation may result in another victim of COVID-19 or one of its variants. We need community immunity against the virus, which means 70%-90% of the individuals in your community are fully vaccinated. The vaccine protects you and those who cannot get the vaccine because of age, underlying medical conditions, or other reasons.

Help us end the pandemic. A vaccine is waiting for you. Ask to get yours today.

Editor's Note: The above guest column was penned by Suma Manjunath, MD, FAAP, a pediatrician and managing physician of the Travel Medicine Clinics at Kelsey Seybold Clinic in Houston, Texas. Manjunath (pictured above) is a member of the Health Equity Council of The Immunization Partnership, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with a mission to eradicate vaccine-preventable diseases by educating the community, advocating for evidence-based public policy, and supporting immunization best practices.

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