

Medical consensus: Follow evidence on coronavirus vaccine review

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Kevin B. O'Reilly

News Editor

What's the news: The AMA and 77 other prominent national organizations representing patients, physicians, researchers and others that constitute a broad consensus of health care stakeholders are urging federal health agencies to let scientific evidence drive their decision-making on vaccines to protect against SARS-CoV-2, the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19.

“By clearly explaining the processes in place to ensure scientific rigor, federal agencies and government leaders will build the confidence and public trust necessary for America to meet this challenge,” says the letter, published this week in the Washington, D.C., edition of *The Wall Street Journal*.

“Leaders should directly address public concern and skepticism about the rapid development of COVID-19 vaccinations, including expressed worries that ‘steps are being skipped’ or questions about safety. Focusing on the well-established guidelines for federal approval, rather than factors impacting the timing of an authorization, will foster trust and bolster the public’s willingness to receive a COVID-19 vaccine,” the letter adds.

“Federal agencies and government leaders can also partner with trusted clinician, patient, and minority community organizations to build confidence through transparent communications. We will not be able to fully ‘return to normal’ until an effective vaccine is widely available and accepted as safe.”

Why it's important: 78% of Americans are concerned that the approval process for SARS-CoV-2 vaccines is being driven less by science than by political factors, according to a survey of over 2,000 American adults conducted in August by Stat and the Harris Poll. The concern was bipartisan, with 82% of Democrats saying they were worried about the process and 72% of Republicans saying so.

Unprecedented levels of vaccine hesitancy could pose a major challenge to the nation’s effort to get

enough people immunized to obtain herd immunity.

“The development of safe, effective vaccines and treatments are essential to protect the public’s health and restore the nation’s economy,” says the letter.

Among the signatories to the letter are the: American Academy of Neurology; American Academy of Pediatrics; American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists; American College of Physicians; American Geriatrics Society; American Nurses Association; American Pharmacists Association; American Psychiatric Association; Association of American Medical Colleges; Association of Black Cardiologists; National Hispanic Medical Association; National Medical Association; National Minority Quality Forum.

The letter also outlines three other ways in which “trusted guidance from our nation’s leaders” is critical:

- | Government decisions must be based on evidence—not politics or individual interests.
- | Evidence derived from clinical trials that meet FDA standards should drive assessment of which COVID-19 therapeutics are safe and effective.
- | Routine, rapid, accurate and easy-to-access COVID-19 testing—followed by timely and efficient contact tracing—is needed to help prevent community spread.

Learn more: Find out from AMA President Susan R. Bailey, MD, how words and actions that erode trust in the CDC hurt us all. Physicians can track the pandemic with the AMA’s COVID-19 resource center.