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KATHRYN FAMIGLIETTI (PharmD)

A Look at the Anti-Vaccine Movement and its Impact on COVID-19

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Vaccines are heralded as one of the greatest contributions to public health by working with the body's immune system to build immunity to viral or bacterial infections, reducing the risk of contracting a disease. The protection of vaccines also works through herd immunity, which occurs when a certain percentage of a population, 70-90%, is vaccinated, slowing and preventing transmission. However, in recent years, a surge in vaccine hesitancy and anti-vaccine sentiments have been observed. Anti-vaxxers refuse vaccinations because of the belief that all vaccines are harmful, whereas vaccine hesitant people have concerns about vaccines, but do not necessarily refuse all vaccinations.

In 2020-2021, the topic of vaccines became even more important with the emergence of the novel coronavirus. Three vaccines have been given Emergency Use Authorization in the United States: two mRNA vaccines produced by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, and a viral vector vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson.

The development of these vaccines, especially the mRNA vaccines, has been met by vocal opposition by anti-vaxxers, making headlines and sparking debate about the safety and efficacy of the new vaccines. Covid-19 has given the anti-vaccine movement a larger platform to spread their message since online anti-vaxxer accounts have increased their followers by 25% since 2019.

The pandemic has caused people who are not usually vaccine hesitant to become wary of the new vaccines for fear of rushed development, overall safety, and long-term effects with mRNA technology. Anti-vaccine organizations have more extreme views on the Covid-19 vaccines including: that it mutates DNA, contains microchips, and that Covid-19 is not dangerous. This paper analyzes the impact of the anti-vaccine movement during the pandemic by looking at both vaccine hesitant and anti-vaxxers and addressing the main concerns from each group about the Covid-19 vaccines, as well as analyzing how the anti-vaccine movement during the pandemic impacts public health.