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Opinion

# Those who reject the vaccine should be ready to accept the consequences | Opinion

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U.S. first lady Jill Biden, left, holds the hand of a nervous patient receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, at Jackson State University in Jackson, Miss., Tuesday, June 22, 2021. (Tom Brenner/Pool Photo via AP) AP

By **Star-Ledger Guest Columnist**

By **Carl Golden**

Nationally, more than 34 million have fallen ill, nearly 609,000 have died from COVID-19. In New Jersey, more than 1 million have been infected and nearly 27,000 are dead. Protection is readily at hand, going to waste in storage in some cases while millions refuse to avail themselves of it.

Americans, usually among the most responsive people on the globe when confronting a widespread, out of control contagion, have resisted accepting a highly effective vaccine doubting its safety, believing it's a false narrative or that government-sponsored inoculation violates their constitutional right to privacy.



Now, cases are spiking to worrisome levels amid warnings that the highly contagious Delta variant will reach a peak going into the fall and seriously impact the unvaccinated.

It is a small wonder that Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, will appear in the Guinness Book of World Records for the most consecutive days of mind-bending frustration.

Fauci, who also serves as chief medical advisor to the President, has been the most outspoken for the COVID-19 vaccine, a ubiquitous presence on network and cable talk and interview shows expressing bewilderment and shock that fewer than 60% of the nation has been vaccinated while large swaths of the country continue to ignore a proven lifesaving, rapid and painless procedure.

He's become a flashpoint for harsh criticism and relentless assaults from some elements of the media, accusing him of peddling false information about the disease's severity and the vaccine's efficacy.

His pleas for greater vaccine acceptance have been dismissed by those who see the government's involvement as a conspiracy to exert greater and insidious control of the private lives of Americans.

He and the Biden administration have been castigated for efforts to send emissaries into neighborhoods where vaccination rates are the lowest to knock on doors and urge the unvaccinated to agree to the protection.

Rather than recognize the door-to-door effort as a worthy attempt to stop the spread of the most serious public health crisis in a century, critics demeaned and derided it.

Congressman Madison Cawthorn of North Carolina, for instance, told the audience at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Dallas the effort was a government plot to confiscate guns and Bibles from people's private homes, a dangerous quasi paranoid notion.

At the same conference, his like-mind conspiracy promoters Reps. Lauren Boebert of Colorado and Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia belittled those participating in the outreach effort as "needle Nazis" and "medical brown shirts." The audience cheered.

How effective their attacks will be is unclear, but the mere fact that wild theories and personal insults have gained a foothold in the U. S. Congress is stunning.

How, for instance, does Fauci refute the sheer lunacy of Cawthorn's warning? Denying a government plot to confiscate guns and Bibles merely serves to give it additional attention.

How do public health personnel respond to accusations they are today's equivalent of Hitler's storm troopers?

Distrust in government runs deep and the anti-vaccine movement is illustrative of the point. At the current level of mistrust, people are open to the kinds of suggestions offered by Cawthorn, for instance, even though logic and commonsense would reject them as absurd.

While President Trump was criticized for his slow response in the early stages of the pandemic, he deserves credit for launching Operation Warp Speed, which developed a vaccine in record time.

Accepting or declining a vaccination is a personal decision and shouldn't be forced upon anyone. Government should not use its coercive powers to achieve compliance.

The person answering a knock on the door to find someone attempting to persuade them to accept a vaccination has the option to shut the door just as they would on a door-to-door solar panel salesman.

At the same time, they must accept the consequences of refusal; becoming a statistic like the millions of others who have been infected or the hundreds of thousands who have died.

If they are not moved by the irrefutable correlation between high vaccination rates and low infection levels, it's unlikely they'll be impressed by other compelling data or public health arguments.

As for Fauci, he likely goes to bed wondering what he can do or say next to convince reluctant Americans to look objectively without bias or outside influence at all the evidence in the hope it will be sufficiently persuasive.

The U. S. is not alone. Nearly 190 million people worldwide have been sickened and a staggering 4 million have died.

The U. S., though, leads the globe in deaths. Why?

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