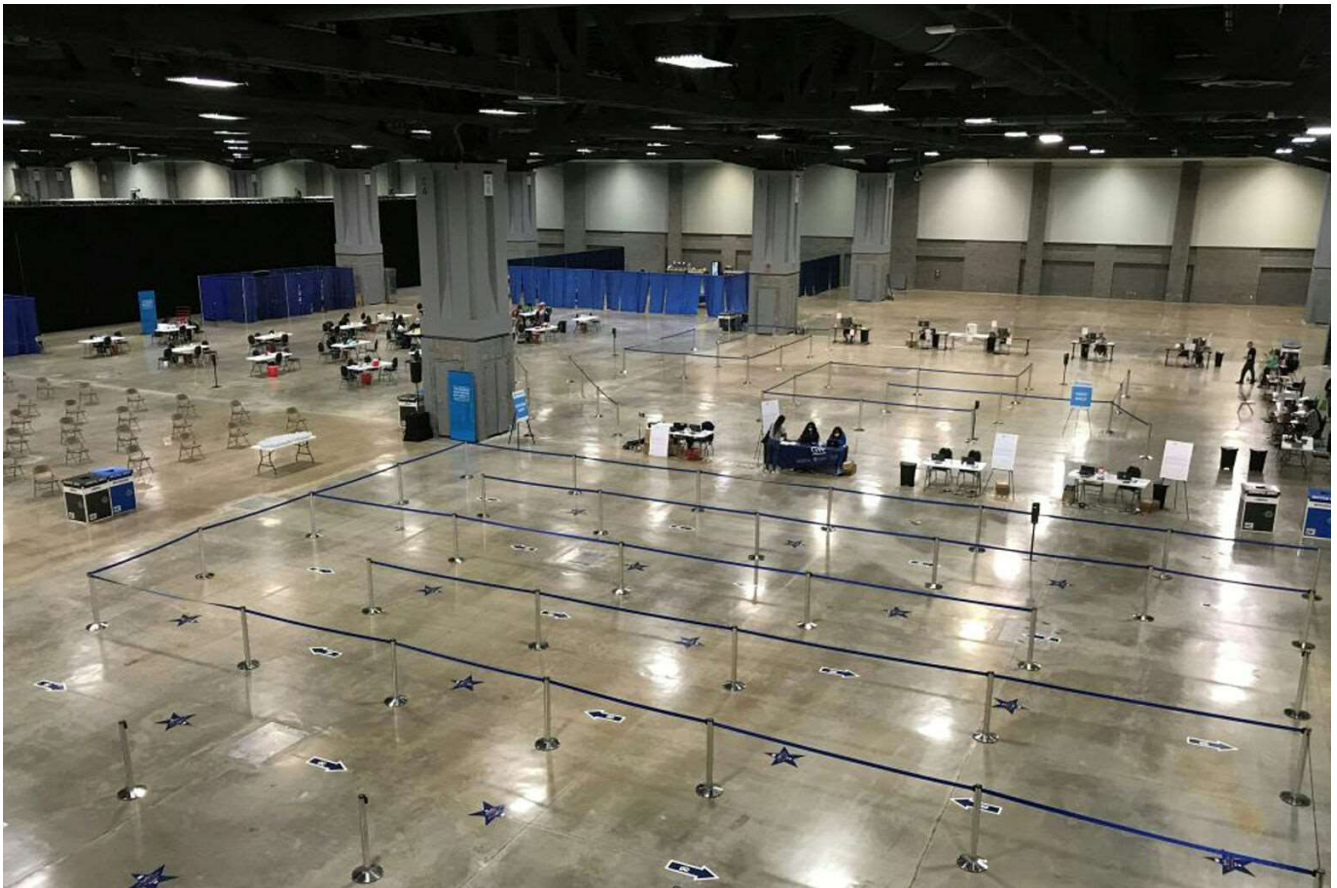


Trust and compassion: Group aims to dispel vaccine skepticism among Black residents

A former D.C. health commissioner said there are pockets of the population who continue to avoid getting a coronavirus vaccine, and these virtual town halls with leaders in health, civil rights and academics aim to guide them as they grapple with the decision over whether to get vaccinated.

In D.C., the latest data from health officials shows 51% of the positive COVID-19 cases reported are among Black residents.

Dr. Reed Tuckson, co-founder of the Black Coalition Against COVID-19 and former health commissioner for D.C., said that while many Black residents across the region have been eager to get vaccinated, there are some pockets of the population, including in D.C., who continue to avoid getting vaccinated.



A deserted walk-in COVID-19 mass vaccination site at the Convention Center in downtown Washington, D.C., is seen on June 1, 2021. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that after months of a steady climb in COVID-19 vaccinations, the U.S. is now experiencing its first slowdown in the rate of daily shots. (Photo by ANITA BEATTIE/AFP via Getty Images)

Tuckson divides those into two groups.

One group is simply in the “wait and see” camp. They’re likely to say they’ll get vaccinated, but they are looking for more trusted sources of information before deciding to go ahead and roll up their sleeves.

“At this point, we are seeing people who really are struggling with the decision, who really are requesting more information” Tuckson said.

The other group is just “really digging in their heels,” and he said that those in this group are not just hesitant — they are resistant.

Convincing people to get vaccinated won’t happen with prodding or shaming, Tuckson said. People are looking for information from sources they feel they can trust, he said.

While vaccine hesitancy is often explained by looking back at the historical treatment of Black Americans, Tuckson suggested that more modern issues, such as efforts to limit voting rights and police conduct toward people of color, have also led to what he called, “this overwhelming sense of distrust of anything that is involved with government or major social institutions.”

That’s where the continued virtual town halls in the “Making It Plain” series come in.

The [open forum town hall discussions](#) bring together a coalition of health, academic, civil rights and faith leaders to provide answers to questions and counter the misinformation that has led some people, of all races, to avoid getting vaccinated.

Tuckson checks off a “Top 5” of reasons that people have given for skipping the vaccines, including skepticism over the speed with which the vaccines were deployed, what’s in them and whether they could affect fertility.

There is an increased sense of urgency among health professionals when it comes to making sure that everyone, including Black residents, are vaccinated. There are more governments and businesses opening up, and mask mandates are being dropped.

“And so to be unvaccinated at this particular historical moment, in this pandemic, is a very, very dangerous thing to do because now, not even the masks are there to protect you,” Tuckson said.

Having spent decades in the public health field, Tuckson said what’s proven effective is taking those concerns head on in a setting where people feel their concerns are understood.

The next session called “The Colors of Covid: Barbershop and Salon Talk” is aimed squarely at that comfort zone historically found in Black barbershops and salons.

“It’s a place you go not only to get your hair done, but it is a place where you meet other people exchange ideas, catch up on local culture. And it’s just a place where you feel at home. And so as a result, it is not only a place where we spend time, but it’s also a place where information is exchanged, knowledge is exchanged,” Tuckson said.

The most convincing arguments for getting vaccinated against COVID-19 come when people are approached in a kind and compassionate way, he said. “People need to understand that it is OK to have questions and that they should raise those questions.”

And when the people providing the answer to those questions can say they’ve had a shared history and shared experience, people become much more open.

Upon learning that [Black doctors, scientists and researchers were involved](#) in developing and approving the COVID-19 vaccines, Tuckson said he often hears people say they wished they had known that before.

“They feel good about getting trustworthy information that overcomes the misinformation that they have been receiving,” Tuckson said.

On Wednesday, the Black Coalition Against COVID-19, or BCAC, will be holding a forum from 7 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.

“The Colors of Covid; Barbershop and Salon Talk-From Vaccine Hesitancy to Vaccine Confidence” will be accessible on [BlackDoctor.org’s Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#) pages.

More Coronavirus news

Looking for more information? D.C., Maryland and Virginia are each releasing more data every day. Visit their official sites here: [Virginia](#) | [Maryland](#) | [D.C.](#)

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