

# Woman affected by ‘Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male’ speaks out

**Both of Nadine Tolbert’s grandfathers were in the study from 1932 to 1972**

CLEVELAND, Ohio (WOIO) - When it comes to the COVID-19 vaccine, more than 55 percent of Americans are vaccinated but folks in the Black and brown communities still lag behind.

Nadine Tolbert lives in Cleveland but she has Alabama roots.

Her family is among the 600 directly affected by the infamous “Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male.”

Among those men enrolled in the study between 1932 and 1972, 399 of them had syphilis, 201 of them did not.

“Both of my grandfathers was in the study,” she said.

Frank Cooper, her grandfather on her mother’s side of the family and Alex Ware on her father’s side were part of the human experimentation that lasted for 40 years.

During the study, the U.S. Government (The U.S. Public Health Service) misled hundreds of Black men to study the effects syphilis would have, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the CDC.

The men were not treated for the disease even though penicillin, a cure became available a few years after the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment started.

“My grandfather was not given it,” said Tolbert. “They kept watching him to see what part of his body it would attack.”

Tolbert’s grandfather on her mother’s side of the family had syphilis.

“They kept bringing medication, but it was a placebo — nothing that would help him,” she said. “So, he actually died at an early age. It attacked his eyesight, his kidneys and his lungs.”

Tolbert said that there have been unintentional benefits from the study for all Americans.

“I feel very good about being a part of it ‘cause those men opened up the door to where we are today,” she said. “Doctors have to tell you what they are doing for you now, back then, they didn’t.”

As part of a settlement to a class-action lawsuit filed in 1972, the medical community has to inform you what they are treating for and the possible side effects medications could have.

In 1973, the government launched a program to provide all necessary medical care for the survivors of the study, the last of whom died in 2004.

But for some, the only treatment they received was counseling.

Those willing to talk about the decades-long ordeal received counseling to help them come to grips with the frustration and other trauma caused by the experiment.

That shameful history is still having negative effects on the Black community.

“Today, with this pandemic, if that hadn’t been done then god knows what would be happening today,” Tolbert said.

Tolbert is concerned the mistrust many African Americans have of the medical community, although often with good reason, is misplaced fear when it comes to not getting vaccinated against COVID-19.

She believes you should talk with your doctor and find out if it’s good for you.

“God knows if my grandfather would have had this opportunity, I’m sure, he would have ran to it,” she said. “So, let’s use the COVID-19 shot to help others so we can stop the spread of this disease.”