

# Tuskegee Study descendants want Black people vaccinated



Lingering concerns around vaccine safety and comparisons to the Tuskegee syphilis study prompted a new campaign encouraging vaccination. A collaboration between the descendants of the original Tuskegee Study, the Ad Council, and the COVID Collaborative hopes to provide people with useful information in deciding whether to get vaccinated.

“We should not allow anyone who needs and wants a COVID-19 vaccine not to have their questions answered – or be denied the opportunity to get it, like the men in the U.S. Public Health Service Syphilis Study at Tuskegee,” Lillie Tyson Head, President of the Voices For Our Fathers Legacy Foundation, said [in a statement](#).

The [Tuskegee Legacy Stories campaign](#) builds on the voices and experiences of a multigenerational mix of descendants. Head was joined by her daughter Carmen Head Thornton, a public health administrator, in sharing their stories as a part of the fight against vaccine misinformation.

Environmental Scientist Elise Marie Tolbert, former Tuskegee Mayor Omar Neal, business owner Leo Ware, and Dr. Kimberly N. Carr are featured in the Tuskegee Legacy Stories campaign.

“There has been a lot of references to the study as to why people may or may not want to take the vaccine, shared Head in [her Legacy Story](#) spot. “A lot of misinformation is out there. We have the ability to find out the facts and the opportunity to talk with people who could help us go through the facts.”

For some unvaccinated people, concerns around medical racism and unethical treatment like the Tuskegee experiment serve as a barrier to getting the vaccine. Given the history of medical racism in

this country, it is certainly understandable why people would question any medical policy promoted by the federal government.

“They were not being treated,” said Omar in the new campaign. “That is very different from what’s happening with COVID-19. The vaccine is being made available to anyone who wants it.”

Writing for The Hill, Rep. Barbara Lee joined Dr. Sheila Davis from Partners in Health to call for [greater investment](#) in community-based groups and faith-based organizations to eliminate barriers to vaccine access.

“Investing in the community-based health workforce is not only a smart and equitable strategy – it’s also a solution that will outlast this pandemic and equitably serve communities well into the future,” wrote Lee and Davis.

And while vaccination rates have increased in the past several weeks, racial disparities in COVID-19 vaccine access continue as the Delta variant surges. CNN previously [reported that approximately 25 percent](#) of Black people are fully vaccinated.

As of August 15, the [Reuters COVID-19 tracker](#) showed that a little more than 50 percent of the U.S. population was fully vaccinated. At least 60 percent of the population has had one dose.

Efforts like celebrity meet and greets and cash giveaways have succeeded in places like DeKalb County, Georgia. WSB-TV Atlanta [reported over 1,000 people](#) turned out for a vaccination event

“We had the right message, respected messengers, a convenient location, and an attractive incentive,” DeKalb County CEO Michael Thurmond told the outlet.

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