

Vaccinations and the pandemic

The whole country is anxiously awaiting a coronavirus vaccination. Once it arrives, our nation faces a challenge – how to make sure everyone gets inoculated. Although many people do not realize it, most vaccinations are not 100 percent effective. A vaccination may only protect 97 out of 100 people; however, this is enough to keep a disease at bay. Such a vaccination can keep enough people from getting the disease so that it won't be in the community. Many people will be protected because they will not encounter the disease, not because they have immunity themselves.

Because vaccinations give us herd immunity, it is important to make sure everyone gets their shots. Unfortunately, getting everyone to agree to get a coronavirus vaccination will be a challenge for several reasons. First, some people just do not like vaccinations. Second, some people will worry that the vaccination was rushed through the testing process and it might not be safe. If a vaccination is approved before the election, the timing will look suspicious, leaving many people with doubts about the shot's safety. Third,

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Russia will and China might start distributing vaccinations before they have been adequately tested – at least by the U.S.'s standards. If Russia's or China's decision backfires and their vaccinations turn out to be unsafe, many Americans will lose confidence in all vaccinations. In this event, when the U.S. finally starts to distribute a safe vaccination, Americans will resist getting it since they will worry about the safety of the shot, mostly because they will carry a picture in their heads of what happened in Russia or China.

Since many Americans will resist getting a coronavirus vaccination, our nation faces a challenge: how to get enough people to get the shot to build herd immunity. With many vaccinations, the government requires children to receive shots before they can enter school. This restriction encourages most people to have their kids inoculated promptly. The coronavirus presents a unique challenge. We need to have everyone get inoculated. The government does

not have anything to hang over adults' heads to convince them to get their shots (since adults are no longer in K-12 schooling).

I think the federal government has two options. First, it can just require people to get shots and fine them if they do not. This approach may turn out to be hard to enforce and costly to implement. Second, the government can give people an incentive to get the coronavirus vaccination. On the federal tax forms, the individual deductions people receive for themselves and their dependents can be withheld from filers unless they provide proof that they were inoculated. Hopefully, people's desire to pay less in taxes will encourage them to get vaccinated.

The government should probably adopt both options I present: 1) fining people who do not get shots, and 2) offering a tax deduction to those who get their shots. By giving people an incentive to get the shot, the government will appear less heavy handed and make people more willing to get it. Of course, my proposal is only relevant when there are enough shots to go around. It might take some time before we reach this stage.