A Bad COVID Vaccine Would Spawn More Conspiracy Theories

By Alex Berezow, PhD — September 10, 2020

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It is difficult to overstate the potential damage that a rushed coronavirus vaccine could inflict on confidence in the biomedical community. Previously, we listed some of the best (worst?) conspiracy theories involving coronavirus and the disease it causes, COVID-19. A bad vaccine would cause them to multiply like rabbits on Viagra.

Much of the public already views “Big Pharma” as a malevolent, money-grubbing industry that puts profits over patients. Others view “Big Government” with equal skepticism, believing that it is inept at best and corrupt at worst. Under America’s Operation Warp Speed, Big Pharma and Big Government are working hand-in-hand, surely a sinister partnership in the eyes of many. Conspiracy theories already abound.

Perhaps the weirdest is the belief that Bill Gates wishes to use the coronavirus vaccine to inject people with location tracking microchips. Obviously, nobody believes such preposterous nonsense, right? Wrong. Overall, one poll found that 28% of Americans believe in this conspiracy, with another 32% who are “not sure.” As with everything else, belief in the conspiracy...
breaks down along partisan lines.

Others are voicing concerns that the coronavirus will usher in the New World Order, a vaguely defined conspiracy that involves a “One World Government” – a notion that seems far-fetched if one is familiar with the inner workings of the European Union… or the U.S. Congress.

Notably, the U.S. isn’t the only place to find coronavirus conspiracy theories. In South Korea, the members of a cultish Christian church believe [5] that the coronavirus was planted by the government in order to shut it down. The Chinese government is spreading the conspiracy [6] that the virus was planted in Wuhan by the U.S. military. The list goes on and on.

In fact, an article [7] in the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene reported the existence of about 2,000 rumors, stigmas, and conspiracy theories in 25 languages across 87 countries. This is surely an undercount.

No matter how ridiculous, conspiracy theories are like herpes [8]; they are difficult to treat and affect millions of people. A bad vaccine, especially one that harms people, would spur yet more conspiracy theories and provide fuel for anti-vaccine activists, setting back the cause of global public health by years if not decades.

Perhaps this is why several major pharmaceutical companies have agreed [9] not to release their respective vaccines until they are shown to be safe and effective. They may have realized that a premature vaccine deployment is a gamble that may not be worth the risk.

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[7] https://www.ajtmh.org/content/journals/10.4269/ajtmh.20-0812