

Childhood Vaccinations Fell During the COVID-19 Pandemic | Time

By Jeffrey Kluger

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Anti-vaccine sentiments have been simmering in the U.S. since at least 1998, when the *Lancet*, a prestigious medical journal, published—[and later retracted](#)—a fraudulent paper falsely linking childhood vaccines to autism. They’ve grown even stronger in the past two years, thanks to disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccines. Though the development of the COVID-19 vaccines happened at an unprecedented pace, they’ve been rigorously tested, and have proven both safe and effective. Nevertheless, falsehoods about them—that the vaccines contained microchips, that they would alter the DNA of recipients or cause them to become magnetic—have spread.

Public-health experts feared that those groundless claims would exacerbate mistrust among people who already doubted vaccines or serve as a gateway into vaccine skepticism among people who previously had no such concerns. Now it appears those fears might have been well-placed. In April, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [published a study](#) showing that during the 2020-2021 school year, rates of routine vaccinations among the nation’s 3.52 million enrolled kindergarteners fell below the 95% level necessary to ensure herd immunity. The average drop from the [rates during the 2019-2020 school year](#) was small, just over 1% for each of three vaccines. But CDC researchers say that is enough to allow viruses to gain a foothold in the overall community of kids, many of whom may be unable to be vaccinated for medical reasons.

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