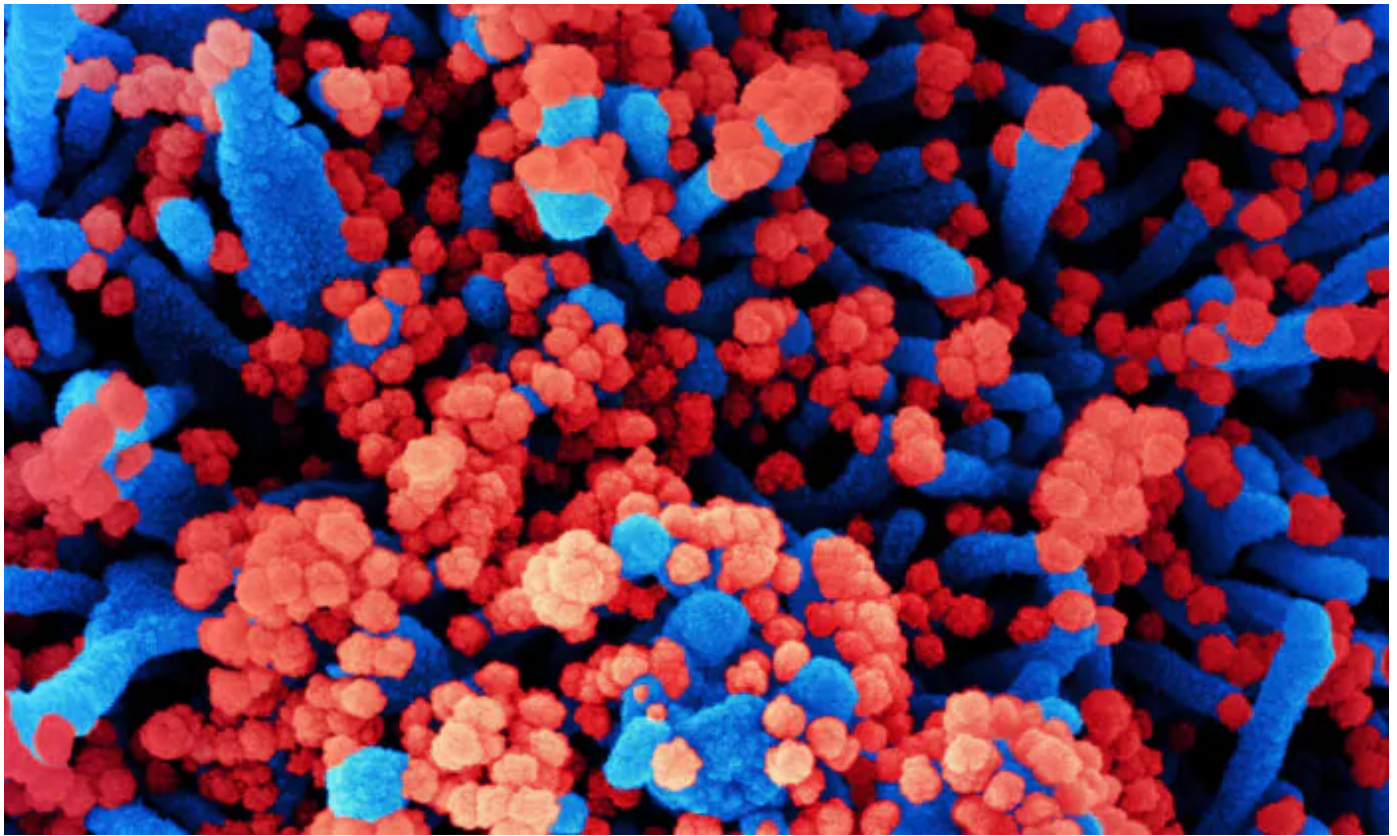


THE EPOCH TIMES

POLICIES & IMPACTS

US Failure to Recognize Natural Immunity Negatively Affected Pandemic Response: NIH Scientist



Undated colorized scanning electron micrograph of a cell (blue) heavily infected with COVID-19 particles (red), isolated from a patient sample at the NIAID Integrated Research Facility in Fort Detrick, Md., on Oct. 31, 2020. (NIAID)



By Zachary Stieber

🔍 🗨️ 🖨️ Print

You're almost there!



Create Account

Verify your account to read more free articles and start receiving our newsletters. **Click the link** in the email we sent you [Now](#).

The failure to recognize how post-infection immunity is similar or superior to that bestowed by vaccination led to prolonged school closures and other problems, a National Institutes of Health (NIH) scientist told Congress on May 11.

U.S. public health agencies “chose to disregard natural immunity,” leading to “lost jobs, staffing shortages, children kept out of school, and wasted vaccines,” said Margery Smelkinson, a research scientist at the NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID).

She was one of three experts who testified at a hearing on immunity during the pandemic conducted by the U.S. House’s Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic in Washington.

Smelkinson, who said she was testifying in her personal capacity, is employed by the same agency that was led for decades by Dr. Anthony Fauci, who repeatedly downplayed natural immunity along with other top public health officials.

Fauci and Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), were among the officials to meet secretly in 2021 to decide whether post-infection immunity should count as one or more vaccine doses in the recommended COVID-19 vaccination schedule, according to documents obtained by The Epoch Times. The meeting resulted in no changes to the recommendations, which advise virtually all Americans to get a vaccine even if they’ve recovered from COVID-19.

The government’s position on natural immunity meant that COVID-19 vaccine mandates across the country featured no exceptions for the naturally immune, in contrast to some other countries.

The CDC has said that there is post-infection protection but that it varies by person, it’s unclear how long it lasts, and recovered people should still get vaccinated.

But evidence from before the vaccines were even available signaled that natural immunity was robust, and later studies provided evidence that natural immunity was similar to or even better than vaccination, Smelkinson noted.

One study in July 2020, for instance, found a strong immune response in people who had recovered from COVID-19. Another in October 2020 provided similar findings. And a paper in November 2020 found that mild infections also triggered strong responses.

As early as April 2021, research suggested protection on par with that from vaccines. A CDC study found natural immunity was better than vaccination against the Delta variant, and a more recent CDC paper provided the same conclusions for the Omicron strain. An analysis of dozens of studies found that post-infection protection was similar to or better than vaccination, depending on the strain.

Smelkinson said the government's position resulted in staffing shortages, including in the health care sector, and "caused needless loss of life as vaccines were given to essential workers with natural immunity instead of being prioritized for the elderly."

"Additionally, the daily quarantine of thousands of students could have been significantly reduced if districts had, at least, made exceptions for students with natural immunity. At least," she said. "Disregarding the wealth of evidence of natural immunity led to missed opportunities to implement policies that could have been more effective and efficient in controlling the pandemic and limiting collateral damage."

Rep. Brad Wenstrup (R-Ohio), chairman of the panel, said that the government shouldn't have mandated vaccination for the naturally immune.

Other Experts

Dr. Marty Makary, a professor at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, told the panel that the stance against natural immunity adopted by Fauci and others didn't make sense. He pointed in part to Fauci saying previously that people who had recovered from influenza didn't need vaccination "because the most potent vaccination is getting infected yourself."

"They dismissed it, saying there was uncertainty, 'We don't know how long it's going to last.' As if we knew how long vaccinated immunity was going to last," said Makary, who also said he was testifying in a personal capacity.

Studies have shown that natural immunity does wane over time, particularly against infection. But the protection from vaccines also drops, with a number of papers indicating the waning is more rapid.

Makary estimated that prioritizing naturally immune health care workers to get vaccinated early on resulted in the deaths of thousands of people who actually needed vaccines but were unable to get them. Another result was higher medical bills, he said.

Dr. Tina Tan, a professor at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine, was also called to testify to the panel as the minority witness for the Democrats. Tan acknowledged that post-infection immunity exists but aligned with the CDC as she asserted that the level of protection after recovery "may vary from person to person."

Tan championed so-called hybrid immunity, or vaccination on top of natural immunity. She pointed to papers including a study published in January that found hybrid immunity triggered a stronger immune response against Omicron than natural immunity alone.

"Recent data suggests that the best immunity comes from 'hybrid immunity,' the combination of vaccination and immunity after infection," Tan said.

The doctor claimed that the currently available COVID-19 vaccines provide “substantial protection against severe disease, hospitalization, and death.” There is no clinical trial data available for the updated formulations of the most widely used vaccines, manufactured by Pfizer and Moderna, and observational data indicate the vaccines provide subpar protection against symptomatic infection and short-lived protection against hospitalization.

Tan also said that the vaccines are “safe,” noting that most adverse events are typical post-vaccination symptoms such as fever. But many serious side effects are either caused by the vaccines or suspected to be linked to them, including heart inflammation and blood clotting.

“We know that CDC has conducted extensive monitoring of adverse events associated with vaccines and the risks associated with getting a natural COVID-19 infection are far greater than the risks associated with COVID-19 vaccination,” Tan said.

One of the latest sets of risk-benefit analyses from the agency concluded that the benefits outweighed the risks, but was criticized by several experts for relying on hospitalization rates that didn’t include children even when estimating hospitalizations among children.

“The risk-benefit analysis is a marketing strategy to maximize uptake of the vaccine,” Allison Krug, an epidemiologist, told The Epoch Times previously. “It is not an honest effort to estimate risks and benefits because it ignores the most durable protection on the ‘market’—immunity from prior infection—which is near universal now.”

RELATED TOPICS

National Institutes of Health

natural immunity

W

WeißerWolfe

May 10, 2023