



# Usability Report

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November 2025

# Executive Summary

The purpose of this study was to see how the site presents its public health information to the general public, such as consumers, patients, students, and everyday people looking for information that is reliable. The FDA contains a lot of information, but its usability can vary depending on what you are looking for and who is using the website.

To collect the data, we counted how many clicks it took for the participants to complete the tasks that were given. Each click, whether on a menu item, search result, or link, was counted to show how easy it was for users to find the information they needed.

The major findings of this study were that the website had a terrible layout and it was difficult to find certain information. At times, there was too much information, and you had to search extremely hard for things.

The priorities needed to overall make this a better website are to allow for important information to be at the top of the website, rather than random listings. The website feels slapped together with a search bar thrown at the top. The color scheme could also take a more professional approach, rather than the random checklist being the very first thing seen on the screen that takes up the whole page.

# Introduction

It is important that it's easy to navigate websites, especially government websites. Some people, especially elders, may find it difficult enough already to navigate through their own computer; now imagine a website that's not properly laid out. This may confuse people as well as prevent them from even wanting to search for the information they are looking for, and could end up using a product that is not FDA approved due to the lacking structure of the website's design.

The FDA government website was selected due to all of us are majoring in the healthcare field. We wanted to take a serious approach on a professional and informative website and see how accessible and effective it was for the intended audience. The intended audience is for those who need more information about a certain product, such as food, medicine, vaccinations, etc.

The overall purpose of the study was to show how simple or difficult the website was to navigate. As someone who is pretty good at navigating through stuff and pretty tech savvy, we found it to be quite confusing and not thought out well at all. The website just lacked in almost every aspect.

The headings were way too small and blended in with the whole page. They also separated different portions of the website by using a different color background, and the colors were grey and white, not really making it clear at all. This imitated the overall use of the website itself and caused more issues than not.

# Methodology

## A. Participants

Our study involved 3 participants ages 18-32; each participant had some sort of experience with online, but they varied in familiarity with government websites. The participants we selected are typical public users, not medical workers or people who go on government websites frequently. We also made sure that none of the participants were affiliated with the FDA.

## B. Tasks

The participants completed the following tasks:

1. Use the search guide to find side effects of prescribed drugs
2. Find information on a specific vaccine of choice, and whether it is safe
3. Locate the consumer product safety commissions in the cosmetic section
4. Find the most recent recall

These tasks were selected because they are something that could be looked for by someone on a day-to-day basis.

## C. Data Collection

To collect our data, we observed each participant and how many of clicks it took them to finish the tasks that were given to them. Each time a participant clicked the menu button, a link,

or a search result, it was counted as one click. This allowed us to see where they clicked first, where they clicked the wrong thing, where they had to go back and try again, and what unnecessary steps were needed to find something. We concluded that there were too many clicks on the website. After we took the time to learn the website fully, we counted how long it took for us vs how long it took someone who's never seen the website before.

## **D. Procedures**

Each participant completed tasks individually. They were encouraged then to verbalize their thought process to help identify any confusion or hesitation they may have had. No guidance was given unless a participant became completely stuck.

During each session, we recorded:

- Total clicks per task
- Incorrect paths or dead ends
- Backtracking
- Frustration
- Differences in mobile vs. desktop

After completing all tasks, the participants provided feedback about the overall experience when using the website.

# Findings

## A. Overall Performance

Participants were able to complete every task, but none were completed efficiently. The average task required more clicks than expected, and users often clicked the wrong section first due to the broad category names.

The navigation felt overwhelming to participants because of the large amount of text and layout. Many important sections blended into the background of the website due to the similar font size, spacing, and color.

When the website was used on mobile, participants suffered the most. The menu items were hidden behind smaller icons, and the features like the “Report a Problem” tool were much easier to miss.

## B. Strengths of the FDA:

From our group's perspective as researchers, we noticed several strengths of this government website during our usability testing. These strengths were identified by observing the participant behavior and looking over the site's structure as a team, rather than just relying on the participants' opinions; we wanted to see for ourselves.

- **Reliability:** The FDA is shown as a trustworthy source, which gives users confidence in the information they then eventually find.
- **Extensive Information:** The website contains a lot of detailed, research-based information on drugs, vaccines, food, cosmetics, and medical devices.

- **Clear categories:** Headings such as “Products”, “Topics”, and “Information” were named correctly and easy for participants to locate.
- **Functional search tool:** When users knew exactly what they were looking for, the search bar was able to provide helpful and accurate results.
- **Multiple reporting and feedback options:** For most sections, there was the presence of feedback tools and reporting forms, which shows an attempt to support users' needs.

### C. Usability Issues Identified

These issues come from our group's observations while watching participants use the site. They weren't just random complaints; we saw these problems happen over and over again.

- **Too many menus:** There were so many sections and sub-sections that users got confused about where to click.
- **Too much reading:** Pages were filled with long paragraphs and lots of technical wording, which made it hard for users to quickly find what they were looking for.
- **No visual structure:** The site barely uses pictures or color, and since the spacing is very tight, everything blends, and nothing really stands out.
- **Important info doesn't pop out:** Things like recalls or safety alerts look the same as everything else, so users didn't notice them right away.
- **Cosmetics section looks messy:** The layout made it look more like a random ad page than an official government website.
- **Random information:** The boxes include links to websites that most people may not have any interest in, rather than moving important information to the main page of the website.

- **Mobile issues:** On phones, menu items were hidden or very small, which made it easy to miss important tools like the “Report a Problem” button.

## **D. User Feedback**

This section looks at what the participants actually said while using the website.

Participants described the website as:

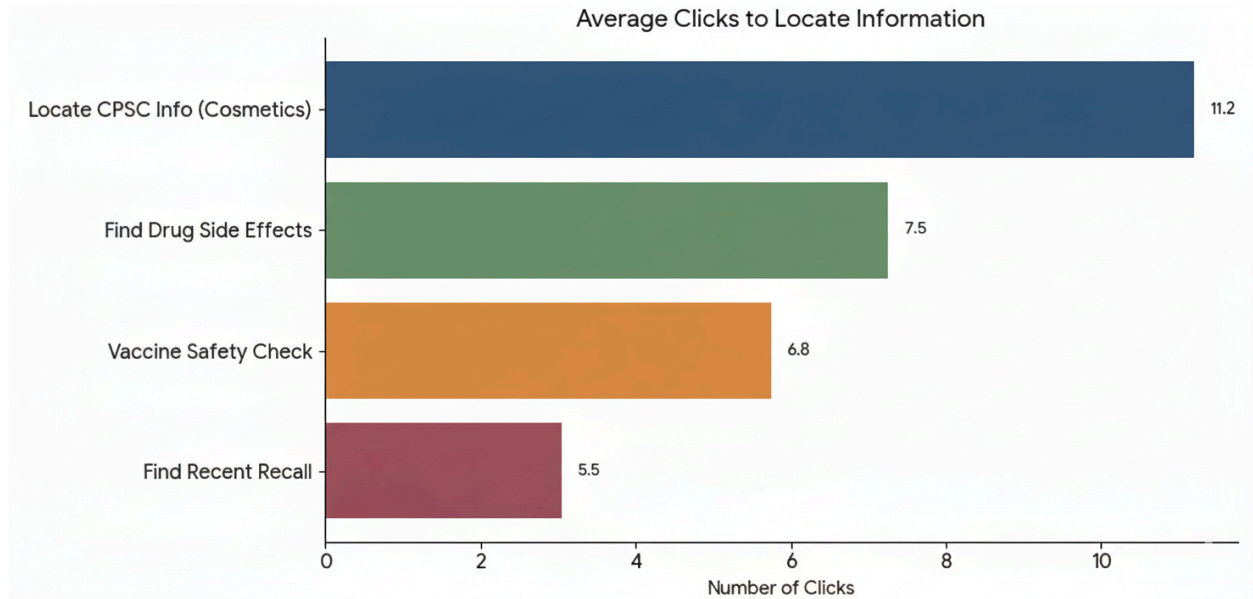
- “Boring”
- “Dull”
- “Too many words”
- “Nothing stands out.”
- “Hard to look at.”
- “Confusing even though im typically good with technology.”

Through our own evaluation, we all agreed that the cosmetic section “looks like an ad”, which made it feel messy and unprofessional.

Between participants and our group, we also said it was frustrating because we had to scroll through huge blocks of text with no pictures or more interesting colors to break the pieces up. Overall, we felt the website wasn't designed in a way that made sense for regular people/ the public trying to find information quickly.



## E. Visuals



*Note: Click counts include search interactions and backtracking. (chart made with Gemini AI)*

### 36% (HIGHEST EFFORT TASK)

- Locating specific Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) information regarding cosmetics required the greatest number of navigation steps.

### 24% (INFORMATION SEARCH)

- Finding drug side effects was a less involved search process than locating CPSC data.

## 27% (SAFETY VERIFICATION EFFORT)

- The process for verifying vaccine safety information was slightly less complex than the drug side effect search.

## 18% (QUICKEST SEARCH)

- Identifying a recent product recall was the most efficient task, requiring the fewest clicks.

# Recommendations

## **F. Justification**

Our recommendations focus on improving the website's layout, visual structure, and navigation because those were the main issues users struggled with. Since participants had trouble finding important information, like recalls, safety alerts, and product details, making those topics stand out visually would help anyone using this website notice them faster.

Users were also overwhelmed by long paragraphs and messy organization, so adding visuals, better spacing, and clearer headings would make the site easier to understand. Because mobile users missed important features, improving the mobile layout seems necessary to make sure everyone can access the same information at all times.

Overall, the changes suggested would fix the main problems we saw during our evaluation. Users were confused and couldn't find important information, making them feel overwhelmed by all the text. By making the website clearer, easier to navigate through, and more visually appealing, people would be able to find what they need faster and with less frustration. These slight improvements would make the site much easier for the general public to use.

## Conclusion

The website [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov) provides important information to the public, but its current design does not show the seriousness or importance of the content it provides. As a government website responsible for drug safety, food regulation, vaccine information, and product recalls, users would expect a clear, structured, and more thought-out layout. Instead, the site feels cluttered, visually outdated, and difficult to navigate, which causes crucial information to blend into everything else.

Because of the weak visuals, overwhelming text blocks, and lack of a meaningful structure, users will often overlook the important sections, not because the information isn't there, but because nothing on the page shows priority. This makes the website feel less important than it actually is, despite having life-changing information on it.

Improving the layout, emphasizing the urgent alerts, and modernizing the visual design of the website would help [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov) better match its purpose. A clearer structure would not only improve usability but also strengthen the public's trust by making this essential information easier to understand, find, and act on.

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