

COVID VACCINE FIELD EXPERIMENT

Overview

In this field experiment, a person who refers his/her friend to receive a vaccine would be entered into a lucky draw, with a monetary prize, created by the government. The purpose behind this nudge is to encourage people who would otherwise not have got a Covid vaccine, to do so. The hypothesis is that there should be an increase in the total number of people receiving a Covid vaccine after the nudge is implemented. Increasing the number of vaccinations is important as medical research shows that vaccines decrease the probability of contracting Covid-19 and are also effective at reducing the severity of the symptoms of the virus for those who do contract it.

The Nudge

The nudge addresses behaviour by creating an environment where there is social pressure to get a vaccine (if I wanted to enter the lucky draw, I would pressure my friend into getting the vaccine). It is also likely that if a person asks her friend to get the vaccine so she can enter the lucky draw, she will reciprocate and get the vaccine as well so that her friend may enter the draw, which will also increase the number of people getting vaccinated.

For the vaccines that require two doses (e.g. Pfizer), a person's name could be withdrawn, if the second shot is not given within a certain amount of time. This makes use of loss aversion, where people who already have their names in the draw feel the pain of having their names withdrawn more intensely than the pleasure of having their names added a second time to the draw for getting their second shot.

Target Group

The lucky draw is anticipated to attract people who are risk-on (they enjoy gambling, and are less worried about getting vaccinated), and poorer individuals for whom winning money is more attractive. These target groups are desirable as they are less likely to get the vaccine, and the government would like to maximise the number of vaccinated people. Additionally, if there are individuals who want to be vaccinated but procrastinate getting the vaccine (e.g. naïve hyperbolic discounters), setting a deadline for the lucky draw could increase the utility of getting the vaccine earlier enough to overcome the procrastination problem. There is no downside or extra cost for having people enter the lucky draw who would otherwise still have got the vaccine.

Proposed Partner Institutions

This field experiment would be in collaboration with the South African government and facilities that conduct vaccinations (e.g. Clicks). The government would be where the data is centralized and the administrators of vaccines would all be data collection nodes. After a person has received a vaccine, the administrator would ask if the person received a referral for the shot, and then note the ID number of the friend in addition to the individual's details.

Data Collection

There is a data collection system already set up at the vaccination sites so this extra data point would not be difficult to collect within the current tracking system. Depending on costs, the referral friend could be sent an sms thanking her for caring about others and getting them vaccinated, and letting her know that she has been entered into the draw. This is a positive reinforcement technique and shows people that the government is following up on their promise. This acknowledgement and transparency is expected to encourage more referrals. Once the lucky draw has been concluded, the data can be analysed, the purpose of which is to uncover whether the nudge increased vaccinations.