

## Ethical pros and cons of infecting healthy volunteers in quest for COVID-19 vaccine

Instead of vaccinating hundreds to thousands of people and waiting to see if they naturally catch the virus, scientists would purposely infect a smaller number of vaccinated volunteers with COVID-19 in a controlled setting to see if a vaccine offered protection. If successful, such studies could fast-track vaccine evaluation, as well as our understanding of COVID-19 immunity.

However, doctors and researchers don't all agree on whether it's ethical to infect people with a disease that remains poorly understood, and for which there is currently no reliable treatment. That leaves it to those bioethicists, researchers and regulators.

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"I would, of course, not want to subject anyone to harm, but the fact is that harm is accumulating all over now, and if we can reduce the total amount of harm, I think it's worth doing," [vaccine developer Stanley] Plotkin says. "Extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary solutions."

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The hallmark of any human challenge trial is fully informed consent from participants. But [virologist Angela] Rasmussen questions whether that's possible at this stage. "I don't know that we can actually inform them of all the risks because there's still so much that's just unknown about this virus," she says.

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[Already] over 20,000 people around the world have expressed interest in participating in COVID-19 challenge trials.

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