

## Anti-vax activists exploit dark history of Tuskegee syphilis study to stir Black opposition to COVID-19 vaccines

[There's] a remarkable new alliance between the anti-vaccine movement and black leaders in Colorado. Among those who testified against [a pro-vaccination] bill, alongside [anti-vax activist Robert F.] Kennedy and white parents, were a local NAACP leader and a prominent Black Lives Matter activist. The dynamics on display in Denver have nationwide implications as [scientists race to create a vaccine for the deadly coronavirus](#), which has taken a disproportionately steep toll on people of color. Although African Americans stand to benefit enormously from a vaccine, they remain distrustful of a medical establishment with a history that includes [the Tuskegee syphilis study](#) and surgical experiments on enslaved people — not to mention the ongoing disparities they confront in the U.S. health-care system.

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The possibility that anti-vaccination leaders — who have already made common cause with those dismissing the risks of the pandemic and protesting state safety restrictions — could further undermine faith in a vaccine among people of color is profoundly worrisome for public health officials.

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[Black Lives Matter activist Theo Wilson] said the [anti-vax] movement's themes — a predatory pharmaceutical industry profiting from the ignorance of vulnerable people — resonated with him. "Visions of Tuskegee still dance in our heads, man," Wilson said in an interview. "There is, in the black community, common cause — much larger than people would think — because of our history in the medical community."

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