

DIY COVID-19 vaccine? George Church, other scientists experimenting with home brewed versions

Nearly 200 covid-19 vaccines are in development, and some three dozen are at various stages of human testing. But in what appears to be the first “citizen science” vaccine initiative, [Preston] Estep and at least 20 other researchers, technologists, or science enthusiasts, many connected to Harvard University and MIT, have volunteered as lab rats for a do-it-yourself inoculation against the coronavirus. They say it’s their only chance to become immune without waiting a year or more for a vaccine to be formally approved.

Among those who’ve taken the DIY vaccine is [George Church](#), the celebrity geneticist at Harvard University, who took two doses a week apart earlier this month.

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[The] vaccine is what’s called a “subunit” vaccine because it consists of fragments of the pathogen—in this case peptides, which are essentially short bits of protein that match part of the coronavirus but can’t cause disease on their own.

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[Arthur Caplan](#), a bioethicist at New York University Langone Medical Center, who saw the white paper, pans Radvac as “off-the-charts loony.” In an email, Caplan says he sees “no leeway” for self-experimentation given the importance of quality control with vaccines. Instead, he thinks there is a high “potential for harm” and “ill-founded enthusiasm.”

Church disagrees, saying the vaccine’s simple formulation means it’s probably safe. “I think the bigger risk is that it is ineffective,” he says.

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