



MEDIA RELEASE

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How much do people in Africa trust medical experts and vaccines ? Landmark survey reveals public confidence in health, science and vaccines across the continent.

Building trust in science and healthcare is critical if we are to successfully confront health challenges across Africa, improve well-being, enhance economic growth and build sustainable long-term resilience.

Wellcome Global Monitor is the biggest survey on public attitudes to health and science. It reveals how people in 40 African countries feel about topics including confidence in healthcare systems, doctors, nurses, scientists, attitudes to vaccines and government, and how much the public believe science benefits people like them.*

The survey shows overall trust and engagement with science and health is low across Africa – and low compared to global levels. And while across the continent the picture is more positive about vaccines, that confidence may be fragile and cannot be taken for granted.

Key Wellcome Global Monitor findings in Africa include:

- More than a quarter of people (27%) have no confidence in hospitals and health clinics.
- 16 of the 20 countries where trust in doctors and nurses is weakest are in Africa
- Around 9 in 10 people (87%) agree vaccines are safe and 96% strongly agree vaccines are important for children to have.
- One-in-five (20%) have low trust in scientists and around one-in-five (21%) believe science benefits very few people in their country.
- More than half of the population (55%) say they know little or nothing about science.

Full continent overview is available [here](#)

Wellcome Global Monitor was commissioned and funded by Wellcome, a financially and politically independent foundation working to improve health globally.

Dr Jeremy Farrar, Director of Wellcome, said: “Health and wellbeing underpin resilience and growth in every society. Science can and does give us extraordinary abilities to improve health and save lives. But the most important healthcare tool is trust. No matter how exciting the treatment, clever the delivery method, or robust the science, it cannot make a difference without the confidence and support of the society in which it works. A lasting and prosperous future is impossible without prioritising healthcare with no-one left behind. We must ensure communities in Africa and around the world are at the heart of research, build their trust and make sure they have ownership of new approaches, and ensure advances are available to all who could benefit, regardless of their ability to pay.”

Globally, there is increasing concern over public confidence in vaccines, with vaccine hesitancy highlighted as among the top global health challenges by the World Health Organisation.

Wellcome Global Monitor, which globally surveyed over 140,000 people in 144 countries, shows that worldwide 79% of people strongly or somewhat agree vaccines are safe and 84% agree or somewhat agree that they are effective.

Findings for Africa show greater trust and take-up of vaccines than any other continent, with a number of countries having the greatest confidence globally. Overall in Africa 87% of the population strongly or somewhat agree vaccines are safe and 86% strongly or somewhat agree that they are effective.

Nigeria and Rwanda have among the highest confidence in vaccines in the world, as the majority of their populations agree that vaccines are safe (91%, 94% respectively) and important for children to have (97%, 99% respectively). Nigerians and Rwandans are also most likely to express confidence in the hospitals and health clinics in their country (80%, 97% respectively).

Confidence in vaccine safety does not, however, always translate into confidence about how effective vaccines are in preventing disease.

In a number of countries in Africa, relatively high proportions of people disagree that vaccines are effective, while concerns about vaccine safety are less common. In Liberia, for example, 28% of people strongly or somewhat disagree that vaccines are effective, the highest in the world, and in Nigeria 16% of people strongly or somewhat disagree vaccines are effective.

In countries where weak health supply and infrastructure systems exist, and there are difficulties with access to vaccines, it is harder to achieve the vaccination rates essential to protect the whole community, and the persistence of infectious diseases may lead some people to conclude that the vaccines themselves are not working.

Dr. Agnes Binagwaho, Vice Chancellor of the University of Global Health - Rwanda and Senior Advisor of the Director General of World Health Organisation, is a member of the Wellcome Global Monitor Advisory Board:

“Scientific advances can bring new vaccines, treatments, cures, and technologies to save and improve lives - but we will only see impact if we have the trust of the people who stand to benefit. Vaccines are one of our most important healthcare tools but vaccine hesitancy – the reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines – threatens to reverse progress made in tackling vaccine-preventable diseases. To address this problem, as a global health community, we must focus on not only access, but also community trust. We need to work together, with Ministries of Health, and stakeholders at all levels, to engage communities to build trust - in vaccines and other healthcare advances and in our health care systems and institutions. It is only through connecting directly with people that we can increase their confidence. We then must match their increased demand with an increased supply, and ensuring access to all who may benefit, wherever they live.”

Prof Thumbi Ndung’u, Deputy Director at the Africa Health Research Institute (AHRI) in Durban, South Africa, heads a research team working to develop effective vaccines and cures for HIV and TB:

“Wellcome Global Monitor is reassuring for Africa because it shows that Africans are among the most hopeful and embracing of vaccines and science and the potential of science to improve public health. The high burden of vaccine preventable diseases shows that African governments need to do more to ensure that Africans enjoy the benefits of vaccines and science in improving their quality of life. Africans must be at the forefront of scientific innovation and delivery to ensure public participation and trust that will then lead to the full realisation of the promise of science to build a healthier and more prosperous continent.”

Prof Nelson Torto, Executive Director of The African Academy of Sciences (The AAS), and a member of the Wellcome Global Monitor Advisory Board:

“Wellcome Global Monitor speaks to the key issue of putting people at the centre of research. The findings are quite interesting as they speak to the positive outlook on vaccines by the public. The African Academy of Sciences identifies critical gaps in science and ensures science communication and community and public engagement supports African scientists to go beyond the bench and bedside to proactively engage with non-scientific audiences and dispel myths about who scientists are and what scientists do and misconceptions that scientists are old male professors in labs, libraries or dark offices filled with countless bounded books and paper stacks. Further, culture in Africa plays a strong role in how people understand science and is one that needs to be understood as more engagement in science is done. The example of Nigeria and Rwanda really is testament to what champions in government or leadership and their engagement can do to influencing the public’s perception of science, technology and innovation and the role it plays in improving all our lives. Given the very low investment in research in the continent, we want a community that is engaged and embraces science for health. Wellcome Global Monitor challenges us all to make sure science works for everyone.”

Imran Khan, Head of Public Engagement, Wellcome:

“The results of Wellcome Global Monitor highlight issues that need to be addressed to ensure science and health research benefits everyone equally worldwide. In Africa we see extremes. From some of the highest rates of vaccine confidence and trust in healthcare in the world, to the lowest confidence in science. We know that trust in science is important, and that it’s deeply linked with how confident and secure people feel in their societies. Africa is increasingly a pioneer in scientific and healthcare, but to achieve real impact demands the trust and attention of the African public.”

*Wellcome Global Monitor was conducted by Gallup World Poll. The research is part of a global survey of 140,000 people in 144 countries. The results from the first Wellcome Global Monitor will help provide a baseline of evidence to assess and will help formulate targeted interventions to improve public engagement and confidence with science and health. The findings are freely available so that as many people as possible can use it to inform research and the development of policy.

To access the full dataset and for images and infographics visit <https://wellcome.ac.uk/reports/wellcome-global-monitor/2018/improving-trust-science-healthcare-africa>

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- **Media contact:** Maggie Stratton, Wellcome Trust: m.stratton@wellcome.ac.uk +44 (0)7872112656

Notes to editors

About Wellcome Global Monitor

Nationally representative surveys were conducted in 144 countries, in more than 140 languages and interviewing more than 140,000 people. The timeline for the survey was as follows: September 2017 to March 2018, developing and testing the survey questionnaire; April to December 2018; January to May 2019, analysing the results; June 2019 onwards, publishing the findings. The survey was conducted by Gallup World Poll and was commissioned and funded by Wellcome. Full details of countries surveyed in Wellcome Global Monitor are available in the report. African groupings for this report are: Eastern Africa (Burundi, Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe); Central Africa (Cameroon, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Gabon); North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia); Southern Africa (Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, eSwatini); Western Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Togo).

About Wellcome

Wellcome exists to improve health by helping great ideas to thrive. We support researchers, we take on big health challenges, we campaign for better science, and we help everyone get involved with science and health research. We are a politically and financially independent foundation.

Link to full Wellcome Global Monitor report : <https://wellcome.ac.uk/reports/wellcome-global-monitor/2018>