

## Inside The Secret Government Meeting On COVID-19 Natural Immunity



BY TYLER DURDEN

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*Authored by Zachary Stieber via The Epoch Times (emphasis ours),*

**Four of the highest ranking U.S. health officials—including Dr. Anthony Fauci—met in secret to discuss whether or not naturally immune people should be exempt from getting COVID-19 vaccines, The Epoch Times can reveal.**



*National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases Director Dr. Anthony Fauci during a Senate hearing in Washington on May 17, 2022. (Shawn Thew/Pool/AFP via Getty Images)*

The officials brought in four outside experts to discuss whether the protection gained after recovering from COVID-19—known as [natural immunity](#)—should count as one or more vaccine doses.

“There was interest in several people in the administration in hearing basically the opinions of four immunologists in terms of what we thought about ... **natural infection as contributing to protection against moderate to severe disease, and to what extent that should influence dosing,**” Dr. Paul Offit, one of the experts, told The Epoch Times.

Offit and another expert took the position that the naturally immune need fewer doses. The other two

experts argued natural immunity shouldn't count as anything.

The discussion did not lead to a change in U.S. vaccination policy, which has never acknowledged post-infection protection. Fauci and the other U.S. officials who heard from the experts have repeatedly downplayed that protection, claiming that it is inferior to vaccine-bestowed immunity. Most studies on the subject indicate the opposite.

The meeting, held in October 2021, was briefly discussed before on a podcast. The Epoch Times has independently confirmed the meeting took place, identified all of the participants, and uncovered other key details.

Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a professor of medicine at Stanford University who did not participate in the meeting, criticized **how such a consequential discussion took place behind closed doors with only a few people present.**

"It was a really impactful decision that they made in private with a very small number of people involved. And they reached the wrong decision," Bhattacharya told The Epoch Times.

**From:** Murthy, Vivek (HHS/OASH) <Vivek.Murthy@hhs.gov>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 12, 2021 12:28 PM  
**To:** Walensky, Rochelle (CDC/OD) <aux7@cdc.gov>; (b) (6)  
(b) (6); Collins, Francis (NIH/OD) [E] <collinsf@od.nih.gov>  
**Cc:** Fauci, Anthony (NIH/NIAID) [E] (b) (6); Bowman, Mary (HHS/OASH/OSG)  
<Mary.Bowman@hhs.gov>  
**Subject:** Tonight at 9p?  
Hi Rochelle, Bechara, and Tony,  
Would you be available tonight from 9-9:30 for a call with a few other scientific colleagues on infection-induced immunity? Tony and I just discussed and were hoping to do this sooner rather than later if possible. Let me know if this might work.  
Thanks  
Vivek

*An email obtained by The Epoch Times shows Dr. Vivek Murthy contacting colleagues to arrange the meeting. (The Epoch Times)*

## The Participants

From the government:

- Fauci, the head of the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and the chief medical adviser to President Joe Biden until the end of 2022
- Dr. Vivek Murthy, the U.S. surgeon general
- Dr. [Rochelle Walensky](#), the head of U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- Dr. Francis Collins, head of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, which includes the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, until December 2021
- Dr. Bechara Choucair, the White House vaccine coordinator until November 2021

From outside the government:

- Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia and an adviser to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration on vaccines
- Dr. Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota and a former member of Biden's COVID-19 advisory board
- Akiko Iwasaki, professor of immunobiology and molecular, cellular, and developmental biology at Yale University

- Dr. Peter Hotez, co-director of Texas Children’s Hospital Center for Vaccine Development and dean of the Baylor College of Medicine’s School of Tropical Medicine

Fauci and Murthy decided to hold the meeting, according to emails The Epoch Times obtained.

“Would you be available tonight from 9-9:30 for a call with a few other scientific colleagues on infection-induced immunity? Tony and I just discussed and were hoping to do this sooner rather than later if possible,” Murthy wrote in one missive to Fauci, Walensky, and Collins.

All three quickly said they could make it.

Walensky asked who would be there.

Murthy listed the participants. “I think you know all of them right?” he said.

Walensky said she knew all but one person. “Sounds like a good crew,” she added.



*From top left, clockwise: Dr. Vivek Murthy, Dr. Francis Collins, Dr. Anthony Fauci, and Dr. Rochelle Walensky. (Getty Images)*

### **‘Clear Benefit’**

During the meeting, Offit put forth [his position](#)—that natural immunity should count as two doses.

At the time, the CDC recommended three shots—a two-dose primary series and a booster—for many Americans 18 and older, soon expanding that advice to all adults, even though trials of the boosters only analyzed immunogenicity and efficacy among those without evidence of prior infection.

Research indicated that natural immunity [was long-lasting](#) and [superior to vaccination](#). On the other hand, the CDC published [a paper](#) in its [quasi-journal](#) that concluded vaccination was better.

Osterholm sided with Offit, but thought that having recovered from COVID-19 should only count as a single dose.

“I added my voice at the meeting to count an infection as equivalent to a dose of vaccine! I’ve always believed hybrid immunity likely provides the most protection,” Osterholm told The Epoch Times via email.

## Hybrid immunity refers to getting a vaccine after recovering from COVID-19.

Some papers [have found](#) vaccination after recovery boosts antibodies, which are believed to be a correlate of protection. Other research [has shown](#) that the naturally immune have a higher risk of side effects than those who haven't recovered from infection. Some experts believe the risk is worth the benefit but others do not.

Hotez and Iwasaki, meanwhile, made the case that natural immunity should not count as any dose—as has been the case in virtually the entire United States since the COVID-19 vaccines were first rolled out.

Iwasaki referred to a British preprint study, soon after [published in Nature](#), that concluded, based on survey data, that the protection from the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines was heightened among people with evidence of prior infection. She also noted [a study](#) she worked on that found the naturally immune had higher antibody titers than the vaccinated, but that the vaccinated “reached comparable levels of neutralization responses to the ancestral strain after the second vaccine dose.” The researchers also discovered T cells—thought to protect against severe illness—were boosted by vaccination.

There's a “clear benefit” to boosting regardless of prior infection, Iwasaki, who has since received more than \$2 million in grants from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), told participants after the meeting in an email obtained by The Epoch Times. Hotez received \$789,000 in grants from the NIH in fiscal year 2020, and has received other grants totaling millions in previous years. Offit, who co-invented the rotavirus vaccine, received \$3.5 million in NIH grants from 1985 through 2004.

Hotez declined interview requests through a spokesperson. Iwasaki did not respond to requests for comment.

No participants represented experts like Bhattacharya who say that the naturally immune generally don't need any doses at all.

On Oct 12, 2021, at 10:47 PM, Iwasaki, Akiko <akiko.iwasaki@yale.edu> wrote:

**\*\*\*CAUTION:\*\*\* This email is not from a BCM Source. Only click links or open attachments you know are safe.**

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It was nice to talk to you all about infection-induced vs. vaccine-induced immunity. Please find attached the preprint study from Oxford I was referring to that compared vaccine vs. prior infection in protection against infection and disease

<https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2021.08.18.21262237v1.full-text>

Also, here is the study we published yesterday on the benefit of vaccinating the previously infected regarding enhancing neutralizing Abs against most VOCs. Clear benefit there.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41586-021-04085-y>

Best wishes,  
Akiko

*In an email obtained by The Epoch Times, Akiko Iwasaki wrote to other meeting participants shortly after the meeting ended. (The Epoch Times)*

## Public Statements

In public, Hotez repeatedly portrayed natural immunity as worse than vaccination, including citing the widely criticized CDC paper, which drew from just two months of testing in a single state.



In one post on Twitter on Oct. 29, 2021, he referred to [another CDC study](#), which concluded that the naturally immune were five times as likely to test positive compared to vaccinated people with no prior infection, and stated: “Still more evidence, this time from @CDCMMWR showing that vaccine-induced immunity is way better than infection and recovery, what some call weirdly ‘natural immunity’. The antivaccine and far right groups go ballistic, but it’s the reality.”

That same day, the CDC issued a [“science brief”](#) that detailed the agency’s position on natural immunity versus the protection from vaccines. The brief, which has never been updated, says that available evidence shows both the vaccinated and naturally immune “have a low risk of subsequent infection for at least 6 months” but that “the body of evidence for infection-induced immunity is more limited than that for vaccine-induced immunity.”

Evidence shows that vaccination after infection, or hybrid immunity, “significantly enhances protection and further reduces risk of reinfection” and is the foundation of the CDC’s recommendations, the agency said.

Several months later, the CDC [acknowledged](#) that natural immunity was superior to vaccination against the Delta variant, which was displaced in late 2021 by Omicron. The CDC, which has [made misleading representations](#) before on the evidence supporting vaccination of the naturally immune, did not respond to a request for comment regarding whether the agency will ever update the brief.

**Iwasaki had initially been open to curbing the number of doses for the naturally immune**—“I think this supports the idea of just giving one dose to people who had covid19,” she said in response to one Twitter post in early 2021, which is restricted from view—but later came to argue that each person who is infected has a different immune response, and that the natural immunity, even if strong initially, wanes over time.

Osterholm has knocked people who claim natural immunity is weak or non-existent, but has also claimed that vaccine-bestowed immunity is better. Osterholm also changed the stance he took in the meeting just several months later, saying in February 2022 that “we’ve got to make three doses the actual standard” while also “trying to understand what kind of immunity we get from a previous infection.”

Offit has been the leading critic on the Vaccines and Related Biological Products Advisory Committee, which advises U.S. regulators on vaccines, over their authorizations of COVID-19 boosters. Offit has said boosters are unnecessary for the young and healthy because they don’t add much to the primary series. He also criticized regulators for [authorizing updated shots](#) without consulting the committee and [absent clinical data](#). Two of the top U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) officials resigned over the booster push. No FDA officials were listed on invitations to the secret meeting on natural immunity.

## **Fauci and Walensky Downplay Natural Immunity**

Fauci and Walensky, two of the most visible U.S. health officials during the pandemic, have repeatedly downplayed natural immunity.

**Fauci, who said in an email in March 2020 that he assumed there would be “substantial immunity post infection,” would say later that natural immunity was real but that the durability was uncertain.** He noted the studies finding higher antibody levels from hybrid immunity.

In September 2021, months after claiming that vaccinated people “can feel safe that they are not going

to get infected,” Fauci said that he did not have “a really firm answer” on whether the naturally immune should get vaccinated.

“It is conceivable that you got infected, you’re protected—but you may not be protected for an indefinite period of time,” Fauci said on CNN when pressed on the issue. “So I think that is something that we need to sit down and discuss seriously.”

After the meeting, Fauci would say that natural immunity and vaccine-bestowed immunity both wane, and that people should get vaccinated regardless of prior infection to boost their protection.

Walensky, before she became CDC director, signed a document called the [John Snow Memorandum](#) in response to the [Great Barrington Declaration](#), which Bhattacharya coauthored. The declaration called for focused protection of the elderly and otherwise infirm, stating, “The most compassionate approach that balances the risks and benefits of reaching herd immunity, is to allow those who are at minimal risk of death to live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection, while better protecting those who are at highest risk.”

**The memorandum, in contrast, said there was “no evidence for lasting protective immunity to SARS-CoV-2 following natural infection” and supported the harsh lockdown measures that had been imposed in the United States and elsewhere.**

In March 2021, after becoming director, Walensky [released recommendations](#) that the naturally immune get vaccinated, noting that there was “substantial durability” of protection six months after infection but that “rare cases of reinfection” had been reported.



Walensky hyped the CDC study on natural immunity in August 2021, and the second study in October 2021. But when the [third paper](#) came out concluding natural immunity was superior, she did not issue a statement. Walensky later [told a blog](#) that the study found natural immunity provided strong protection, “perhaps even more so than those who had been vaccinated and not yet boosted.”

But, because it came before Omicron, she said, “it’s not entirely clear how that protection works in the context of Omicron and boosting.”

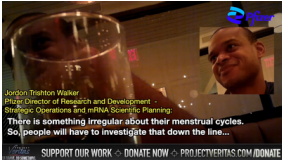
Walensky, Murthy, and Collins did not respond to requests for interviews. Fauci, who stepped down from his positions in late 2022, could not be reached.

Murthy and Collins also portrayed natural immunity as inferior. “From the studies about natural immunity, we are seeing more and more data that tells us that while you get some protection from natural infection, it’s not nearly as strong as what you get from the vaccine,” Murthy said on CNN about two months before the meeting. Collins, in a series of blog posts, highlighted the studies showing higher antibody levels after vaccination and urged people to get vaccinated. He also voiced support for vaccine mandates.

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