

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/three-years-late-the-lancet-recognizes-natural-immunity-great-barrington-declaration-tech-censor-antibodies-mandates-b3ba912c>

OPINIONLIFE SCIENCE

Three Years Late, the Lancet Recognizes Natural Immunity

The public-health clerisy rediscovers a principle of immunology it derided throughout the pandemic.

Illysia Finley [Follow](#)

6, 2023 1:07 pm ET



An at-home Covid-19 test in San Anselmo, Calif., May 2, 2022.

PHOTO: JUSTIN SULLIVAN/GETTY IMAGES

The Lancet medical journal this month published a review of 65 studies that concluded prior infection with Covid—i.e., natural immunity—is at least as protective as two doses of mRNA vaccines. The most surprising news was that the study made the mainstream press.

“Immunity acquired from a Covid infection is as protective as vaccination against severe illness and death, study finds,” NBC reported on Feb. 16. The study found that prior infection offered 78.6% protection against reinfection from the original Wuhan, Alpha or Delta variants at 40 weeks, which slipped to 36.1% against Omicron. Protection against severe illness remained around 90% across all variants after 40 weeks. These results exceed what other studies have found for two and even three mRNA doses.

This comes after nearly three years of public-health officials' dismissing the same hypothesis. But now that experts at the University of Washington have confirmed it in a leading—and left-leaning—journal, it's fit to print.

The Lancet study's vindication of natural immunity fits a pandemic pattern: The public-health clerisy rejects an argument that ostensibly threatens its authority; eventually it's forced to soften its position in the face of incontrovertible evidence; and yet not once does it acknowledge its opponents were right.

The supposition that prior Covid infection could protect against future illness was deeply rooted in immunology before studies bore it out. Those who dismissed natural immunity argued it wasn't known how long protection against reinfection would last. That's true. We still don't know exactly, and it seems to vary by person and variant.

Over their lifetimes people are frequently reinfected with viruses that cause respiratory illnesses, including other coronaviruses. But healthy people rarely get severely ill with a virus to which they've already been exposed. Infections generate antibodies in blood and the membranes of the upper respiratory tract that prevent reinfection in the short-term. They also generate and train B and T white blood cells that prevent serious illness after antibodies wane.

Repeat exposures train our immune systems to live with and fight off viruses as they become endemic. Think of it as peaceful coexistence. We tolerate viruses rapidly replicating in our upper respiratory passages, which allows them to transmit to other people, without mounting an overkill immune response that ends up harming ourselves.

Anthony Fauci and two co-authors explained this process last month in the journal *Cell Host & Microbe*. The concept of natural immunity isn't scientifically controversial, yet it was disparaged by public-health officials who associated it with opposition to lockdowns and the Great Barrington Declaration in autumn 2020.

Recall that the declaration called for a new pandemic strategy with a focus on protecting the elderly and vulnerable while letting those at low risk for severe illness “live their lives normally to build up immunity to the virus through natural infection.” The aim was to minimize deaths and social harm until we reach herd immunity.

While the goal of herd immunity proved elusive as the virus mutated, the declaration's central premise was correct: “As immunity builds in the population, the risk of infection to all—

including the vulnerable—falls.” This is what has happened over the past three years. Vaccines helped mitigate severe illness while people developed stronger natural immunity.

Although the virus has become more transmissible, we’ve built up what experts call an “immunity wall” that prevents it from spreading like a wildfire through a dense, dry forest, as happened in China after Beijing lifted its zero-Covid policy.

The public-health clerisy worried that acknowledging natural immunity would encourage people to get infected or discourage them from getting vaccines. The first concern was unsupported, and the second was no reason to deny scientific reality. Public-health officials in the U.S. nonetheless dug in and refused to provide exemptions from vaccine mandates for those with natural immunity, as many European countries did.

Meantime, tech companies suppressed discussions of natural immunity. Twitter flagged posts that claimed natural immunity was superior to vaccines as “misleading.” Facebook’s misinformation policy still restricts distribution of content that “implicitly discourages vaccination by advocating for alternatives” such as “natural immunity.”

The false denial of natural immunity caused vaccine skeptics to dig in and fueled suspicions that public-health officials were in the pocket of vaccine makers and dishonest about other things as well.

The Lancet study could serve a useful political purpose by giving public-health officials cover to relax vaccine mandates, which in turn could reduce resistance to vaccines. But this would require the clerisy to concede its opponents were right.

Appeared in the February 27, 2023, print edition as ‘Three Years Late, the Lancet Recognizes Natural Immunity’.