

Covid-19 Vaccinations in Brazil

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The COVID-19 pandemic has adversely impacted a vast number of countries in all regions of the world. Brazil was one of the countries that was most impacted, having the second highest number of COVID-19 related deaths, exceeded only by the United States. Brazil has a high overall global death toll represented as a proportion of the Brazilian population. Compared to other Latin American countries, Peru has the higher number of deaths based off of population.¹ Vaccinations, however, have proven to help prevent future deaths from occurring, but Brazil has faced various challenges in this endeavor.

Dr. Marcelo J.S. de Lemos, a Brazilian academic and scholar, is currently Purdue University's first Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Interdisciplinary Studies. In Brazil, he serves as the head of the Department of Energy at Instituto Tecnológico de Aeronáutica in São José dos Campos. Dr. de Lemos talked about the Brazilian response from his lived experience. He mentioned how he never really encountered any vaccine hesitancy in his home country. He also stated that all vaccines were free and anyone could go up to a clinic and receive an immunization. It's fair to say that vaccines were and still are easy to get, albeit, depending on supply. In the long run, Dr. de Lemos believes that Brazil should not have any vaccine hesitancy regarding COVID.

Brazil's Vaccine History

Brazil's National Immunization Program was created during a military dictatorship in 1973. The purpose of the program was to help vaccinate rural citizens and create trust in the science of immunizations. This program led to the Unified Health System or Sistema Único de Saúde (SUS), which provides free healthcare to those in need. According to Dr. de Lemos, any Brazilian citizen could go to a clinic and receive over twenty vaccines for free. Having programs like this instills a strong public confidence in vaccines. A survey was done in mid-June 2021 where Brazilian citizens were asked whether or not they will raise their sleeves for shots. Ninety-four percent of people said that they would get vaccinated.²

COVID Vaccine Numbers

As of December 2021, Brazil has vaccinated approximately 75% of its population—which is well over three million doses. The current rate of vaccine rollout is a few thousand doses short of one million doses being administered every day. In order to vaccinate another 10% of the population, it will take roughly forty-three days. With vaccinations increasing across the nation, positive cases have been steadily decreasing as well since June 22, 2021.³

¹Jake Horton, "Covid Brazil: Why Could Bolsonaro Face Charges?" *BBC*, October 27, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-56663217>.

²Kiratiana Freelon, "In Brazil's Successful Vaccine Campaign, a Lesson for the U.S." *Undark*, October 14, 2021, <https://undark.org/2021/10/14/in-brazil-successful-vaccine-campaign-lesson-for-us/>.

³Gurman Bhatia, Prasanta Kumar Dutta, and Jon McClure. "Brazil: The Latest Coronavirus Counts, Charts and Maps." December 8, 2021, <https://graphics.reuters.com/world-coronavirus-tracker-and-maps/countries-and-territories/brazil/>

Vaccine Rollout

Initially, Brazil's vaccine rollout was subpar. It was very slow compared to other countries. President Bolsonaro's administration was in charge of supplying the country with an adequate number of doses in the shortest amount of time possible. Unfortunately, they did not succeed in this job and did not try to. They purposely delayed the purchase of the vaccine because of politics. Bolsonaro's political opponents advocated for the vaccine. There were several allegations regarding corruption in a COVID-19 shot agreement.⁴

Pfizer, a biopharmaceutical company who manufactured one of the COVID vaccines, sent over one hundred emails to Bolsonaro's administration but they did not respond to Pfizer. All of this information came to light in a congressional investigation of the administration.⁵ This scenario illustrates that there wasn't a shortage in vaccines but a shortage in government action.

THE IMPACT

Having vaccines readily available in Brazil from the very beginning would have changed the number of deaths in both Brazil and the rest of the world. There was a COVID variant that was spreading worldwide that originated in Brazil.⁶ **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

If more people were to have been vaccinated, would that variant have emerged? Would it have spread around the world? It is hard to know what would have happened but regardless securing large doses of COVID vaccines was a very important accomplishment.

Vaccine Misinformation

Even though Brazil is known for little hesitancy when it comes to immunizations, there was a lot of misinformation spread throughout the country stemming from the President, Jair Bolsonaro. He publicly questioned the safety and the efficacy of the vaccines. He even told citizens that he was not going to get vaccinated because he thought having COVID naturally was better for the body. The spread of misinformation is quite dangerous, so several social media platforms acted by deleting Bolsonaro's posts.⁷ The acceptance of the vaccine would have been higher if people didn't trust the misinformation spreading on the internet.



Figure 1: "[Syringe and Vaccine](#)" by [NIAID](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

A Source of Hope

For many individuals, the COVID-19 vaccine serves as a source of hope for a return to normality. The pre-pandemic life might never return to its fullest potential or it may come back but may take many

⁴ Judy Stone. "Covid-19, Brazil's Bolsonaro, and Herd Immunity." *Forbes*, November 6, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/judystone/2021/11/06/covid-19-brazils-bolsonaro-and-herd-immunity/?sh=6b8001f95af6>.

⁵ Lise Alves. "Health Experts Welcome Brazil COVID-19 Inquiry Findings." *The Lancet* 398, no. 10312, (November 6, 2021):

1674-1675. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)02398-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)02398-9).

⁶ Lise Alves. "Health Experts Welcome Brazil COVID-19 Inquiry Findings."

⁷ Judy Stone. "Covid-19, Brazil's Bolsonaro, and Herd Immunity."

years. As of right now, we are experiencing a new normal. Hopefully there will not be another huge wave of cases that strikes Brazil. Only time will tell. With an increasing vaccination rate, Brazil might become the country with the highest vaccination rate and it will be interesting to see how fast they will achieve it. Other countries can look at Brazil for some pointers on how to increase the general public's trust in vaccines.

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