**Health Watch**

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**I'm getting the vaccine and so should you**

Some people express reluctance about getting the vaccine for COVID-19, citing concern about side effects and how effective the vaccines are. This is understandable, given how quickly the vaccines have been developed and the political overlay on the push to secure useful vaccines for COVID-19 disease.

So, let’s examine what we know so far:

1. COVID-19 has killed 355,000 Americans as of January 6, 2021 (the writing of this column).

No one has died from being vaccinated, and more than 3 million Americans have received the vaccine to date. So here is the score card:

 COVID-19: 355,000 deaths versus COVID-19 Vaccine: 0 deaths

1. The existing vaccines (Pfizer and Moderna) were tested using the gold standard of study methods (randomized clinical trial) in very large populations (> 30,000 each). They showed a very high level of effectiveness – 95%. Nearly 20 times the number of unvaccinated people developed COVID-19 disease in the trial compared to the people who were vaccinated.

These two studies were done entirely separately but achieved the same results. These events make us very confident that these vaccines work.

1. The only important side effect of the vaccine detected so far is a severe allergic reaction in a very few people within a few minutes of being vaccinated. They were immediately and successfully treated. The allergic reaction was reversed, and no ongoing effect from the reaction is expected.

People who get vaccinated wait 30 minutes at the vaccination site to see if they develop a reaction. If they do not, they can go safely home. Very few develop an allergic reaction.

1. Millions of people have now received the vaccination. If there were important immediate or short term side effects, it should have been detected by now. None has been reported except for the allergic reaction.
2. Vaccines, in fact, do not cause long term health problems, despite what some people say. There has been a suspicion that the flu vaccine causes a nervous system problem in a few out of every million people who receive it. But a National Academy of Sciences report reviewed all available studies a few years ago and found no solid evidence that the flu vaccine causes any long term health effects. There is no reason to believe that the COVID-19 vaccine is any different.

Here are a few reasons to get the vaccine as soon as you can.

**Protect yourself** The vaccine will greatly protect you from getting ill with COVID-19 disease, especially from severe COVID disease and death.

**Help others** You need to get the vaccine to help others – your family and friends, people in your community, and the rest of us – from getting COVID-19. The virus only spreads from person to person. If fewer people have COVID-19 virus in their bodies, the virus will be less likely to spread. The “chain of transmission” (going from one person to the next) will slow and eventually die out (or nearly so) when it can’t spread from person to person, because most people are vaccinated. So, when you get the vaccine, you stop being part of the chain of transmission. It is like having a sign on your forehead. “The virus stops here.”

**Set an example** You need to set an example for others. People will feel more comfortable getting the vaccine when others they know and trust have received it and recommend it. It has been truly hard to connect to other people during the pandemic, but getting the vaccine and informing others becomes a vital way to connect with and help your friends, family, and community.

So, get the vaccine as soon as it is available to you! I know that I will. And it won’t be soon enough!