Respond to Vaccine Hesitation with Facts

By: Margo Ely, Executive Director at IRMA

IRMA has previously recommended that our members strongly encourage employees to get COVID vaccines. We know there are some people who are hesitant to get the vaccine. In order to assist IRMA members having tough conversations with employees who are hesitant, we are providing a summary of the research which strongly supports the use of vaccinations.

First, vaccines are effective. The CDC reported that the vaccine effectiveness is strong; 90% of those that were fully vaccinated were less likely to get infected with COVID-19, meaning that there is growing evidence that the vaccine offers similar protection in real-world conditions as in clinical trial settings. This is reassuring as vaccination is an important tool to help stop the pandemic and protect not only people that are vaccinated, but also those that are around them from getting sick or severely ill with COVID-19.

Second, vaccines reduce severity of infection. The data and science to date reveals that the vaccines not only provide very effective protection from infection, but also that the vaccines are effective in reducing the severity of any infection. Large-scale clinical trials found that COVID-19 vaccination prevented most people from getting COVID-19. Some people who are fully vaccinated may still get sick with COVID-19; however, data indicates when this happens the vaccination might help from getting seriously ill.

Third, the vaccinations are safe. To date, the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) has not detected patterns in cause of death that would indicate a safety problem with COVID-19 Vaccinations. COVID-19 can have serious, life-threatening complications and obtaining natural immunity by contracting the virus is not recommended. The risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19 far outweighs any benefit of natural immunity. The COVID-19 vaccinations help protect people by creating an antibody immune system response without having to experience sickness. Also, real-world data on vaccinations is indicating long-term side effects are unlikely. Potential side effects of vaccinations last a few days, while the long-term impact of contracting COVID-19 can result in severe illness that can last for weeks or months after being infected.

Fourth, vaccinations do not cause infertility and can be safe for those that are pregnant and breast feeding. While it is true that there is limited data, there is currently no evidence that any vaccines, including COVID-19 vaccines, cause fertility problems. The authorized COVID-19 vaccines are non-replicating vaccines, meaning they are able to create an immune response but do not reproduce inside host cells. They do not affect or interact with DNA in any way. The COVID-19 vaccines are currently being studied with pregnant women. There has been no indication of adverse pregnancy or infant outcomes connected to the vaccine.

Finally, vaccinations are proving to be effective against emerging variants. Some people are hesitant to get vaccinated because of the emerging variants. The perception that the vaccinations are ineffective against the variants is incorrect. IDPH advises that studies suggest that antibodies generated through vaccination recognize these variants. The most prominent variant in Illinois is the U.K. Variant known as B.1.1.7. While the variants are continually being studied by IDPH and CDC, studies show that all of the major vaccines are effective against B.1.1.7. According to Dr. Eric Topol, professor of molecular medicine at Scripps Research in La Jolla, California, “If you’re fully vaccinated, two weeks post dose, you shouldn’t have to worry about variants at all.”

According to Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease specialist, "The vaccines we are using very well protect against the most dominant variant we have right now."

To help stop the spread of misinformation and provide resources to employees, below are several research-based articles that outline the effectiveness of the vaccines against variants:

- JAMA, *COVID-19 Vaccines vs Variants – Determining How Much Immunity is Enough*, March 17, 2021
- WebMD, *Where Do COVID Vaccines Stand Against the Variants?* March 30, 2021
- NPR, *Can Vaccines Stop Variants? Here's What We Know So Far*, April 9, 2021
- NY Times, *Can the COVID Vaccine Protect Me Against Virus Variants?*, April 15, 2021

We understand the challenges our members are facing. IRMA is committed to providing accurate and current information about COVID-19 and the vaccinations to our members. This article is based on studies, data and research currently available. We know COVID-19 continues to evolve and will continue to provide timely updates to our membership. For more information, visit our COVID-19 page on our website.

Resources used within this article:

- IRMA's Executive Director Update, Considerations and Guidance for COVID Vaccines, December 18, 2020: https://irmarisk.org/Risk-Management/COVID-19/Vaccines/Consideration-and-Guidance-for-COVID-Vaccines.aspx
- CDC Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report, Interim Estimates of Vaccine Effectiveness, April 2, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7013e3.htm
- CDC, COVID-19 Vaccines Work, April 7, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/effectiveness/work.html
- CDC, Frequently Asked Questions about COVID-19 Vaccination, April 13, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html
- CDC, Selected Adverse Events Reported after COVID-19 Vaccination, April 13, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/adverse-events.html
- CDC, Benefits of Getting a COVID-19 Vaccine, April 12, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/vaccine-benefits.html
- CDC, Safety of COVID-19 Vaccines, April 13, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/safety/safety-of-vaccines.html
- CDC, Post COVID Conditions, April 8, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/long-term-effects.html
- CDC, Information about COVID-19 Vaccines for People who Are Pregnant or Breastfeeding, March 18, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/pregnancy.html
- CDC, Understanding mRNA COVID-19 Vaccines, March 4, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/mrna.html
- CDC, Understanding Viral Vector COVID-19 Vaccines, April 13, 2021: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/different-vaccines/viralvector.html
- IDPH, COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions: https://www.dph.illinois.gov/topics-services/diseases-and-conditions/diseases-a-z-list/coronavirus/faq
- IDPH, COVID-19 Variants of Concern, http://dph.illinois.gov/covid19/variants