



Delta: Take Two

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August 2021

I was wrong about several things in my last newsletter about Delta. It is not 10 to 20 times more infectious; it's more than 200 times more infectious. And breakthrough infections are much more common than initially thought. It's very difficult to get the data in real time. More vaccinated people are getting sick— some seriously sick— and children are getting seriously sicker at a rate greater than the tiny percentage projected. I have personally seen a number of fully vaccinated people land in the hospital. This is a disturbing development to say the least. Delta feels like a whole new virus, not the same old COVID we came to know and hate. The southeastern US is really getting hit hard.



To boost or not?

Many people, including several that I know personally, are saying that they're going to get an extra shot, just because they believe it will provide more immunity than they currently have. It's possible that's true. But it's also possible that new booster shots may need to be targeted to Delta and whatever variants come after it. We just don't know at this point. We know the boosters up the immunity against existing virus and possibly current variants but that's all.

It's hard for me to separate the idea of companies wanting to make a profit by putting another vaccine on the market— one that doesn't require a change in formula— from the possibility that it really does make a difference. Especially with countries have 1 or 2 percent of their population vaccinated. Let's get their numbers up. But certainly boost if your doctor suggests it.

Israel is giving a booster to people over 65 and those with immune issues. We will see what happens there. Israel has pretty much been the canary in the coal mine. But all of their people received Pfizer, so if you did not, we may need to make an assessment from there.

This week, the FDA and CDC authorized use of a third dose of Pfizer and Moderna vaccine for people immunocompromised or older. This means that doctors will be able to give their patients having organ transplants, cancer, or autoimmune disease a third shot of the vaccine. This is not for the general public. The CDC is currently considering whether to authorize a third dose to others. It's going to happen. It's just when and how.

When do these things run out?

I've been hearing a lot of conflicting numbers about immunization time frames. At the moment both Pfizer and Moderna immunity looks like about eight months. That means that a lot of people who were vaccinated early are already dropping off in their immunity. Immunity isn't going away, it's just lessening. But the question is how much? And how much more vulnerable does that make us?

What about the Delta variant itself. It seems that there are significant breakthrough cases with the Delta variant, even among the vaccinated. So government agencies are trying to play catch-up and/or get ahead of this new variant by the aforementioned third dosage. Things are unclear at this point about how this is going to play out and I've heard many "experts" with very different opinions. Also, in all of this there is little mention of the J & J vaccine, which has been used less widely in the United States but more widely across the world.

However, I don't think the situation is quite that simple. Immunity levels may, in fact, vary from person to person— and there isn't really a good way to know who is holding immunity and who is not. Johnson & Johnson data using South African medical personnel as research subjects say their immunity lasts a year, especially against the Delta variant. I'm not so trusting of corporate data at this point. We may not know the details until after we've been in the soup for a while.

School is coming

Quite a few parents are calling me and asking what to do about vaccinating their kids before school. People who have themselves gotten the mRNA vaccines are thinking that they might want to give the kids a more traditional vaccine. The Novavax is looking pretty good in the trials. In fact it's looking like an excellent alternative to the J&J, if they prefer to not use the mRNA vaccines. The problem is that Novavax can't get its administrative act together to get approval in this country. It is getting approval in Europe and other places.

It's pretty clear that Novavax approval is unlikely to occur before school starts. Their website says fourth quarter. So the question is whether to use the Pfizer which is approved for older kids, or to wait and go with a more traditional vaccine type option?

Honestly, I think it's pretty likely that we're going to have a school delay, or parents may choose to keep the kids home because too many are getting sick. I do have concerns. This is a different virus. If I had a kid in school at this point I might consider keeping them out for the month of September, until we see what options will be available, and have some data on the efficacy. Masks alone may not do the trick with this variant. But they do help both in preventing illness and in passing it along from a symptomatic carriers. Teachers unions are strongly considering suggesting vaccination, weekly testing and masking for all teachers.

Masks and mandates

Whatever is happening it's pretty clear that we are moving into mask and vaccination requirements. Airlines are beginning to require that all staff become vaccinated, as are many major hospital chains and large companies. I think we are moving away from the carrot and toward the stick. I see a very real possibility that as corporations and businesses require masking and vaccine proof, the government may follow. State governments are starting to do so. Longer delays of in person work are also starting to happen.

Many Regional and state governments are beginning to require vaccination and or weekly testing. Unfortunately, the federal government that has been hesitant to require anything. Certainly there are political reasons not to require vaccination and testing. But perhaps the time is over for pussyfooting around.

I do not feel that people choosing not to vaccinate should be punished. But perhaps it's reasonable to ask for mask and weekly testing requirements in all public use places.

New variants?

Yep, we are starting to see new variants too, and we don't have any idea whether they will be the big deal that Delta has become, or milder. There's a lot up in the air right now, and again I'm asking people to be sensible. Obviously, wear masks any time you are indoors around other people—vaccinated or unvaccinated. And please remember that the longer you stay indoors around other people, masked or unmasked, the more likely you are to catch COVID. Time is not your friend.

We'll be moving into cooler seasons in New England and the outdoor option is going to get less appealing. I don't think we'll go back into anything like quarantine, but continued serious caution is definitely in order.

Please know that we are way closer to the end of the pandemic than we are to the beginning. Please don't lose strength or determination in the last stretch. We need to pull it together, stay and get through this last bit. Don't give up that Netflix subscription just yet.

Namaste,

Wendy