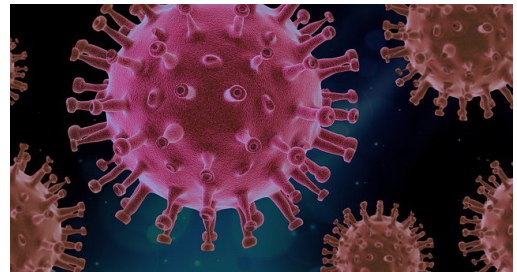




Boosters and Variants and Imvermectin, OH MY!
Wendy Marks
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All three of the current vaccines have been approved for booster shots. Is it okay to get one— morally and medically?

I'm a basic math person. If there are x number of available COVID vaccines in the world (and more in the pipeline), is it not our obligation to get them to areas of greatest need? And isn't it better to get as many people in the world vaccinated as possible so this thing can stop creating variants? Should we not do this before we booster our affluent selves?



I'm afraid it's not that simple. The problem isn't flying the vaccines where needed, it's getting trained people to and in less wealthy countries to administer the vaccines, and getting the citizenry motivated and organized. Let's face it: right now we don't have a surplus of healthcare workers that we can send to administer vaccines and train others. In fact, we are losing healthcare workers at a ridiculously rapid pace here. And Doctors Without Borders is pretty maxed out right now.

I would definitely prefer that everyone in the world who wanted a vaccination would get it. Obviously, that would change the course of the virus and its evolution much more quickly because it mutates while in the body. But that ship has sailed, and stopping transmission becomes more complicated with each variant.

So given that we have vaccine supplies sitting in storage in the US, are boosters a good idea (all the while, of course, working to get them out to the wider world)?

Yes, they are. Even though the effectiveness of most vaccines wears off after a certain period of time (think tetanus, etc), I would probably be making my original rich country/poor country argument were it not for the Delta variant. I'd be saying Ok America, mask up, be really safe and let's just buckle up until we get everyone else out there vaccinated. But two horrifying statistics jump out about the Delta variant:

A vaccinated 65-year-old person is more likely to end up in the hospital severely ill than an unvaccinated 30-year-old. Yikes. And one One in 500 Americans have died of COVID and counting. Again yikes.

Learning From the Past

We look back at the success of the Obama administration in getting the potential Ebola pandemic under control quickly and effectively. Even though we had seen Ebola before (there were even horror movies about it), and it's not nearly as contagious as this coronavirus, the point is there were detailed policies and procedures that could have been adapted to a future pandemic as need arose. That was the purpose of the pandemic playbook created by the Bush administration, and refined during President Obama's term. It was subsequently ignored.

The virus will continue to mutate and we may always have to live with it in some form. We don't know whether the next variant is going to be a Delta or a relatively harmless Beta. The breakthrough infection factor is a big issue. I think we should get all get the booster if we wish. There is a moral argument to be made for it. As a wealthy country, we are more likely to travel to less-vaccinated parts of the world, and if we don't have continuing immunity, we can communicate the virus, and new variants as well. If we don't booster we may slip back closer to Square One, and no one wants that.

Still Cautious

Many people accuse me of being too conservative about my precautions at this point in the pandemic. They are surprised that I'm not seeing clients at my house, or having friends inside, even in small gatherings. Nor am I attending social events indoors. I'm still working remotely. My circle remains shut down tight, and I am going to get a booster, even in my little bubble.

I did go through a period of "wait and see" once the vaccines started being administered. I wanted to see how many people got vaccinated and how many people continued to take normal and usual precautions. The herd immunity that everyone talked about was dropped from the conversation after it became clear that many people were not going to vaccinate. Then Delta came in— the meaner, stronger big sister of COVID-19. And all hell broke loose. So now I'm waiting to see what happens when people gather for the holidays, and I'm hoping to return to normal life by the Spring.

Crossovers and Potential Drugs

I would not at this point recommend the crossover vaccine suggestion (taking a different vaccine from your original one, as a way of "hedging your bet"), as we don't much data on it yet. I think people should get what they got originally. In a few months, if there is data that crossover is the way to go, and pandemic numbers continue to rise and fall, I will be reconsidering that.

Please don't take Ivermectin. It's a treatment for parasites in animals. It's also a potential neurotoxin that could have long-term adverse effects on your neurological system. Scientists are exploring the possibility of using it in the treatment of COVID, but to me it's a lot like the Trump bleach situation. Let's wait before we take something that could potentially cause horrible side effects.

There is hopeful news about a Tamiflu-type medication Merck and Ridgeback's Investigational Oral Antiviral Molnupiravir for COVID that would be taken once the disease has been contracted it appears to have strong effectiveness in preventing hospitalization and severe symptoms. It is also a good option for those of us choosing not to or unable to vaccinate. It could significantly mitigate the illness and could be another good tool in our toolbox. Eventually the Covid vaccine will probably be like a flu or similar shot give annually is my guess.

Winter Blues (again)

I know it's been awful not having holidays with family. But I would really encourage people to do things outside as much as they can and to keep gatherings as small as they can. The biggest spreader events seem to be large family gatherings. For all of us vaccinated or not masking and distance precautions, please! As I've said before, there is less before us than there is behind us, but we may have a bit of a lonely tough winter ahead. My hope is that by Spring we will all be thinking of things other than COVID.

Namaste,

Wendy