

For Immediate Release – March 19, 2021

MYTH BUSTERS, Part One – COVID-19 VACCINES

Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ)

“Safe COVID-19 vaccines that work really well are a vital part of how we will protect each other from COVID-19 sickness, hospital stays, and deaths. Californians have made amazing sacrifices to slow the spread of COVID-19. These three vaccines (Moderna, Pfizer, and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen) now are among our most valued tools to end the pandemic.” – HPSJ Chief Medical Officer Dr. Lakshmi Dhanvanthari, MD and Board-Certified Pediatrician

MYTH #1: I heard the vaccine will give me COVID-19.

No. That’s not possible. The three vaccines have NO virus. COVID-19 vaccines teach our immune system how to spot and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. Sometimes this can cause a day or two of side effects, perhaps fatigue, headache, soreness or redness at the injection site, and muscle or joint pain. These are common with most vaccines. They are normal and a sign the body is building immunity.

MYTH #2: They’re just like the Flu Shots – and those never work for me.

No. These three COVID vaccines are very good – even more effective than the yearly flu shots. All of them will protect you from getting severe disease, getting hospitalized or dying.

MYTH #3: A thing built at “Warp Speed” cannot be safe.

No. These vaccines are not overnight-wonders! They and other vaccines being developed and tested around the world were well underway years before COVID-19. How? COVID-19 comes from a family of viruses (such as famous cousins, the 2002 SARS coronavirus and the 2012 MERS coronavirus). Scientists had been developing new vaccines to treat any additions to this virus family. From this years-long work came the first COVID-19 vaccines. Each has been carefully reviewed, then authorized for emergency use by the FDA (Food & Drug Administration). As with every other vaccine we rely on, they met all safety standards. No steps were skipped. Clinical trials and safety reviews took about the same amount of time as other vaccines. Since the pandemic’s start, people have worked around the clock, 7 days a week – instead of 8 hours a day, 5 days a week – to develop, test, manufacture, and now deliver these COVID-19 vaccines. Millions of Americans have now been safely vaccinated.

MYTH #4: I’m worried it will change my DNA

No. COVID-19 vaccines do not change the DNA, or any part of the human cell. They only teach the immune system how to recognize the virus, and then cause the production of antibodies that protect against the virus.

MYTH #5: I’m not at risk for severe complications of COVID-19 so I don’t need the vaccine.

No. Regardless of your risk, you still can be infected with the coronavirus and spread it to others. About 40% of those infected show no symptoms. So it’s important you get vaccinated. Once widely available, it is recommended that as many eligible adults as possible get the vaccine. This is to protect you – and your family and community, too.

MYTH #6: I’m allergic to eggs so I shouldn’t get the COVID-19 vaccine.

No. None of the FDA-authorized COVID vaccines (Pfizer, Moderna, or Johnson & Johnson/Janssen) contain eggs.

Myth #7: I’ve already had COVID-19 and recovered, so I don’t need to get vaccinated.

No. Scientists and doctors have no clear idea if you are actually immune, or if you are, how long you might stay that way. You also may develop no future signs of COVID-19, but unknowingly carry and spread it. You still need to be vaccinated. **If you tested positive, had only mild symptoms, and were not treated for the coronavirus,** you should wait at least 10 days since the start of COVID-19 symptoms and satisfy criteria to stop isolating before getting the COVID-19 vaccine. **If you recovered from a COVID-19 infection and were treated with monoclonal antibodies or convalescent plasma,** wait 90 days to get vaccinated. It’s best to talk with your doctor for more information or about any concerns.

Myth #8: I have an underlying condition, so it is not safe to get a COVID-19 vaccine.

No! COVID-19 vaccination is especially important for people with underlying health problems, like heart disease, lung disease, diabetes, and obesity. You should talk with your primary care physician if you have any concerns.

Myth #9: I am not a scientist, but now I have to choose between the various kinds of COVID-19 vaccines.

No. Each of them is highly effective and safe. Any one of them will keep you from getting sick with COVID-19, keep you out of the hospital, and keep you from dying. With limited supplies of vaccine for the coming months, which shot you get depends on where you are registered and when. Currently there are three vaccines authorized by the FDA: Pfizer and Moderna require two shots; very safe and effective Johnson & Johnson/Janssen requires one shot.

Myth #10: I just heard I only need to get one COVID-19 vaccination.

No. For both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines you need to get both to have the fullest protection. The first shot helps the immune system recognize the virus and gets your body ready. The second shot strengthens the immune response to make sure you have full protection. However, you **should not** get the second dose earlier than recommended at your appointment for the first shot. The Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine requires one shot for full protection.

Myth #11: The COVID-19 vaccine can harm pregnant women.

No. While the research and clinical trials for the first two COVID-19 vaccines did not measure impacts on pregnant women, several women did become pregnant during the clinical trial phases and went on to healthy pregnancies and deliveries. Their babies were unaffected by the vaccine. Because of the severe risks from contracting COVID-19, pregnant women are urged by the CDC to register for a vaccination when they are able. With the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine, pregnant and breastfeeding women should discuss their options with their healthcare provider.

MORE COVID-19 VACCINE MYTHS BUSTED

Health Plan of San Joaquin (HPSJ)

“Remember, your actions will continue to save lives. Wear a mask. Wash your hands. Watch your distance. When it’s your turn, please get vaccinated. Then, until everyone is safe, keep on being a protector: masking, handwashing, and physical distancing.” – HPSJ Chief Medical Officer Dr. Lakshmi Dhanvanthari, MD

MYTH #12: Once I get the vaccine, I don’t need to wear a mask.

No. Just because you are protected from COVID-19 doesn’t mean you cannot carry the virus and give it to others. The best protection we can offer each other right now is to continue to follow current safety guidelines. As more people are vaccinated, scientists will have a better idea of how long immunity lasts – both from having had COVID-19 and from the vaccine. Public health experts will quickly update their guidance. **GOOD NEWS WHEN FULLY VACCINATED – You can** gather indoors in small groups with other fully vaccinated people without wearing a mask. **You can** gather indoors with unvaccinated people from one other household (for example, visiting relatives who all live together) without masks – unless any of those people or anyone they live with has heightened risk from COVID-19. **You can** be around someone who has COVID-19, but there is no need to stay away from others or get tested – unless you have symptoms. **However**, if you live in a group setting and are around someone who has COVID-19, you should still stay away from others for 14 days and get tested, even if you don’t have symptoms.

MYTH #13: As soon as I get a shot, I don’t need to wear a mask – and I don’t need a second shot.

No. Vaccines need time to work. Otherwise, you could be infected with the COVID-19 virus just before or just after receiving the shot and get sick. With the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, count on two weeks after the **second** shot to be fully vaccinated. After the one-shot Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine, you will be fully vaccinated after two weeks.

MYTH #14: I will be sick from the vaccine for weeks, maybe months.

No. There are no reports of long-term side effects, from the thousands who were in clinical trials or the millions who have already been vaccinated. Mild side effects may last up to 1-2 days and can include soreness at the injection point of the arm, chills, fatigue, muscle soreness, and fever. If the symptoms don’t go away in a week you can call your doctor. A very small number of those vaccinated may have an immediate allergic reaction; that is why every vaccine center is prepared to manage the situation. Medical providers are always on site and make sure anybody with an allergic reaction is cared for right away. This is why you are asked to stay for 15 minutes after your shot. **Getting COVID-19 can be a million times worse than side effects from any COVID shot!**

MYTH #15: I cannot afford the COVID-19 vaccination.

No. Any COVID-19 vaccination you receive has been paid for and provided by the federal government and is absolutely free. There is no charge to anyone receiving the vaccination – or for registering for a vaccination appointment. **There is no cost to Health Plan of San Joaquin members for medically-needed screening, testing, and treatment for the Coronavirus that causes COVID-19.**

MYTH #16: There are tracking microchips planted in the vaccine.

No. Any vaccine injections or nasal sprays – including shots for COVID-19 – do **NOT** contain microchips, nanochips, or **any** devices that would track or control your body in any way. Further, shipments of vaccine doses are monitored as they are shipped across the country to make sure they are not tampered with and stay safe.

MYTH #17: COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility

No. During the deep-dive briefings for both Pfizer and Moderna vaccines, through to the FDA consideration, none of the research on effectiveness, safety and side effects showed any signs that would have any effect on fertility.

Myth #18: It is better to get natural immunity to COVID-19, rather than protection from a vaccine.

No. While you may have some short-term antibody protection after recovering from COVID-19, we do not know how long protection lasts. Vaccination is the best protection. And it is safe. People who get COVID-19 can suffer serious illness and, as we tragically have seen, there is the risk of death. Some have debilitating symptoms that persist for months.

Myth #19: Great, I can get a COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as my other vaccines.

No. If you get the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine first, wait at least **14 days**. If you get another vaccine first, wait at least 14 days before getting your COVID-19 vaccine. No worries if a COVID-19 vaccine is unintentionally given within 14 days of another vaccine: You do **not** need to restart the COVID-19 vaccine series; you should still complete the series on schedule. When we know more about COVID-19 vaccines given at the same time as other vaccines, your healthcare provider will update this recommendation. There is no information on the use of the Johnson & Johnson/Janssen with other vaccines.

Myth #20: I heard I need to get my younger children vaccinated so they will be safe – and not be accidental carriers.

No. Currently, COVID-19 vaccines are not recommended for children. Clinical trials are now underway to identify a safe vaccine for children. At this time, the vaccines are FDA-authorized only for these age groups: Pfizer (for ages 16 and above), and for both Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccine and Moderna vaccine (for ages 18 and above).

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About HPSJ – Health Plan of San Joaquin, a not-for-profit, public health plan, has been serving members and the community since 1996. Located in the heart of California’s multicultural Central Valley, local HPSJ is the leading Medi-Cal managed care provider, serving over 91% of Medi-Cal recipients in San Joaquin County and over 67% in Stanislaus County. HPSJ offers a broad network of providers and works closely with doctors to develop programs and services to ensure quality health care for 369,000 members who are mostly working families and children, as well as seniors and disabled residents.

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