

TRANSITIONS

WHAT COVID-19 MEANS TO US

The information about Covid-19 is confusing. You see it in passionate opinions on mask versus no mask, and vaccine versus no vaccine. Thus, it is timely to move beyond soundbites and share with you a point of view from a practitioner on the front lines, to explain what Covid-19 means to us. Dr. Alan Rissolo is an Oral and Maxillofacial surgeon in Norwalk, Connecticut who has been working inside patients mouths throughout the Pandemic. Although not an infectious disease doctor, every day he operates in a high-risk environment. Below are his comments on Covid-19.

THE VIRUS

It is important to understand the basics of how the virus gets into you, how it replicates, what your body does in response, and how you can best survive it. It is the belief of many in the medical field that eventually every person on Earth will come in contact with this virus. It is far more contagious than the common cold, and we all seem to get the common cold. Covid-19 spread around the globe in a matter of months; so no mask or vaccine is going to stop the virus.

First, viruses are not like bacteria. They are not living cells. Instead, viruses are particles of DNA or RNA, which is a replication material with just a little shell around it. Covid-19 is an RNA virus that once inside our bodies, takes over our own cells to make copies of itself then destroys the cell. Covid-19 is highly contagious breath to breath virus. It sticks to mucous membranes in people's throats and mouths and noses very easily, and it spreads very easily from person to person. The scientific community has mostly discounted spread from surfaces to humans unless you put your fingers into your mouth or nose.

IMMUNITY

Immunity varies from person to person. Immunity is a factor of heredity, health and exposure. Three basic types of immune protection are Barrier immunity; Primary or Innate immune response; and Secondary or Acquired immunity. Your Barrier and Primary immunity are your first line defense against the virus. To improve your primary barrier immunity, wear a mask. This should not be a scarf, handkerchief, or a thin mask, as they only decrease the amount of virus you get exposed to. If someone with the virus is coughing or talking loudly or in tight, closed spaces, a mask will keep fewer various particles from leaving their body. But it will not prevent the virus from spreading. For you, the N95 mask is about the closest thing to a true barrier between you and Covid-19. If I were in tight spaces, like an airplane, with an underlying heart, lung condition, or immune deficiency, I would definitely wear only an N95 mask. Once past the mask, our barrier is our mucus membranes in mouth nose and lungs. If you get exposed to a moderate



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amount of virus particles, it's going to get past this barrier very quickly, and you're going to have to depend on your primary innate immunity, which attacks the Covid-19 that invades your body. The Primary immune response is not specific. Certain cells and chemicals in your tissues and blood react to and destroy invaders. This response is rapid and does not require previous exposure.

Unfortunately, as we age this Primary immune defense weakens. This is the main reason why the older people get sicker with the virus because the virus has a chance to get deeper into the body and infect more cells. During this delay period between the Primary and Secondary immune response, the virus has a great advantage. More and more cells infected with Covid-19 have a chance to replicate for a greater period of time before you can fight back with your secondary or adaptive immunity. Your adaptive immunity makes B- Cell antibodies, T Helper and T-Killer-Cells specific to Covid 19, but that takes two to three weeks. It's like putting together the parts in a factory to make the tool that's going to tag and kill the virus and your infected cells.

The time lag between when the virus gets in you and the time you make antibodies is how well you'll do with Covid-19. If your immune system is not tuned up at its best, or if you have any underlying health conditions, there's a good chance you're going to do poorly with Covid-19. For younger people, their primary immune response is healthy enough to respond to the virus they get exposed to, and it holds it in check until their secondary immunity is able to make antibodies.

VACCINES

The vaccine shot is not immunity. The vaccine is a method to improve your chances when you come into contact with the virus. What the vaccine does is enable our body to develop specific antibodies to a protein on the surface of Covid 19 capsule. This acquired immunity takes a couple weeks after the shot. It helps reduce the risk of developing serious illness, as your body is already prepared to fight this virus. For most vaccinated people, if they get Covid-19, they will have symptoms much like a mild cold or flu, that will not require hospitalization. The vaccine is the way to get people who have never seen the virus before, to survive after getting the virus. Then their body will create a true natural immunity.

If you naturally have or acquired a compromised or slowed immune system, you are not cured because you get the vaccine. If somebody with Covid-19 is coughing in an enclosed space, you still can get this virus and become very ill. The reason is you may not have enough antibodies to control a massive influx of virus particles into your body. After getting the vaccine, the best thing you can do is improve your barrier immunity by wearing a good mask when in an enclosed space. Getting a booster shot if you are over age 65 or have a weak immunity is also recommended. Simply put, the best immunity is to get the vaccine and then get the virus in a low dose while healthy. However, if your immunity is weak you should take barrier precautions seriously.

CONCLUSION

With a straightforward explanation from Dr. Rissolo about the virus, our immune system, and the vaccine, you now can logically discuss with your family and friends the steps needed to survive this once in a lifetime Pandemic. Whether young or old, in good health or compromised, we can all get through this by making informed decisions. Here's to your continued good health!

This article is an informative point of view. We are not providing medical advice. You should always consult with your doctor on medical decisions.

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