

## COLUMN

# Booster shot?

A new recommendation from the US-CDC is in the offing: A booster shot with a reformulated COVID-19 vaccine, engineered to cover the deadlier Delta strain from India and other variants to prevent breakthrough infections. Before we discuss that issue, allow me to delve deeper into the serious matter of people's vaccine hesitancy. This is a vital factor, one that will determine how soon we will achieve herd immunity as a society and end the pandemic, or whether a new pandemic of deadlier variants (God forbid, COVID-22, etc.) will result from people's refusal to be vaccinated. So far, less than 55 percent in the USA are vaccinated.

We have to be compassionate with people who are fearful of the side-effects of COVID-19 vaccines, but not with those misguided political anti-vaxer agitators, who are wrongly invoking civil rights and freedom to do what they want regardless of the danger to lives of millions, including the vaccinated.

Obviously, most of the people who reject the vaccines are ignorant of the accurate medical facts. The wrong notion has now led to new surges (the worst yet) in the infection rates and rising deaths (which are preventable) among the unvaccinated around the country and in the world. Hospitalization has catapulted to new heights and massive numbers of elective (non-emergency) surgeries had (have) to be cancelled (a great complex logistic inconvenience) to provide spaces for COVID-19 patients. The economic, social, and mental, impact of vaccine hesitancy is ravaging every nation. People who are fearful of the vaccines have to be educated with scientific facts to counter the harmful inaccuracies and dangerous lies circulating around.

Last Sunday, August 8, 2021, in the USA, there were more than 36,000 new cases and a 7-day average of 110,360 deaths. Florida, where the Governor was arguing against a masking and social distancing mandate, had the worst data: 22,783 cases and 199 deaths in one day, the highest in the nation. This is to be expected. Another proof that masks and social distancing are a must in our fight against viruses, especially this more virulent Delta variant, the predominant (90+ percent) killer today.

Politicians and civil rights activists chanting we must leave the decision to parents (re: vaccination, masking, distancing) are most dangerously wrong, unless parents are epidemiologists or experts in infectious diseases. For the prevention and management of illnesses, we must listen to medical science and leave the recommendation to experts in the field, not to politicians or any non-medical people. Would you hire a plumber to make decisions about your electrical problems at home, or a carpenter to fix your air-conditioning unit, and

vice versa? We need common sense and safety not dangerous political correctness.

Those refusing the vaccines (around 60 million as of last month), who believe they are right, are misguided and are serving as a huge reservoir-host to this deadly virus, which will continue to rapidly mutate to a more transmissible and deadlier strain. If not stopped, the mutation could create an ultimate killer variant that would no longer respond to vaccines or any drugs, an apocalyptic possibility, God forbid. Without a warm body host, viruses are inactivated, unable to replicate, and eventually self-destruct.

This 20 percent anti-vaccine individuals should realize that the 4.4 billion people around the world and the 166 million, or 50.7 percent, of the US population who had the vaccination, are doing well. These massive statistics are evidence-based data that prove, beyond any reasonable doubt, that these vaccines are safe and effective in preventing SARS-CoV2 infections and premature deaths.

Those who are refusing the vaccines during any pandemic, harboring and enabling the virus to thrive, multiply, and mutate in their body, and then spreading the deadlier strains to others, albeit unintentionally, are nonetheless guilty of intentional (refusal to get the vaccine) negligence, contributing to public endangerment. The end-result of intentionally spraying bullets around or ignorantly spraying a deadly virus to other people is no different: massive bodily injury and death, medical consequences that are real and devastating.

More than 90 percent of the recent surges in COVID-19 infections and deaths involved **unvaccinated people** (many of them are younger, including children) and mostly due to the Delta variant. **Vaccinated people are highly protected**, with a small number of breakthrough infections with milder symptoms. Those previously infected who received the vaccine were found to be **doubly** protected, as their antibodies doubled.

## **Bribery is wrong**

The States/cities enticing people with vaccine lottery, etc. (using tax dollars) for them to get the vaccine will only teach our children not to do what is right and proper (even for their own good) until they get a bribe first. A terrible example! If anyone deserves a reward, they are those who got the vaccines and are helping society get herd immunity to end this pandemic, not those working against our global objective.

## **Another shot**

In view of the Delta strain, which had obviously mutated in the reservoir-hosts (body of the 60 million who refused the vaccine), a booster shot is now being considered mainly among those with health issues and those with compromised immune system. **Rationale:** the vaccines already given are about

90-97 percent effective, so there is still a 3-10 percent chance of getting infected with the new strains. The booster will close this gap in protection.

**In summary:** 1. Vaccines for COVID-19 are safe and effective; 2. More than 90 percent of those who recently got infected and died during these latest surges in COVID-19 **involved unvaccinated** individuals; 3. Vaccinated persons have 90-97 percent protection from the original virus and some protection against the Delta variant; 4. If breakthrough infection occurs among those vaccinated, the symptoms are milder; 5. If interested, discuss booster shot with your physician; 6, In the meantime, every one should get vaccinated soonest against this deadly viruses (national mandate or not), later may be too late; 7. Continue wearing a mask, social distancing in public, washing hands frequently, and avoiding crowds; 8. Let's listen to science, not to politicians or civil right agitators who are worse than the viruses.

Let us each do our share to defeat this killer as soon as possible by protecting each other. Life is precious. Let's not gamble it away. The odds are exponentially high against those without the vaccine.

If we all behave properly and earnestly work together to achieve herd immunity and end this pandemic soonest, we could still have a wonderful White Christmas in 2021.

Philip S. Chua, MD, FACS, FPCS, a Cardiac Surgeon Emeritus based in Northwest Indiana and Las Vegas, Nevada, is an international medical lecturer/author, a Health Advocate, and Chairman of the Filipino United Network-USA, a 501(c)3 humanitarian foundation in the United States. Websites: FUN8888.com, today.SPSAtoday.com, and philipSchua.com Email: scalpelpen@gmail.com