

December 28th, 2020

For several months patients have been asking me if I would receive the COVID vaccine, and my response has always been that I would get in line as soon as I was given the opportunity. I was fortunate enough to receive my 1st shot at 5:30am this morning. I did not experience any kind of immediate reaction to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and the shot itself didn't feel any different or more painful than any flu shot or other vaccination I have received in the past. I was asked to wait 15 minutes afterwards along with other socially distanced and masked recipients, where emergency medication was available if anyone required treatment. The whole procedure at Reading Hospital was very organized and efficient. My second dose is scheduled three weeks from now. It is anticipated that I may have some achiness during the next 24-48 hrs, and there is a greater risk of achiness after the second dose as compared to the first.

My emotions this morning ranged from excitement to guilt, as I had the privilege of receiving the vaccine long before my office staff, patients and my family. But fear was not among them. While many are worried that these vaccines were rushed to market without adequate testing and safety precautions, I am confident that the manufacturers followed all of the usual procedures. "Warp speed" was achieved because the genetic makeup and the target proteins of the coronavirus were identified early, its mutation rate is relatively slow compared to other viruses (which makes it less of a moving target), and an unprecedented amount of financial capital was poured into the process, from both the manufacturers' and government's standpoint. Investment was placed into the later testing phases and production capabilities from the outset, betting that the earlier phases would be successful. Failure in the earlier phases would have meant a waste of the investment in the later phases, which is why a company wouldn't ordinarily operate in this manner. But as we all know, the stakes have never been higher, and it was a gamble worth taking.

As you know, there have been a few cases of severe allergic reactions to the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID vaccine. None have been fatal reactions, although these recipients received epinephrine and/or were hospitalized. Position statements from the AAAAI and ACAAI remind us that historically the rate of anaphylaxis after any vaccine has been 1.3 per one million doses given, with some vaccines more likely to cause reactions than others. It is felt that polyethylene glycol is the component responsible for the reactions to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, and currently the ACIP recommends that individuals with a history of severe allergy to this chemical or any other component of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine should not receive this vaccine. Individuals with a history of a mild allergic reaction (hives only) to vaccines or other injectable medications may receive the vaccine, as can those with allergies to foods, environmental allergens, latex, stinging insects, etc. Those with a history of an anaphylactic reaction to another vaccine or injectable medication will need to consider the risks vs. benefits of receiving the vaccine and discuss it with their healthcare provider. A 15 minute minimum post vaccination observation time is recommended for all individuals, and that time should be increased to 30 minutes in those at higher risk of a reaction. Since the Moderna vaccine is similar to the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, it is assumed that the same precautions should be in place. Future yet-to-be-released vaccines may have different rules.

With these facts in mind, we are encouraging virtually all of our patients to receive a COVID vaccine when it becomes available to them, especially those with co-existing medical conditions that put them at higher risk of developing a more serious infection. It will take months before the COVID vaccines can be administered to a majority of the country however, and we all need to keep our guard up by wearing masks and social distancing in the meantime. Tullyview Allergy will continue to operate in the same manner it has done since the beginning of the pandemic, and we will likely be one of the last businesses to "return to normal" after social distancing measures are no longer felt to be necessary. We want everyone to remain safe, and hopefully 2021 will eventually be a Happy New Year for all of us!

Ed Skorpinski