

QUESTIONS re: CDC's "Interim Public Health Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People" of 3/8/2021 and DC's Phase Two Guidance of 6/20/2020

Toni, our Georgetown Village President, asked me several good questions last Thursday. I think many people might have similar questions. I will attempt to answer them based on the two published documents. Things change, so my answers might change in light of the next iteration of guidance and as more scientific information becomes available. Note that each person must decide for themselves what risks of potential exposure are worth the actions taken.

1. When will the Village be able to go back to in-person meetings, such as Book Club and Coffee Talk, since the "Interim Recommendations for Fully Vaccinated People" allow small group gatherings of fully vaccinated people without masks?

Answer: Small groups generally mean 6 or fewer people, if there are no masks or social distancing. Current CDC guidance allows for fully vaccinated people, i.e., 2-4 weeks after the last shot depending upon vaccination received, to meet indoors unmasked with other unvaccinated people who are at low risk for severe COVID-19 and only from one additional household or pod. Therefore, for now, that is not going to work. If in the future, the guidance allows small group of multiple households or pods, this is how I see it working. The host would have to know the vaccination status of each participant. Lynn and Varnita have been composing this information. Usually there are 10-12 members who join the Book Club meetings, so some members would not be able to join in-person, but perhaps by Zoom. They would be given first choice for the following Book Club meeting.

2. **Jonathan and I want to go out to eat again. How do we know that a restaurant is safe to go to?**

Answer: DC Health has published "Restaurant Guidance." I would recommend that you only go to restaurants that you have felt safe in before, i.e., observation of good hygiene practices. Here are some examples of what restaurants must follow: tables limited to 6 persons and placed so that patrons are at least 6 feet apart; no standing permitted at the bar area; all staff wearing a well fitted mask covering nose and mouth; no typical congregation of staff near the kitchen or front entryway; and receptionist asking for and recording of contact information should the DC Health need to contact you. Briefly, observe the restaurants' and staffs' mitigation behaviors.

3. **Can the vaccine give me COVID-19?**

Answer: For the Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson/Janssen vaccines, the answer is, no. Those three COVID-19 vaccines currently approved for the US do not contain any of the live virus that causes covid; they only the code for the protein of that virus that allows facilitates its entry into our body's cells. However, it typically takes 2-4 weeks for the body to build immunity after the vaccination. That means it's possible you could be infected with the virus that causes COVID-19 just before or just after vaccination and get sick. Moreover, no vaccine is 100% effective; you may still get covid. If you develop a

cough, shortness of breath, runny nose, sore throat, or loss of taste or smell after getting the vaccine, you should not assume these symptoms are from the vaccine and should take steps to quarantine yourself and contact your health care provider.

4. What is a Vaccine Passport?

Answer: Before our community and nation has reached herd immunity, if we want to resume our normal life in public without always wearing a mask, observing social distancing, etc., with more security and lower risk, such as eating in restaurants, going to concerts, attending sporting events, we may be required to prove that we have been fully vaccinated. The US and countries around the world are working toward launching certificates or a “digital green pass” that will declare a person’s vaccination status or recent negative PCR COVID-19 test. For now, it might be wise to take a photo of your CDC COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card on your smart phone and keep it safe with your passport. You might also want to send a copy to your health care provider.

5. Is FONO “Fear of Normal” irrational?

Answer: Dr. Lucy McBride, a primary care doctor, wrote a recent article for the Washington Post regarding FONO, i.e., the fear of returning to normal. Now that we’ve adjusted to pandemic life, with its inherent struggle, stress, social isolation, emotional toll, and hidden silver linings, it’s understandable to experience emotional whiplash even as the trauma recedes. Dr. McBride’s advice is to name the fears, acknowledge the new normal, and be patient with yourself.

Some Additional Thoughts

If each of us seriously thinks back to the past year, there have been some hidden silver linings from the pandemic. Take a moment and acknowledge how each of us and the Georgetown Village has adapted to this challenge. The Georgetown Village has remained open and provided services to our members throughout the entire pandemic. Our volunteers, old and new, young and old, have faithfully and responsibly taken assignments to help village members. Lynn, our Executive Director, has said every request throughout the pandemic has been filled.

If you have additional questions, you can either ask them at our bi-weekly “COVID – Information Call” or email the office to obtain a quicker response from the Health Committee. We look forward to seeing one another at our live events, meetings, and parties soon. The Georgetown Village Health Committee will make recommendations when and how we can restart in-person activities. These recommendations would need approval from the Board. For now, we are relying on the health professionals and scientists to tell us when “soon” is and “how” looks like.

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