

A vaccine skeptic changes his outlook

Stallsworth got sick, while his father died

By PAT DOORIS
KGW

A Newberg man who was once skeptical of the COVID-19 vaccine now carries a different outlook after spending 10 days in the hospital with the virus.

Brandon Stallsworth, 31, grew up in Warrenton. Earlier in the pandemic, he was someone who'd say that you don't need a COVID shot.

"I did a physical in April. And I came back really healthy. Other than being overweight, I was a very healthy person, so I thought OK, 'I don't have any underlying health issues what do I need to worry about?'" he said.

Stallsworth said he's not against vaccines, but he did not trust the government in the rollout of the COVID vaccines and worried how they might affect him over the long term.

"I was just kinda holding off, waiting, wanting to see what was going on. And like I said, I didn't know anyone that had been sick. So why get the vaccine?" he said.

In late July, Stallsworth, his wife, Debbie, and their 20-month-old son, Mason, drove to California to visit her family.

On the way back, Stallsworth started to feel sick.

Two days later, while working outside at his plumbing job, it got even worse. He began to shiver in 90-degree heat.

"It felt like my face was trying to melt off my skull. That's the best way I can describe it. It literally felt like my head was trying to melt," he said.

He went to urgent care and learned he had COVID.

The first thing that ran through his mind was not fear for himself or his family.

"It was embarrassment!



Brandon Stallsworth with his son.

I'm not gonna lie. It was the first thing that hit — 'Oh god, I gotta face the music now. I gotta face the music with all these people. I told them and now I'm sick. I'm that person!' I felt like it was almost karma."

'Almost karma'

After telling many friends not to bother with the vaccine, the virus was spreading inside his body.

"When I got home and it was progressively getting worse. I mean it was like minute by minute. It was getting worse very quickly," he remembered.

Two nights later, he could not stop coughing and his heart was racing. His wife drove him to the nearby Providence hospital in Newberg.

"They did a chest X-ray and the X-rays came back normal," Stallsworth said.

The hospital gave him a monitoring system to use at home. It allowed nurses to check his health every four hours. By that Saturday morning, they'd seen enough. They called his house. The numbers were bad and he needed

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Brandon Stallsworth

to come in immediately.

Stallsworth's wife, who got vaccinated even though her husband refused, felt a mix of emotions as she dropped him off at the hospital door, then watched with little Mason to make sure he got inside OK.

"You're scared, you're worried, you're nervous exhausted too because you're not getting any sleep then you've got the anger too.

Because you think to yourself, why did you not get vaccinated? Why did you not do this? Here you are so sick and in the hospital!" Debbie said.

And it was not just Brandon fighting COVID.

Five days earlier his father, Ted, was also hospitalized with COVID and got very sick very fast.

At the Newberg hospital, Brandon quickly got a second chest X-ray. This time it was

"I think that was the first time that I really got worried," he said. "I'll be honest, even being on the oxygen and stuff I still was positive about it. You know like, OK, couple days I'm gonna be alright. No big deal. Then that hit. I was like, Oh dang. This is real. Like, Oh okay. What's gonna happen next, you know?"

In the end, Stallsworth avoided the ventilator, just barely, he said, and finally was strong enough to go home in early August.

His father was not as fortunate.

Ted Stallsworth, 52, of Warrenton, died on Aug. 19.

'Why not save yourself from the pain?'

"It's crazy. One day you're sitting there talking to somebody and the next day, you can't see them anymore," Brandon Stallsworth said, slowly shaking his head and blinking back tears.

Even with all that, Stallsworth won't insist anyone get the vaccine. But he now thinks they should, and he's waiting for his body to heal enough for him to get it, too.

"I wouldn't push it on anybody. But I would definitely encourage them to have a second thought about it. To really maybe look into it," he said.

He's seen how bad things can get and how the shot will protect you.

One of his sisters, who is vaccinated, also got sick.

"She was sick for a day or two. She bounced back no problem. And I'm like, OK, why not do it? Why not save yourself from the pain? I wouldn't want this on my worst enemy. It's so terrible to go through what I went through. And what my father — and that's the thing, it's not just me and my father. It's the rest of the family. What everyone went through. It's terrible!"

Researchers work to get more carbon out of atmosphere

By JES BURNS
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Over the next three years, Oregon State University researchers will be tackling one of the biggest technological challenges of our time — removing climate change-causing carbon from the atmosphere.

"We're designing technologies, or chemistry in my case, that will capture carbon dioxide just out of ambient air," said Oregon State chemist May Nyman. "A lot of the focus so far on capturing CO₂ is at the source — at power plants. It's much more challenging to capture it out of just ambient air because it's like 50 times less concentrated."

The university will receive \$1.6 million from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop new carbon-capture methods.

"I'm excited to be able to work on what I consider one of the biggest challenges and most important problems that should involve engineers and chemists and scientists from all disciplines," Nyman said.

In August, the United Nations climate change panel issued what's been referred to as a "code red for humanity" — a true climate emergency. The broad scientific review found temperatures over the past decade are nearly 2 degrees Fahrenheit higher than in pre-industrial times. Continued warming will further intensify

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May Nyman | chemist

droughts, extreme precipitation events and sea level rise.

A vast majority of the warming is the result of human activities, and most of that is caused by the release of carbon dioxide and methane into the atmosphere through burning fossil fuels like coal, gasoline and natural gas.

If efforts fail to reduce carbon emissions, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has said humanity would require "a greater reliance on techniques that remove CO₂ from the air" in order to drop temperatures back down.

In the Pacific Northwest, the most visible form of large-scale carbon capture comes from the natural world. Oregon and Washington state forests suck up 7 million metric tons of carbon per year as they grow.

Just this month, the largest carbon-negative plant in the world opened in Iceland. The "Orca" takes CO₂ out of

the ambient air and stores it underground. The plant will remove 4,000 tons of CO₂ from the atmosphere each year.

Neither of these are going to be nearly enough to stem the tide of climate change, according to climate-technology experts like Mahmoud Abouelnaga, who's with the Center for Climate and Energy Solutions.

"So there are different research projects going on how to increase the efficiency of the process and how to make it less energy intensive," he said. "Cost is a big

barrier for this technology." That's where additional research and development efforts, like Nyman's, comes in.

She and her team are focusing on a group of elements found in the center of the periodic table, known as transition metals and which have been shown to react with carbon from the air, turning it into a solid.

"It was just always this kind of weird phenomena that was an annoyance because it made my reactions misbehave," said Nyman, who first noticed the process back in 2009.

The reaction happens at a 4-to-1 rate — four CO₂ molecules taken up by each transition metal ion.

"That's a very good ratio to have," Nyman said.

But before the new chemistry is ready for prime time, the chemists will have to figure out how to control the reactions. And even if Nyman's team is completely successful on this front, she says it will be many years before it's ready to deploy outside the lab.

bad.

While the first one had mostly black over his lungs, which is good, the new X-ray showed lots of white.

He said the doctor told him the white was COVID in his lungs.

There were many things he did not know about COVID. He was learning fast.

"The COVID is like a plaster. It affects your lungs worse because you can't cough it up. It's like concrete in your lungs. And your lungs, from what I understood, can't expand very well and can't absorb the oxygen like they're supposed to. So that's why my oxygen levels were dropping — I couldn't get the oxygen to my body that I needed," Stallsworth said.

As he got worse, the Newberg hospital transferred him to Providence St. Vincent in Portland in case he would need a ventilator.

The reality of it all shocked him.

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