

Ward

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Larry Williams, executive director of the Steel Framing Industry Association, said with a steel-framed home, provided the fire can be kept outside of the building envelope, then the most important consideration is how much combustible material is inside the structure.

"In the event the flame reaches inside the home, you can expect contents that can burn will burn," Williams said. "And that includes wood framing."

Ward added that no house is fireproof.

"Once it gets into your house and gets into your furnishings," Ward said, "you know you're in trouble."

Ward said after 30 years of touting the benefits of fire-resistant homebuilding techniques, people are starting to hear the message.

"Now the West Coast burned up," he said. "Now we have global warming."

Steel-framed vs. wood-framed

While steel framing historically has been more expensive than building with wooden 2-by-4s, wood's

cost advantage has shrunk considerably of late, according to Larry Williams, executive director of the Steel Framing Industry Association.

Williams said a pre-COVID-era study done by the SFIA found that a steel-framed house would cost about \$1 per square foot more than one framed with wood, which for a 2,594-square-foot house would translate to an additional \$2,594 on a basic home costing \$296,652 to build.

Since then, however, skyrocketing lumber costs have changed the calculation for the foreseeable future. Typically, wood prices have

ranged between \$300 and \$500 per 1,000 board feet, Williams said.

But earlier this year, he pointed out, a cost analysis from the National Association of Home Builders found that framing lumber prices had hit all-time highs of \$1,600 per 1,000 board feet.

Prices receded over the summer, Williams noted, but last week they were \$676 per 1,000 board foot, significantly higher than the historical norms.

Williams noted that framing costs are typically around 17% of the total cost of building a home, so con-

sidering the total cost of construction, framing with steel has minimal impact on the pocketbook.

Up to now, the primary market for steel framing has been midrise buildings such as apartment complexes and hotels. But Williams said megafires in California, coupled with soaring lumber costs, have prompted an uptick in interest in steel framing for residential construction from across the country.

Apparently, interest has risen enough to keep Ward plenty busy. So far this year, the steel-loving homebuilder has built six houses in Grant County.

Booster

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Whether and when booster shots are necessary became a hotly debated topic between members of advisory committees at both the FDA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

While top health officials in the Biden administration pushed for boosters to be made more widely available for the general population, scientists and public health experts argued the U.S. should prioritize getting shots in the arms of the unvaccinated. The vaccines, they said, still provide strong protections against hospitalization and death.

An Israeli study found that immunity from the Pfizer vaccine dropped from 95% in January through early April to nearly 40% in June. However, protection from severe disease and death did not budge and held at 90%.

Booster shot?

Ali Ellebedy, an immunologist at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis, said referring to an additional COVID-19 shot as a booster is imprecise.

Ellebedy said that people get a tetanus shot, a yearly flu vaccine or a booster against



a vaccine from childhood every 10 years because doctors know how much immunity is needed to fight those infections.

"When you say, 'I'll give you a booster,'" Ellebedy said, "that means I know exactly how much immunity you have or how much immunity you need to be protected, and we suspect your level of immunity will be below that needed amount for protection,

and that's why you need the booster."

'Correlate of protection'

With COVID-19, Ellebedy said, no one yet knows what scientists refer to as the "correlate of protection," the level of antibodies needed to stave off infection.

If researchers had a firmly established correlate, Ellebedy said, then it would be accurate to deem it a booster shot.

The first jabs, he said, could be part of an initial series of immunizations but spaced out at later points in time.

Ellebedy said it would not be the first vaccine requiring three shots to achieve a correlate of protection, citing hepatitis B as an example.

"I think the argument should be that this could be part of the initial immunization that we are establishing," Ellebedy said. "We are driving in the middle of the

pandemic and we are making decisions as things are moving."

Ellebedy said the hypercontagious delta variant forced public health experts and scientists to move to a three-jab regimen for vulnerable populations.

Ellebedy said in the six months after the last shot, the body generates immune memory cells that are not producing antibodies. Still, he said, memory cells are ready to engage with a pathogen once there is a need for the cells. Ellebedy said the third shot is akin to restarting a smoldering fire.

"Once we've restarted it, it is restarted to an even higher level," Ellebedy said.

Scientists have been uncertain about the virus since the beginning of the pandemic, Ellebedy said.

"This uncertainty is what makes the third immunization especially needed for those who are 65 and older or those who have any immunosuppressive effects," Ellebedy said.

Ellebedy said the third jab is probably unnecessary for young and healthy people with a robust immune response to their last shot.

Indeed, he said it is not for people who had contracted the virus before and then got vaccinated.

However, Ellebedy said

that people from vulnerable populations who have had the virus and got their last shot six months ago should get the third jab.

Myocarditis, inflammation in the heart in young men, is a rare side effect that researchers have found with the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines, Ellebedy said, but to his knowledge the myocarditis has never led to a death.

A study published Oct. 6 in the New England Journal of Medicine reported that 11 out every 100,000 males in that age group developed the inflammation of the heart. However, studies have shown that COVID-19 is much more likely to cause heart problems than the vaccination.

He said it is unclear why a small portion of young men get the side effect.

The new normal/Ellebedy, who told the newspaper he is not conducting research on the vaccines that would pose a potential conflict of interest, said the coronavirus is here to stay.

"This virus is not going to be eradicated," Ellebedy said. "So either you get vaccinated, or you get infected."


Ellebedy said those taking a chance because they trust their immune system are hoping that the infection will be mild. However, he noted that young people with no significant preexisting conditions are being intubated.

COVID-19 may become a routine illness like a common cold or the flu one day, Ellebedy said.

However, he said scientists are trying to figure out if the virus is evolving more deadly and contagious new variants.

What can be worse, Ellebedy noted, is that if the virus could replicate as efficiently and quickly as the delta variant but also evade immunity better than delta. There are trickier variants of the virus, but so far, he said, none of those variants have been able to compete against the delta variant.


"I think the major thing for us is we really have to think that we are not alone in this," Ellebedy said. "And there are no walls that can block the virus from coming from outside."




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