

EDITOR'S DESK

It's an important year to get a flu shot

While the *Hermiston Herald* does not write endorsements for political candidates each election, I will offer up an endorsement of what doctors and public health officials around the world are begging people to do this year: Please get a flu shot.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

While we don't have a vaccine for COVID-19 yet, we can reduce the number of people who sickened by some strains of influenza, helping reserve hospital beds and other medical resources for coronavirus outbreaks.

I will admit, I used to be a flu vaccine skeptic.

Most vaccines seem like a no-brainer. Before the polio vaccine, thousands of children in the United States paralyzed or killed by the poliomyelitis virus each year. Now none are. Before the smallpox vaccine, millions of people worldwide died of the variola virus each year. Now none do. It doesn't take an epidemiology degree to figure out everyone should be getting one of those.

But for me, the flu shot always seemed different. For one, while other vaccines were a distant childhood memory, the flu vaccine required me to make the decision each year to voluntarily get stabbed with a needle again. And then, since the flu shot is not 100% effective,



Greg Bonner, left, receives a flu shot from Blue Mountain Community College nursing student Dariann Scott during a drive-through vaccination clinic in 2019. Doctors are saying this year is a particularly important year to get a flu vaccine.

there was the chance that I could get stabbed *and* still get sick.

Also, people I knew told convincing tales, swearing that they never got the flu shot and then the one year they did, they immediately got sick, so obviously it was the flu shot that made them sick.

This made for a rather impressive argument when I didn't think about it too closely (which was all too convenient to do since I really don't like needles).

What changed my mind was finally reading up on the flu vaccine from reliable scientific sources. It brought me new information that I hadn't considered before.

I learned, for example, that while the flu shot isn't a 100% guarantee you won't get sick, several studies have shown that people who get the flu after getting the vaccine generally have less severe symptoms compared to those who didn't get the shot.

I also learned that it takes about two weeks for your body to develop immunity after you get the flu vaccine. One explanation I read suggested this is the main reason for many of the "flu shot made me sick" stories.

For a skeptic who usually skips the vaccine, often what prompts them to try one is a particularly bad outbreak of influenza among their fam-

ily, friends or coworkers. It seems everyone is out sick from work and all their friends are posting on Facebook about their awful symptoms, and so the skeptic decides maybe they should try out a flu shot after all.

The problem is, with such an outbreak, the chances are good that by the time things get bad enough for the skeptic to go in for a shot, it's too late. The virus is either already incubating inside them or they will be exposed in the next few days before their body has built up an immunity.

Thus, when they start running a fever two days later, it only feels like the flu shot made them sick — a theory they are all too eager to embrace without a second thought, because it confirms the biases they already had against the vaccine.

I don't have space in this column to debunk all the myths and misconceptions about vaccines, or explain why various charts are misleading.

What I do have room for is this: There are people you know who have health conditions that mean they cannot get vaccines, or make them especially vulnerable to complications from the flu. Half of all adults hospitalized with the flu have a heart condition, for example.

Those people are counting on you to help protect them. One way to do that is get vaccinated. The rest, you've heard a million times this year — stay six feet apart, wear a mask and wash your hands.

COLUMN

Clock's alarm rings anew

For the better part of the past six months, I haven't even set an alarm clock. That all changed last month, as I was asked to fill in for a couple of weeks while one of my former colleagues was on vacation.

It couldn't have come at a better time. Since the world turned into the 'rona roller coaster, I've mostly maintained a positive attitude. However, with all the smoke we had from wildfires and my osteoarthritis flaring up because of changes in barometric pressure, I was a hot mess for a bit.

During an 11-day period, I only left the house twice — for a Walmart pickup order and to get takeout from Lawan's Thai Garden. No walking the dog, no splashing in my little pool and no lounging on the back porch. In fact, I was firmly planted on my daybed so long that the memory foam topper seemed to forget its natural state.

I was giddy as a schoolgirl as I laid out my clothes the night before I was scheduled to return to the newsroom. I even asked my husband to make sure I got up in case I somehow slept through the multiple alarms I set.

Other than a frustrating first hour because of a computer glitch, it was great to be back in the newsroom. While my primary focus was making sure obituaries, death notices and community news were entered into the system, it was good to be at work. I've missed the chatter of the scanner and perus-

ing information from press releases shortly after they are sent.

I was extremely grateful for a massage appointment that was scheduled several days after I returned to work. For the past six months, I've alternated between sitting on my overstuffed recliner, the memory foam topper on my daybed, my zero-gravity outdoor lounge and my floating pool chair. Sitting in front of a computer for 5-6 hours at a stretch was quite an adjustment.

Returning to work for a couple of weeks also offered me a chance to evaluate my future in the workforce. While I've been unemployed a couple of prior times over the course of my adult life, this time has been different.

In the past, I looked forward to returning to work full time. While I'm not ready to retire, I'm not altogether sure that I want to resume working 40 hours a week.

And I believe the General, my 8-year-old German shepherd, would prefer that I wasn't gone as much. He has gotten quite used to hanging out on the daybed, chilling outside and going for more rides together. He was quite exuberant when I returned each evening and was a bit more clingy than usual — and I think he detests the annoying sound of the alarm clock as much as I do.

Tammy Malgesini, the former Hermiston Herald community editor, enjoys spending time with her husband and two German shepherds, as well as entertaining herself with random musings.



Tammy Malgesini

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SPEAK UP

Seeking guest viewpoints

Are you a parent who has been managing your children's distance learning while working from home, struggling to find child care or had to quit your job during the pandemic? The *Hermiston Herald* wants to hear from you about your experience this year. Submit a 250-word letter to the editor or a guest column of 400 to 650 words about your experience, along with your name, city of residence and phone number (phone number is for verification purposes and will not be published) and you may be published on the opinion page of an upcoming edition of the *Hermiston Herald*. Letters and columns can be sent to editor@hermistonherald.com or submitted via the letters form at www.hermistonherald.com.



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Please contact the editor at editor@hermistonherald.com or call (541) 564-4533 with issues about this policy or to report errors.

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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The *Hermiston Herald* reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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