

EDITOR'S DESK

A return to pre-pandemic life will take everyone

In early January, I wrote a column explaining the reasons I planned to get the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as I was able.

I'm pleased to share that since that time, I have been able to receive the Pfizer vaccine. I've also been thrilled to see members of my family and many of my friends receive their own protection through vaccination, along with three quarters of a billion people worldwide.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

All three vaccines offered in the United States continue to prove safe and effective. On April 1, Pfizer released updated results from its initial Phase 3 trial participants, showing that six months out, the vaccine continues to strongly protect participants, who also continue to see no long-term side effects. Moderna is seeing similar results.

While a small percentage of people in the vaccinated group have tested positive for COVID-19, none have had a severe case, which is defined by the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention as a case resulting in hospitalization or death. Studies are also forming a clearer picture that the vaccine greatly reduces the chances of transmitting the virus to others.

While the Food and Drug Administration announced this week it was temporarily pausing the Johnson & Johnson vaccine due to six people out of about 7 million developing blood clots after vaccination, the fact the problem was caught and addressed after such a miniscule percentage of people had it shows what careful monitoring the vaccines are going through. And the risk of blood clots from the vaccine, if there does



Doris Pitzer, 90, receives her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine from Jessica Marcum during a vaccination clinic at Good Shepherd Hospital in Hermiston on Feb. 12, 2021.

prove to be a link, is tiny compared to the risk of blood clots from the hormonal birth control pills that millions of women in the United States take daily, and also tiny compared to risks of blood clots from COVID-19 itself.

Despite these successes, we still have a long way to go. Only about 20% of the United States population is fully vaccinated so far, and scientists estimate we'll need about four times as many people who are vaccinated or have at least already had the virus before transmission becomes rare enough to safely return to "normal" life.

Unfortunately, in the United States, this effort to make gathering safe for everyone again as soon as possible is expected to be hampered by the estimated one-fourth of Americans who say they won't get vaccinated. Vaccine hesitancy is particularly high in rural areas, including

Umatilla County.

It may be easy to state that those who want protection can receive it and those who would rather take their chances with the more dangerous virus have a right to do so. But like the rest of this pandemic, vaccination is also a reflection on our willingness to protect others as well as ourselves.

Not leaving the house when you have a cough or other symptoms doesn't protect you, because you're already sick. But other people who must leave the house for work or school or buying groceries are at the mercy of those who know they may be a carrier of COVID-19 but decide to go out anyway.

Similarly, with masks, the science is clear that the mask protects people from the wearer's germs more than it protects the wearer from other people's germs. This doesn't matter if everyone in the room is masked, but again, people most at risk of compli-

cations from COVID-19 are at the mercy of those who decide not to wear a mask around them, increasing the chances they will catch an infection from that person.

With vaccines, the person who is vaccinated is protected the most. However, evidence continues to increase that vaccinated people are far less likely to spread COVID-19. That directly protects those around them, including children, people with allergies and others unable to receive the vaccine. It also helps stop the spread throughout a community, making it safer to do things like indoor dining in restaurants or having children in school. Finally, every infection prevented takes away another opportunity for the virus to mutate into a variant that makes people sicker or can evade the protection of the vaccines.

If you're unsure about getting vaccinated, please reach out to your primary care physician, Umatilla County Health Department, Oregon Health Authority or another knowledgeable source to talk through your concerns. How many people get vaccinated in this county and worldwide will have a significant impact on what the next year looks like for all of us.

If you're not interested in getting vaccinated for yourself, do it for your neighbor whose financial situation depends on their restaurant being able to fully reopen this year. Do it for your immunocompromised cousin whose allergies don't allow him to get vaccinated. Do it for your grandmother who could be vulnerable to "breakthrough" cases after vaccination. Do it for your niece in FFA who wants to be able to show her hog at the fair this August.

Do it for all of us. We need you.

COLUMN

The myths and facts of testing in school settings

Testing has become quite controversial in education. We often hear about students' test scores or teachers reporting test results. Then in social groups, you might experience people discussing that there is too much testing imposed on our children in schools. Is there a misconception?

Depending on your generation and where you attended school, perspectives on student testing have probably changed dramatically. Testing in schools in the past was most often for determining grades in classes over material taught by the instructor. Often those tests were teacher-developed or may have come with the curriculum, covering the information taught during the instruction. As we have moved to a more mobile society we have come to expect students to learn the same material, whether in a little country town or a large city, and no matter what geographical location, education looks different than 25 years ago. Publishers created curricula for all subjects along with creating tests to ensure that all students receive the same instruction.

Testing/assessment in education has changed over the years and we have also been able to learn more about how our brains learn and develop, thanks to science. We have learned that waiting for a student and allowing additional time for them

to catch up may not be the best, and may make it even harder for the child to learn because of what we now know about brain development. Then borrowing from the sciences and using the scientific process of gaining a baseline, applying theory, and then checking for change means education takes a different path.

In education, if the child is not showing understanding we are now able to provide specific instruction at their level and check for understanding by monitoring, which is often referred to as testing. If the child understands the concept, they are ready to move on; if not, some reteaching is necessary. Past practice often was to assume students had it because we taught it to the whole group, or they will catch up and some will, but many don't and fall behind. This is true in both math and reading. Moving on and hoping in time they will catch up is more of a myth than reality.

Back in the 1970s publishers were creating reading materials as fast as they could. Then they set out to show how their programs were superior to teacher-based programs. These curricula provided instructional materials along with assessments. During the 1980s studies were completed showing if teachers used and followed their programs students scored higher. They took their results to the U.S. Department of Education, getting them to sign off that teachers needed to follow the programs with fidelity. We have all experienced changes in

the medical field and the impact on our health and lives. Look at diabetes for example: Twenty years ago the way we tested sugar levels is much different than today. Schools that have embraced using data to inform education rather than teaching what a teacher feels is best have experienced greater student learning growth. There are not many people who would want the doctors to treat their cancer as they did 40 years ago. The same should be true with how we educate our youth.

Students are assessed more in today's schools than in the past. In the younger grades, the short screeners used can determine if the student knows the skill or needs additional support and are usually less than 10 minutes. As a teacher, having to screen each student can seem overwhelming and feel like all they do is test, but the students are not spending all that time testing. The teacher can use that information to adjust their lessons to give additional instruction on skills a student might be struggling with within the curriculum. This allows the student not to fall behind and keeps their skills moving forward, whereas in the past students often fell so far behind that it was hard for them to catch up with their classmates.

Dr. Scott Smith is a 40+-year Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia-OR board as their parent/teacher liaison.



Scott Smith

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Hansell keeps children at the forefront

This letter is to introduce Mrs. Sally Anderson Hansell, who is running for a position on the Hermiston School Board.

Mrs. Hansell grew up in Hermiston, graduated from Hermiston High School, and went on to get her degree in law. She is a practicing attorney in Hermiston. She has three children in the Hermiston schools at this time; she also has to school her husband, Tyler Hansell, occasionally.

Mrs. Hansell has seen what COVID has done to her children's education and believes your children have been affected too. She believes that school is more than learning to read, write and mathematics — it is a place where discipline and respect are taught. School is a place where children see old friends and make new ones.

In Hermiston, some children eat two meals a day at school. In a way, school is a mirror of society where children learn to deal with the same problems that Mom and Dad do every day. Many of these things have been taken from our children during the COVID era. How and when will these losses be replaced?

I haven't read or heard of any concrete plan to do that. I don't believe this is the fault of the local schools, educators, board or administration. I do believe that if you elect Mrs. Hansell, she will absolutely make sure that these problems will be solved for our children.

Please join me in voting for Mrs. Hansell in the May 18 election.

Mike Mehren
Hermiston

CORRECTIONS

It is the policy of the Hermiston Herald to correct errors as soon as they are discovered. Incorrect information will be corrected on Page 2A. Errors committed on the Opinion page will be corrected on that page. Corrections also are noted in the online versions of our stories.

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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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