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Vaccine Safety
By Cynthia Morrow, MD, MPH

Recently I visited our vaccine clinic in Covington and had the opportunity to visit with some residents while they received their shot. One gentleman told me, "I'd rather be uncomfortable for twelve hours after getting a shot than get COVID-19. I don't want to end up in the hospital with COVID."

It is heartening that many of our residents like him have reached the same conclusion: that the possibility of some mild discomfort from the vaccine is much better than having COVID-19. We know that the disease can make people very sick, especially the elderly and those with underlying conditions. COVID-19 disease can have many long-term complications affecting the heart, lungs, skin, and nervous system.

In contrast, we currently have three very safe and effective vaccines that can prevent COVID-19. The vaccines were evaluated in tens of thousands of people before being approved for use. Although they were developed in record time, the COVID-19 vaccines authorized by the Food and Drug Administration have gone through all of the same steps and requirements as every other vaccine, meeting all safety standards. As of this past week, over 120 million doses of the vaccine had been administered in the United States under the most intense safety monitoring in U.S. history.

The three vaccines available in the United States have been proven to be safe as they help your body fight COVID-19. Some people may have no side effects at all after receiving the vaccine while other people may have some mild effects. For example, you might have a sore arm or may not feel well for a day or so, with mild fever or body aches or fatigue. But it is important to know that these effects are temporary, and they mean the COVID-19 vaccine is working. We have also learned that for some people, the second dose of the vaccine can have more side effects. Thankfully, even with the second dose, side effects are mild and self-limited.

We continue to learn more about the disease or the vaccines that prevent it every day, but there is so much that we do know. We know that certain people, such as older adults and people with underlying medical conditions, are at much greater risk of getting seriously ill if they get COVID-19. We know that people who become infected can pass the virus to friends and loved ones. And we know that there are minimal risks of an effective vaccine. At the end of the day though, every person has to make the best decision for themselves. If you have questions or concerns about the vaccine, consider writing them down and talking to your doctor about them.

As a public health professional, I am thrilled that over two million Virginians have received vaccine, including the 115,000 first and second doses we have now delivered to residents in our health districts. With every vaccine that is delivered, we are one step closer to ending this pandemic.