

## **Script – Print – Planning the COVID Vaccine and Your Mammogram Don't Delay Your Next Mammogram**

The COVID-19 pandemic put many things on hold in the past year, including mammograms for some patients who elected to wait before scheduling their annual appointment. But delaying a mammogram for too long can have serious consequences on one's health, as some patients have found out over the past few months.

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the most common cancer in American women, except for skin cancers. The average risk of a woman in the United States developing breast cancer sometime in her life is about 13 percent, meaning there is a 1 in 8 chance she will develop breast cancer. Nearly 44,000 women in the U.S. will die this year from breast cancer.

"We recommend that after the age of 40 women should really get a yearly mammogram," said Allison Gleason, Women's Center Supervisor, OSF HealthCare. "We did see an increase in breast cancer due in part to the pandemic. Women were not coming in to have their annual screening and, unfortunately, we are seeing an up rise in that breast cancer. That just shows the importance of having that yearly mammogram."

The good news is with the COVID-19 vaccine becoming more readily available, health care providers are starting to see an increase again in mammogram appointments. However, a small percentage of women who have received the vaccine have noticed enlarged lymph nodes under their arm, which is a possible side effect of the COVID vaccine. Breast cancer can also cause swollen nodes under the arm.

"We are seeing an increase of some patients having their lymph nodes swollen, usually on the side where they had their COVID shot," said Allison Gleason, Women's Center Supervisor, OSF HealthCare. "It doesn't happen to everyone. It's a small percentage of patients. We are still encouraging, as long as you're healthy and not having any problems, to make sure you're scheduling those screening mammograms. If you are having issue before, during or after your shot, you need to speak to your primary care physician."

To help alleviate any fears about coming in for an appointment, medical facilities continue to be vigilant about cleaning between appointments, taking temperatures at the door and making sure patients and employees wear masks at all times. In addition, online check-in and virtual follow-up provider appointments are available to provide additional comfort and accessibility for patients.

"We're seeing a lot of physicians and hospitals are starting this process," said Allison Gleason, Women's Center Supervisor, OSF HealthCare. "It makes it a little more convenient for the patient and trying to show them that even though we are in a pandemic your screening appointments are still extremely important to have."

For patients who experience some anxiety during a mammogram, Gleason says the procedure is relatively painless. The entire process takes 20 to 30 minutes to complete after check-in. The technician will take four pictures, two on each side and be available to answer any questions or address any concerns.

When it comes to any decision regarding your health, Gleason adds that it's best to consult with your physician regarding the timing of your mammogram. He or she is the best resource to determine when's the best time to come in for that diagnostic mammogram and possible ultrasound.

"If you have any concerns about that you need to reach out to your primary care physician, making that e-appointment or go in and talk to them to make sure you're making the right choice for you," said Allison Gleason, Women's Center Supervisor, OSF HealthCare.

For more information about mammograms, or to schedule an appointment online, visit [OSF HealthCare](#).