

Staying Vigilant after Vaccination

So, you recently received the COVID-19 vaccine, or perhaps you are awaiting your turn to receive it. Now what? Since the spring of 2020, we have grown accustomed to wearing our masks, washing our hands frequently, and watching our distance with others.

From isolating at home and virtual visits with family and friends to limiting our time spent venturing out for essential needs such as groceries, many across the nation have embraced the “new normal” while patiently waiting for the light at the end of the tunnel: the development of a COVID-19 vaccine.

Two vaccines have now received emergency use authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and are being rolled out in phases – which will soon include the general public. Now that a vaccine has arrived, many are wondering what precautions should continue now that it is here? Dr. Bill Walsh, chief medical officer at OSF HealthCare Little Company of Mary Medical Center, breaks it down for us.

“At this point, there is no herd immunity. So while the people who are vaccinated still need to wear masks, those who are unvaccinated also still need to wear masks – and this will stay in effect until most of our population is immunized and we have herd immunity. Herd immunity means there are so many people who are immunized that we can’t really spread the virus well and the virus can’t get a stronghold on us. We won’t know that until we see the numbers going down significantly,” Dr. Walsh explains.

Early data shows that the currently available COVID-19 vaccines are more than 95% effective at preventing illness, including serious illness. However, the safety measures that we have grown accustomed to during the pandemic need to remain in place.

“Ninety-five percent means out of every 100 there are still five people that could get significant COVID illness, so there are still possibilities for COVID illness among the vaccinated. Bear that in mind when you are at work, when you are at home, when you are out shopping, when you are thinking about going to a gathering – and continue to keep the gatherings small,” says Dr. Walsh.

Dr. Wash adds that the vaccine, combined with continuing to practice the three Ws, is the most effective track back to the “normalcy” many have been craving.

“This is a safe and very effective vaccine and the more people we get vaccinated, the sooner we can stop the precautions. But at this time, continue to wash your hands, wear your mask, and watch your distance,” Dr. Walsh emphasizes.

[Learn more](#) about how vaccines work. If you are awaiting your turn to receive the vaccine, [learn more](#) about the vaccine rollout process from the CDC.