

Don't Hesitate - Please Vaccinate

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

My first name, Charles, is a family name. I was named for one my mother's younger brothers, Charles Sandall. I never met my Uncle Charles. He died over six years before I was born from polio. My mother's other brother, my Uncle Ralph also contracted polio but survived and amazingly will turn 92 later this month. But I have spent my entire life watching how polio has impacted his life. Needless to say, just as soon as the polio vaccine was available my mother herded all five of her children in to the doctor's office. It is one of the earliest memories that I have as a child. My mother watched both of her brothers become stricken with polio and watched one of them die from it.

Vaccinations are important. Worldwide we have continued to beat polio nearly into submission. Rotary International, a group that I am a member of, has made it a priority and I donate money monthly to help support the cause. We got rid of smallpox, and many people my age have the scar on the arm from that vaccination program, and we can defeat polio. All it takes is continued vaccination to eliminate this disease from the planet.

We have spent over a year fighting another virus, a coronavirus. There are now vaccines to help protect us. There are two dose versions, there's now a one dose version and all of them are working. But they only work if people will take the time to be vaccinated. It's simple math. The more people we get vaccinated and the sooner we get them done, the sooner the coronavirus goes to the back burner, the sooner we can relax on mask use, and the sooner we can get our lives back to some form of normal. More and more vaccines are pouring into the state and out to the counties. But they have to get into arms to do any good!

These coronavirus vaccines are using a "new" technology. These vaccines are RNA or specifically mRNA vaccines. RNA vaccines were first proposed and developed in the 1990s and really improved in the early 2000's. One of the advantages of an RNA vaccine is that because of how they work they can be ramped up and produced much quicker than in traditional vaccine development and production.

In traditional vaccines, a dead or inactivated virus (or bacteria) is injected into you. Your body recognizes it as a threat, develops antibodies to it and then, depending on the specific viral or bacterial threat, immunity can be nearly life long (polio) or only for several months (influenza). When a dead or inactivated virus is used the body is recognizing the threat because of antigens (proteins) that may be on the virus or they are recognizing the actual genetic makeup of the virus. With an RNA vaccine, just part of the unique genetic code is being injected which is enough for the body to recognize the threat and develop antibodies to it.

Vaccinations are all around us all the time. If you have pets, you likely make sure they have their shots every year. If you raise livestock you are probably giving them vaccinations on a set schedule. We do it because we don't want to see them get sick or die. The vaccinations for us are the same way. I've had my two doses of the Covid-19 vaccine. When I became eligible I didn't hesitate. I'm not concerned how fast the vaccine rolled out because I understand the science involved. The vaccines that we are receiving were tested on tens of thousands of people for side effects and efficacy (how well it worked). I'm far more concerned about the long term impact of Covid-19 than I am about short term or long term impacts from the vaccine. You and your doctor can decide if it is safe for you to get the vaccine. Talk to them if you have concerns. But for the good of Kansas, the USA and the world, when the opportunity comes along don't hesitate, please vaccinate.