COVID-19 VACCINE

SEPARATING FACT FROM FICTION WHEN IT COMES TO GETTING VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19

The COVID-19 vaccine is available in Bermuda. Globally, vaccines save millions of lives each year. After clean water and sanitation, vaccination is the single most important public health action an individual can take to protect themselves and their loved ones.

We owe it to ourselves, and to those we care about, to use every tool we have to try and stop the spread of COVID-19. This includes getting vaccinated, wearing masks, physical distancing, good hand hygiene and downloading the WeHealth Bermuda app, which will help reduce your chance of being exposed to the virus or spreading it to others.

HERE ARE THE FACTS ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE.

FICTION - THE COVID-19 VACCINE IS UNSAFE BECAUSE IT WAS DEVELOPED SO QUICKLY.

FACT: The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine that we currently have in Bermuda was developed in record time, but has gone through the same rigorous Food and Drug Administration (FDA) process as every other vaccine, meeting all safety standards. No steps were skipped. Instead, we can thank the unprecedented worldwide collaboration and investment for the shorter timeframe on the development of the vaccine itself. The clinical trials and safety reviews actually took about the same amount of time as other vaccines.

In addition to the FDA approval, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has been approved for use in the UK after meeting strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness set out by the independent Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, which follows international standards of safety. And it has been approved by Health Canada and the World Health Organization.

FICTION - THE VACCINES USE A LIVE VERSION OF THE CORONAVIRUS.

FACT: The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine does not contain the live virus that causes COVID-19. The Pfizer vaccine uses approved scientific techniques to train the human body to recognise and fight the coronavirus by giving the body instructions to make its own coronavirus-like protein. The body then recognises these proteins shouldn't be there and produces antibodies to fight them off. Then, the immune system establishes memory to protect against future infections. That said, like other vaccines, it can cause side effects in some people. Some symptoms include injection site pain, fatigue, headaches, chills and muscle aches. None of these are worrying and are completely normal.

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FICTION - THE COVID-19 VACCINE WILL ALTER YOUR DNA.

FACT: The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine utilises a new type of technology called messenger RNA, or mRNA for short. Think of mRNA as an instruction manual: It directs the body to build an immune response to a specific infection. Once it has taught our body how to fight the vaccine, the body gets rid of the mRNA. It NEVER enters the nucleus of our cells where our DNA lives, so it cannot change your DNA.

FICTION - THE COVID-19 VACCINE INCLUDES A TRACKING DEVICE.

FACT: It does not. There are some syringes with microchips to allow a provider to confirm the doses' origin. The chip itself is not injected into the person getting the vaccine.

FICTION - THE COVID-19 VACCINE CAUSES INFERTILITY IN WOMEN.

FACT: Misinformation on social media suggests the vaccine causes infertility. Don't listen to social media, but use trusted sources of information such as the WHO and CDC.

FICTION - ONCE YOU RECEIVE THE CORONAVIRUS VACCINE, YOU'RE IMMUNE FOR LIFE.

FACT: Right now, we do not know how long immunity from a COVID-19 vaccine will last and whether it will need to be given more than once, or even on a regular or annual basis, like the flu shot. This may also depend on which vaccine you take.

For now, medical experts say that we should think of the COVID-19 vaccine like a tetanus shot, where you might need a booster shot every few years. There are also scientists that are hoping that it may be like the measles vaccine where once you're immune, you're immune for life, but that remains to be seen.

FICTION - YOU DON'T NEED BOTH DOSES OF THE TWO-DOSE VACCINES.

FACT: The Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine require two doses that are given 21 days apart. And because health experts are not sure whether one dose will be effective enough to prevent COVID-19 or a severe case of the illness, skipping the second shot is not a good idea. The first dose is only shown to be 52 percent effective while after the second dose, it is shown to be 95 percent effective. The first shot primes your body and the second shot helps it to deliver longer lasting immunity.

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FICTION - YOU CAN DITCH YOUR MASK AFTER YOU GET VACCINATED.

FACT: The COVID-19 vaccine is just one tool that can help slow the spread of COVID-19, but others that we know work will continue to be needed to bring the pandemic to an end. These include mask wearing, social distancing, frequent handwashing and avoiding closed and crowded spaces.

It will take several months to get the majority of residents who want a coronavirus vaccine vaccinated. And until a substantial portion, perhaps as high as 70%, of the population develops resistance to COVID-19 and so-called herd immunity is reached, the virus will continue to spread and sicken people.

Also, protection from the vaccine isn't immediate. It typically takes a few weeks for the body to develop memory cells for the virus after vaccination. In this case, face masks, social distancing and other recommended efforts can help prevent an infection while the body builds up immunity.

Finally, while the Pfizer vaccine has proven to be effective at preventing COVID-19, it's not yet clear whether it can block virus transmission. Masks, however, have demonstrated their effectiveness at stopping virus particles from infecting others.

FICTION - IF YOU GOT THE FLU SHOT THIS YEAR, YOU DON'T NEED A CORONAVIRUS VACCINE.

FACT: While the flu and COVID-19 share a similar list of symptoms, they are two different illnesses, caused by two different viruses. So when it comes to the vaccines, "it's not one or the other," Anthony Fauci, M.D., director of the National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), explained in a recent interview. "You want to be doubly protected from the flu and from coronavirus," Fauci said — especially since it's possible to get infected by both viruses at the same time, or one right after another, which can be taxing on the lungs and other organs.

W ONCE I RECEIVE THE VACCINE, I WILL TEST POSITIVE FOR COVID-19.

FACT: Tests used to diagnose COVID-19 check for the virus that causes COVID-19. Since there is no live virus in the vaccines, the vaccines will not affect your test result. It is possible, however, to get infected with the virus before the vaccine has had time to fully protect your body. So you MUST still wear your mask, wash your hands and keep your physical distance.

COVID-19 VACCINE

FICTION - I'M NOT AT RISK FOR SEVERE COMPLICATIONS OF COVID-19 SO I DON'T NEED THE VACCINE.

FACT: Regardless of your risk, you can still contract the infection and spread it to others, so it's important you get vaccinated. Once the vaccine is widely available, it's recommended that as many eligible adults as possible get the vaccine. It not only protects you, but your family and community as well.

FICTION - IF I RECEIVE THE COVID-19 VACCINE, I AM AT A GREATER RISK TO BECOME SICK FROM ANOTHER ILLNESS.

FACT: The vaccine is made up of mRNA, which boosts your immunity to COVID-19. It does not heighten your risk to become sick from another infection such as the flu.

FICTION - IMMUNITY FROM THE VACCINES IS LESS SAFE THAN NATURAL IMMUNITY.

FACT: For many diseases, immunity acquired naturally often lasts longer than immunity from a vaccine. But that means you have to suffer, and survive, the disease.

Plus, with COVID-19, the natural immune response after a mild case appears to be short lived, and much shorter than what is expected from the vaccine. To achieve the level of immunity that protects a community, many people will have to suffer and die from this disease. The vaccine allows us to achieve the same effect with only mild side effects.

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GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Ministry of Health

Visit: **www.gov.bm/vaccines**
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