

As I write this, my 74 year old mother is struggling to breathe with flu pneumonia in India. Her COVID test was thankfully negative. I have been trying to get her a flu shot and a pneumonia shot for the past three months, but they were unavailable in her city of 1 million people. And now she has pneumonia, which could have been prevented had she been able to get a flu shot.

COVID vaccines were initially in such short supply in India that she didn't get fully vaccinated until just a few weeks ago. Also, she couldn't get the mRNA vaccines that have been readily available here for months. However, she is fortunate that the hospitals there have no oxygen shortage this time around. And she's also very lucky that she found a hospital bed.

I want to remind us all of some of the things that we take here for granted.

Most people in the world don't have access to the safe and highly effective mRNA vaccines.

Most people in the world can't just walk into their grocery store and get a flu shot.

Most people in the world don't even know that there is an excellent pneumonia vaccine.

We often forget how blessed and privileged we are compared to most others around the world. It saddens me to have to beg patients to get a flu, pneumonia or COVID shot when others are desperate to get them at any cost. If you believe that COVID is a conspiracy or the vaccines are a hoax, then nothing I say will change your mind. But for those of you who usually get vaccines, but have now been swayed by misinformation, I have a personal plea: Please do not let fear keep you from doing what is right. Please get yourself and your loved ones vaccinated.

I am not one who simply takes news headlines at face value. When the news screams that a miracle vaccine/treatment has been discovered, I actually read the scientific paper that the headline was based on. I dug deep into the data before convincing myself that the mRNA vaccines were safe. The data on boosters for high risk people is now looking very strong too.

Many people feel that they should not get vaccinated because they are being forced by mandates to do so. I fully understand the terrifying prospect of being stripped of personal freedom. A family friend recently said that he is quitting his well paying job at the hospital because they were forcing him to get vaccinated. He said he would rather work 3 jobs to support his family than have his principles challenged. Safeguarding personal freedom is very important to me as well, but please don't cut off your nose to spite your face. You're putting your and your family's health, finances and safety at risk when there is no need to do so.

With the holidays approaching, and the weather turning cold, most of us will be gathering indoors in larger groups than in prior months. There is a significant likelihood that cases, hospitalizations and deaths due to COVID will rise again after recent decreases. The latest data show that in Texas, the unvaccinated died at a rate **40 times** higher than the vaccinated. If you're still not convinced that you should get the vaccine, I urge you to wear surgical masks when in close proximity with others, avoid being in large crowds and open your windows to improve ventilation when in crowded conditions.

Many tell me, "I never get sick, so I don't need to get vaccinated." My mother never got the flu all these years, but she did this year. She's now in the hospital on oxygen, possibly needing a ventilator. There is always a first time for everything. Don't let your first flu or pneumonia kill you when you could have prevented it.

Stay safe this holiday season. Take advantage of all the benefits of living in this great country. Get vaccinated and be healthy!