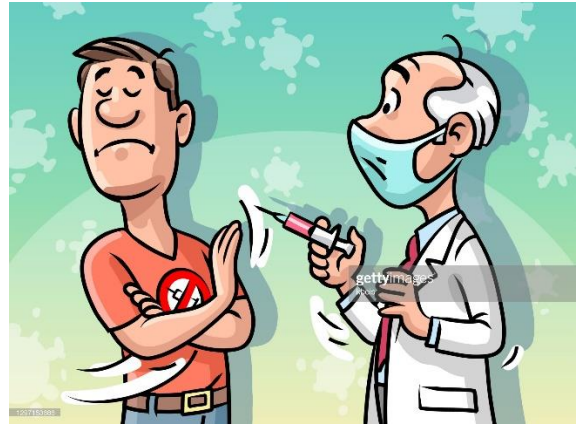


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Safe means never, collective cooperation, and other common sense

Steve Bakke  August 10, 2021



People talk about returning to normalcy when it's "safe." But when will that happen? And what does "safe" mean?

A virus came visiting in 2020 – by chance, mistake, or possibly by design. Our original goal was to slow the virus spread and keep hospitalizations down – i.e., smooth the infection curve. Understandably, nobody knew the answers, but our collective fear pushed us to insist on information that was clear and certain.

We ended up with false assurances, conflicting opinions, incomplete answers, and constantly changing advice. We insisted on clarity but saw only confusion. We were given too many "one size fits all" solutions. And some ham-handed comments and ideas coming out of two administrations didn't help. Combine all of that with two foolish impeachments, a divisive presidential election, violence in the streets, and a perfect storm of national division resulted.

Despite failures we learned that well-intended restrictions and lockdowns brought significant collateral damage, even body-counts. The solution was often worse than the problem. We came to realize the accuracy of iconic economist Thomas Sowell's advice that "there are no perfect solutions, only tradeoffs." Thankfully, our government came through in an important way – successful vaccine development and distribution in record time.

My attitude regarding vaccines was influenced by living through the 1950's polio epidemic as an impressionable boy. Offering little resistance, we got vaccinated. We understood there was a pandemic, and intuitively realized that our constitutional rights and obligations permitted the choice of participating in collective cooperation through voluntary vaccinations. That cooperation will maximize benefits to the most people in situations such as we now face. It's just common sense.

The decision to vaccinate should generally be left up to individuals and families. As expected, some say, "I'm going to wait and see. The vaccine has received only "emergency" approval. I'm waiting for official approval, and I'm not going to be a "guinea-pig." I say to those folks: Personal risk assessment is your right. However, approximately 170,000,000 "volunteers"

have decided to be vaccinated and that has significantly beaten back the pandemic. If the pandemic was still raging at its highest level, would you have this same confidence in delaying your decision? Where would America be if everyone had echoed your response? Whatever your personal rights, your choice to avoid a vaccination may require others to realign their lives to accommodate your decision. Remember that when feeling puzzled by the “push-back” you may receive.

I know that the federal government has wide latitude concerning public health policy. Nevertheless, I don't want sweeping vaccine mandates coming out of Washington. We've learned from COVID policies that “one size doesn't fit all.” The federal government should provide information, but decisions are ideally left to families and individuals. In a few situations it may be unavoidable for rules to be established by states, local authorities, or organizations.

A review of statistics is helpful when making these decisions. Studies show that about 98% of current infections occur among the unvaccinated. Merely .0006% of those vaccinated have been reinfected and died. A reasonable estimate of herd immunity for COVID-19 is 85% of the population. We'll soon be over 60% fully vaccinated. Add to that 11% of the population having natural immunity from being infected. With over 700,000 shots being administered daily, the goal is in sight. And unvaccinated children, age 0-17, remain highly immune with just over 350 having died with COVID.

As we make decisions necessary for transitioning away from COVID restrictions, we should remember that everything we do involves risks. We get into cars, onto bicycles, into boats – doing many exciting things involving a myriad of slim risks. The vaccine has continued its high efficacy for the Delta variant. As a result, those who've been vaccinated continue to enjoy a high level of protection against severe illness and death.

Early in the pandemic, Dennis Prager shared some advice in “Some thoughts on being safe” appearing in Real Clear Politics on 5/19/20. He wrote: “The pursuit of ‘safe’ over virtually all other considerations is life-suppressing.” I agree with that and realize that “safe” means “never.” It's past time to apply common sense in resisting needless fear.

America is moving ever closer to the “herd immunity” goal. Ideally, we'll accomplish it rapidly through vaccinations. But perhaps large numbers will remain unvaccinated. In that case, vaccinations, combined with natural immunity from those having been infected, can jointly accomplish our goal. In its own way, that can be considered good news.

We have vaccines awaiting final approval for all ages, and many more vaccinations to administer. Let's get that done, and use our many tools, including collective cooperation, to start getting back to normal.