

Community Immunity

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Sen. Smith writes about the importance of getting vaccinated to protect our neighbors and families. Like other past health crises, COVID-19 vaccines will get us closer to reaching herd immunity and putting the pandemic behind us.

MADISON - At every stage of the pandemic, we've done what's best to keep our communities safe. We stayed home, socially-distanced and started wearing masks all to protect our neighbors and families. The pandemic isn't over just yet – we still need to work together to put the pandemic behind us. Everyone will need to pitch in by getting vaccinated so we can reach herd immunity.

From the very beginning of the pandemic we heard the goal was to reach herd immunity. I don't ever recall knowing anything about herd immunity before, but then again we never faced anything like this in our lifetime. So, what is herd immunity?

An easy way to think of herd immunity is "community immunity." Herd immunity occurs when a large portion of a community (the herd) becomes immune to a disease, making the spread of disease from person-to-person less likely. We can reach herd immunity when a proportion of

the population that is immune is greater than the population susceptible to contracting the disease. Herd immunity is reached when enough people have developed protective antibodies to the disease. There are two ways this can happen, either through infection or inoculation.

Scientists and healthcare professionals developed and delivered the COVID-19 vaccine at a rapid pace without risking an individual's health and safety. Like during wartimes, the urgency of the moment brought out the best in our scientists and medical minds. In just a matter of months we had multiple vaccines available and distributed to every state. Wisconsin remains a national leader in getting shots in arms, thanks to the diligent work of Governor Tony Evers' Administration.

The pace at which scientists developed a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, compared to that of other well-documented vaccines is mind blowing. In the late 1940s polio outbreaks were frequent, disabling more than 35,000 people a year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It took years of research and trials before the polio vaccine was widely distributed. After the [polio vaccines were introduced](#) in 1955 and 1963, cases fell to less than 100 per year in the 1960s and less than 10 in the 1970s. Since 1979, no cases of polio have originated in the United States. But it takes just one traveler with polio to bring it into the U.S. if we aren't vigilant and our communities aren't immunized.



There have been more than 31 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the U.S. since the beginning of 2020. At the time this column was published, approximately 103 million Americans were fully vaccinated, or 31% of the population. In Wisconsin nearly 2 million people have been fully vaccinated, which accounts for almost 35% of our population.

It's a good start, but not where we need to be. Like most major achievements, it only gets harder as we get closer to the finish line. But, if we work together we can improve our chances of stopping the spread and eradicating COVID-19.

If you or someone you know is hesitant, please consider the community around you. Professionals are available to answer your questions and share the facts about the COVID-19 vaccine.

If you're still doing your research, it's important to know that [COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective](#). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC have detailed the vaccines' safety and efficacy.

Additionally, the [COVID-19 vaccines cannot give you the virus](#). According to the CDC, COVID-19 vaccines teach our immune systems how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. This may cause you to have some side effects, but that's normal.

You should also know that COVID-19 vaccines are FREE. There are [many options where you can get vaccinated](#), including your local health department, pharmacies, community-based vaccination clinics, on-site vaccination clinics and your doctor or healthcare provider.

You can find a vaccine provider by visiting vaccinefinder.org and inserting your zip code. It is free, simple and safe. Getting vaccinated is the right thing to do for yourself, your family and your neighbors to reach community immunity.

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