

Tahlequah Pulmonologist Encourages Covid-19 Vaccine

TAHLEQUAH, OKLAHOMA – There is hardly a more contentious subject than whether or not to get the COVID 19 vaccination. A brief internet search, or scroll through social media, and the differing opinions and rationalizations quickly become overwhelming. Is the vaccine safe? Does the vaccine protect against the different COVID strains? Has there been enough research conducted to know for sure? Northeastern Health System’s (NHS) Chair of Medicine, Dr. Creticus Marak, provides some insight into the pandemic, and the vaccine.

For more than ten years, Dr. Marak has specialized in pulmonary and critical care medicine, two of the medical specialties seeing the most effects of the COVID pandemic. Dr. Marak bases his opinions on national research, but equally as important, on the cases he sees on a daily basis in Cherokee County. His advice closely follows that of other healthcare providers and the Oklahoma State Department of Health.

“Get vaccinated, maintain social distancing, wear a mask and wash your hands,” said Dr. Marak. “COVID vaccines are safe and very effective. Throughout the United States, including our county, more than 95 percent of the patients hospitalized for COVID-19 pneumonia are unvaccinated.”

Hospital reports nation-wide are reporting that the majority of the COVID-positive patients on ventilators and life support are primarily unvaccinated.

“Our hospitalized COVID-19 patients present with respiratory failure, and most of them end up on a mechanical ventilator,” said Dr. Marak. “So far we have had only 2 vaccinated patients in the hospital with COVID-19 pneumonia, none requiring life support, and both were discharged home within a week.”

But is the vaccine safe? And does it protect against the different strains of the virus?

“The vaccine is like any other drug with possible side effects. I can assure you all that it is safe and effective,” stressed Dr. Marak. “Usual side effects are minor and include pain at the injection site, redness, fever, and other mild effects. The severe side effects that people are concerned about are extremely rare.”

According to the Oklahoma State Department of Health, COVID-19 vaccines undergo a strict testing and approval process before they can be administered to Oklahomans. In Oklahoma, individuals receive what is known as the mRNA vaccines, which helps the body to generate antibodies against the COVID-19 “spike protein.” This protein is

found on the surface of the virus that causes COVID-19. The antibodies that are produced in response to the vaccine help to fight the real virus when infected.

“The Delta variant is more virulent and contagious than the Alpha variant that we dealt with last year,” said Dr. Marak. “The new strain of interest is the Mu variant, and has been reported in all the US states except Nebraska. At this time we do not know much about this strain, but the CDC is monitoring it closely” said Dr. Marak.

Much like the Flu, there are variations of the COVID-19 virus. While the vaccine may not keep one from contracting COVID-19, it has proven to make the virus less deadly to those who are vaccinated.

“Getting the vaccine is the only solution to control this pandemic,” said Dr. Marak, “so please get vaccinated if you are eligible; and, for those who have already been fully vaccinated they should consider getting the booster dose preferably at 6 months from the 2nd dose.”

COVID-19 vaccines are widely available. Patients are encouraged to discuss the vaccine with their primary care provider. Appointments can be made through the local health department, the Oklahoma Department of Health, and through Northeastern Health System’s Tahlequah Medical Group at (918) 207-0991, or the Ft. Gibson Medical Clinic at (918) 478-2101.