COVID ICU Patient: Get the Vaccine

New cases of the coronavirus continue to surge across the U.S., driven by the fast-spreading and highly contagious Delta variant that now makes up the majority of COVID infections in the country. Nationwide, the push continues by health professionals, scientists and lawmakers for everyone eligible to get vaccinated against COVID-19 as soon as possible.

The three COVID-19 vaccines approved for use in the U.S. have been proven very effective at preventing severe COVID-19 illness and death. In fact, as of August 18, nearly 94% of people in the ICU with COVID in OSF HealthCare facilities were unvaccinated - a disparity being reported at hospitals across the county.

Despite this, millions of people are still hesitant to get vaccinated for many reasons, from personal views and fears, to problems getting to vaccine sites. Mario Cruz-Cortez was one of those people. The 33-year-old Taylorville man said he was aware of the recommendations, but didn't take action.

SOT
Mario Cruz-Cortez, OSF HealthCareCOVID-19 Patient
"I ignored it because it's so much stuff you hear on the TV, your friends say, my friends say, there's just so much political – this is not real. This is the government trying to control people." (:15)

This was a decision Cruz-Cortez would soon regret. In late July he was infected with COVID-19. Cruz-Cortez tried to ride out the illness at home, but it soon became apparent that he needed medical attention.

SOT
Mario Cruz-Cortez, OSF HealthCareCOVID-19 Patient
"I knew I was really sick, I was not sure I was going to make it – I was so sick. It changed overnight, because I remember the night before I went to bed, I was feeling a little sick. It started with muscle pain, not a lot of energy to move, but I was still breathing fine. I still did not have a cough. I wake up, and oh my god I cannot stop coughing. Cough and cough and cough. I started moving more and I started to notice my breath – I can't breathe anymore. I was so short of breath." (:35)

Cruz-Cortez drove himself to the emergency department in his hometown of Taylorville, where his condition continued to deteriorate. On July 30 Cruz-Cortez was intubated and transferred to OSF HealthCare Heart of Mary Medical Center in Urbana, Illinois, where he remained on a ventilator for nine days.

SOT
Mario Cruz-Cortez, OSF HealthCareCOVID-19 Patient
"I shouldn't have ignored it. I should have went to get a test and get proper medication. I ignored it for a week and a half and by the time it was almost two weeks is when I could not breathe anymore." (:15)

Off of the vent and in recovery, Cruz-Cortez said from his hospital room that he wished he could go back in time to give himself some sage vaccination advice.

SOT

Mario Cruz-Cortez, OSF HealthCareCOVID-19 Patient
"I would tell myself to get the vaccine. It doesn't matter. Get the vaccine. I'm going to get it as soon as I can because COVID is for real and I don't want to go through again, I don't want any of my family members to go through what I went through, because that was so scary." (:20)

Cruz-Cortez was discharged from OSF Heart of Mary on August 11. The father of two said the first thing he was going to do is hug his children. He says he will also advocate for his friends and family to get vaccinated as soon as possible, using his ordeal as a cautionary tale.

SOT
Mario Cruz-Cortez, OSF HealthCareCOVID-19 Patient
"Don't wait until someone you love gets so sick to get the vaccine. Get your vaccine. You might be thinking it's scary, but it's more scary when you see someone you love lying in bed with oxygen, don't even know if they are going to make it or not. Get the vaccine and you will feel better about yourself and you protect other people." (:23)

For more information on the COVID-19 vaccine, including general vaccine information, answers to frequently asked questions, and even online vaccination appointments for anyone 12 and older, visit osfhealthcare.org/vaccine.