

BROADCAST-Incidental Illness and COVID-19 Vaccination: Don't Automatically Connect the Dots

Safety data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows allergic reactions to COVID-19 vaccines are rare. For example, fewer than 5 people receiving doses of the Pfizer vaccine had a severe reaction that sent them into shock.

But if you spend any time on social media, you might get a different impression about the safety of COVID-19 vaccines.

Dr. Leon Yeh, OSF HealthCare vice president for Hospitalists, Emergency Services and Diagnostic Medicine says social media anecdotes exaggerate our perception of risk and plays against *actual data* which demonstrates the vaccine is safe and getting it far outweighs risk of getting COVID-19.

According to Dr. Yeh, what people should know is that they might feel pretty crummy after their shots, particularly after receiving their second dose. Such reactions [are a normal sign that your body is building protection](#). The top symptoms include pain at the injection site followed by fatigue.

Another connection between the COVID-19 vaccines and negative health effects being circulated on social media involves [Bell's palsy](#), which causes one side of a person's face to droop temporarily. Dr. Yeh points out, some people will wrongly conclude the vaccine is a direct cause.

SOT-Dr. Leon Yeh, OSF HealthCare vice president for Hospitalists, Emergency Services and Diagnostic Medicine

“The trials that were done, out of almost 40,000 patients, there were really only just a handful of patients that developed Bell's palsy. So that basically mirrors what we would expect for incidence in the general population anyway. Again, it goes back to understanding data and statistics and that's not something that we, as human beings, are really good at.” He added, “We tend to overestimate these risks when we hear about them.” (:22)

As the availability of COVID-19 vaccinations continues to expand, particularly for those 65 and older, many with underlying health conditions, there will be a greater number of incidental negative health events such as a heart attack. Dr. Yeh reminds us surveillance data to date shows there is no evidence those were caused by receiving the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine.

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“Even aside from the vaccine, we expect there to be some unfortunate things happening to people and the vaccine is not necessarily the cause but it's very easy for us to make that link.” (:11)

Dr. Yeh agrees with other experts that giving people a comparison that makes sense can help put the risk in perspective. For example, [the risk of getting hit by lightning](#) (1 in 500,000) is significantly higher than the risk of going into shock after being vaccinated against COVID-19.

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The CDC and FDA are both compiling information on side effects and outcomes so we have even better data about it. And then, I think it would help if we continue to have a constant dialogue about what we are seeing so that people understand the true outcomes and the true data.” (:20)

Dr. Yeh hopes as more data is collected and outcomes are shared regularly through trusted health experts more people will have confidence that the COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective.