

While the **numbers of cases of COVID** during this 3rd surge, which is the largest in less than a year, are finally beginning to fall, the number of deaths due to this virus are increasing.

In the United States, the number of active cases is about 30 million, of which 1.8 million are in Florida. So far, we have lost in this country, almost a half a million lives, 30,000 of which are right here in Florida.

The states with the highest infection and death toll are these:

- New York
- California
- Texas
- Florida
- Pennsylvania

Mass delivery of **VACCINES** began 2 months ago in many high income countries, but some low income countries are yet to receive a single dose, yet. Here in the US, while there are about 1/3 of the population with "vaccine hesitancy", meaning they do not intend to get vaccinated, there is also HIGH DEMAND for the vaccine which is still in very short supply. And, the vaccine appears to **be more protective than having the disease**, for building antibody defense.

Right now, the number of US citizens vaccinated is 3%, and also 3% of Floridians, as well. (Keep in mind that 85% is the number we need vaccinated to create "herd immunity" so that the spread no longer occurs.)

More doses are coming to Florida this week. And the new administration is attempting to implement improvements to our overall Health Departments around the country.

There is good news from the CDC this week, and that is this: Once you are vaccinated, 2 weeks after your second booster shot, you no longer have to quarantine if you come into an exposure encounter with someone who has the disease. In

other words, even though masking and distancing will be required, you may work and go out without fear of worsening yourself or others. (I suspect that vaccination cards will be like passports for certain activities, like flying, attending church?, etc.)

POINTERS:

1. All of us should become "**VACCINE CHAMPIONS**" and encourage whoever we can to also become vaccinated.
2. The goal right now is to **save LIVES** and to keep our hospitals open and functioning.
3. Understand that the "**LONG HAULERS**" with residual symptoms such as shortness of breath, migraines, fatigue and other other serious after-effects may not be able to return to work, even by 6 months.
4. **GET VACCINATED** wherever and whenever you can.
5. **Double mask**, now, or find a tighter fitting mask to prevent further spread, as we now know that you are more likely to obtain the virus from air than from contaminated surfaces.

Finally, there is a new belief in the medical community, that COVID may become ENDEMIC, meaning that it is "here to stay" and that we will "LEARN TO LIVE WITH IT" like we have with tuberculosis, HIV, influenza, and the common cold. This is due to the mutations, a few of which are extremely contagious and more deadly than the original strain which began in NYC and Washington State. With time, we will be able to identify and adjust our vaccines to deal with these newer strains, but at the current time, the vaccines available, have provided enough protection that while some have become sick with the newer strains (variants), not a single person has become critically ill, nor has died, if they were vaccinated.

We are likely looking at the end of summer for a return to some semblance of normalcy.