



IMA Public Health Committee - January 17, 2022

Updated February 10, 2022

IMA Public Health Committee Guidance

(1) If you have not had COVID-19 and are unvaccinated, you and your family, friends and loved ones are at risk. Please get vaccinated as soon as possible. (2) if you previously had COVID-19, we cannot tell you how much or how little protection you may have against getting COVID-19 again and how long that protection may last, and whether getting the virus again might cause more severe disease, so please get at least one dose of vaccine.

The vaccine is safe and effective. As the governor [previously stated on Sept. 21, 2021](#), "Since the COVID-19 vaccine was made widely available to everyone in May, nearly all new COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are among the unvaccinated." Today, it remains true that the majority of hospitalizations and deaths continue to occur in the unvaccinated.

Natural Immunity vs. Vaccine-induced immunity

1. The IMA is committed to promoting the health and safety of Idahoans.
2. The science around COVID-19 continues to evolve and the information regarding natural immunity (immunity from getting the COVID-19 infection) vs. vaccine-induced immunity differ in what science is available to evaluate the amount of protection provided. This is an important point because natural immunity may differ based on which variant the person was previously infected with and which new variants are circulating.
3. There are conflicting data from studies looking at the strength and durability of natural immunity in comparison to vaccines. The studies comparing natural immunity to vaccines often involve only one vaccine, and any conclusions from these studies cannot be assumed to be the same for other COVID-19 vaccines or vaccines with boosters. These studies also have taken place in different countries at different times, where the virus variants (different types of COVID-19) may differ from what we have experienced in the U.S.
4. The fact that some people who have recovered from COVID-19 appear to have strong immunity that lasts for many months is a very good thing. However, we do not want Idahoans to get COVID-19 in the first place and risk the fate of over

900,000 Americans who have died from COVID-19. But it is good news that it appears there is some protection from future reinfection and severe disease after recovery. It remains unclear how long natural immunity lasts and how protective that immunity will be against future variants. There are some reports that natural infection may be less effective in preventing against Omicron infection, e.g., see <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/mrc-global-infectious-disease-analysis/covid-19/report-49-Omicron/>. Also, [a study published just this month](#), showed that prior infection (which may result in some natural immunity) was less protective against getting COVID-19 again (reinfection) and severe disease with the omicron variant compared to the delta variant, as is also the case with vaccination.

5. Citizens often ask if natural immunity is as “good” as vaccine-induced immunity. It’s important to start any discussion by emphasizing that although there is some protection from future infections, getting COVID-19 and developing natural immunity as a result of infection is far more dangerous than getting vaccinated and developing vaccine-induced immunity. This includes Omicron, which has lower hospitalization rates than previous variants, but can still cause severe disease and death. **It is clear from multiple studies that the best protection comes when individuals with prior COVID-19 infections get vaccinated and when those who have been vaccinated get boosted.**
6. COVID-19 has caused many hospitalizations, deaths and in many cases long-term complications, such as fatigue, memory problems, and other symptoms that are often referred to as “long COVID.” These ongoing symptoms may lead to long-term disability. It’s important to include the risk of long COVID, cardiovascular disease and the many other potential complications that can follow infection in any discussion about risks of the disease. **We now know that vaccines do greatly reduce the risk of suffering these long-term symptoms;** e.g., see [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099\(21\)00460-6/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/laninf/article/PIIS1473-3099(21)00460-6/fulltext).
7. While some studies have looked back at populations of people who have had COVID-19 and found evidence of strong immunity, it should be noted that natural immunity is unpredictable – some people develop more protection for a longer period of time than others. The current problem is that we have no simple way to identify people who have recovered from COVID-19 that are likely to have strong and long-lasting immunity.
8. Having a positive antibody test does not necessarily mean that someone is protected from getting sick again, nor that any protection they have will protect against future variants of COVID-19. In fact, [recent evidence suggests vaccination induced antibody protection is more effective than natural immunity](#).
9. Studies have looked at the natural immunity of people who, in most cases, had COVID-19 with symptoms. (There was a highly publicized Israeli study posted in August of 2021 that reported a surprisingly high natural immunity over 2 doses of a

vaccine. That study has not yet been peer-reviewed, nor published in a peer reviewed journal. Again, deliberate infection in an attempt to gain immunity is not advised due to the risks of severe illness, long-COVID, and death.) We do not have enough data to determine whether those who previously had COVID-19 without any symptoms or those who were hospitalized with severe COVID-19, have strong and long-lasting immunity. There are reasons based upon our knowledge of immunology to believe that it could be different for these individuals.

10. There is some decreasing immunity over time among people who have had COVID-19, as is the case for those who are vaccinated. It is likely that this period of time is different for every person.
11. Even those who previously had COVID-19 appear to benefit from a single dose of vaccine.
12. Some people have suggested intentional mass infections in order to reach “herd immunity” and bring the pandemic to an end. Please realize that:
 - a. Mass infections will result in disruptions to schools and risks overwhelming urgent care centers and hospitals.
 - b. Mass infections could result in large numbers of deaths as we currently face shortages in many of our therapeutic options which are most effective for treating COVID-19.
 - c. Mass infections will greatly increase the risk of long-term health care problems and costs, as well as decreased employee productivity, which will adversely affect the economy. There will be more long-COVID disability.
 - d. Mass infections will greatly increase the potential for new variants of concern that may have greater ability to escape the immunity created by prior infection or vaccination.
 - e. Herd immunity to the SARS-CoV-2 virus is likely not attainable, see <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7929447/>. Experts such as the Infectious Diseases Society of America strongly recommend against mass infections in an effort to try to achieve herd immunity, see <https://www.idsociety.org/news--publications-new/articles/2020/herd-immunity-is-not-an-answer-to-a-pandemic/>.

General References

Natural immunity vs. vaccine-induced immunity to COVID-19

<https://connect.uclahealth.org/2022/01/20/natural-immunity-vs-vaccine-induced-immunity-to-covid-19/>

COVID-19 natural immunity <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/covid-natural-immunity-what-you-need-to-know>

COVID-19: Natural vs. vaccine-induced immunity https://www.chop.edu/news/feature-article-covid-19-natural-versus-vaccine-induced-immunity?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=VEC+Parents+PACK+December+2021&utm_term=feature+article&utm_content=natural+immunity+vaccination+COVID-19&fbclid=IwAR3lXgQWN3KqPPWrXwGi29EZrfl4Gq56U5UdVt7rSKOdDEhJkf0I92bdQU

Omicron largely evades immunity from past infection or two vaccine doses
<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/232698/omicron-largely-evades-immunity-from-past/>

Prevention of Long COVID with vaccines
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600\(22\)00020-0/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanres/article/PIIS2213-2600(22)00020-0/fulltext)

AND

<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-022-00177-5>

COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations by vaccination or prior infection status
https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/71/wr/mm7104e1.htm?s_cid=mm7104e1_w

Natural infection + vaccination provides maximal protection
<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/infection-vaccination-together-protection-covid-variants>