

I'm a Baby When It Comes to Shots

Rabbi Nancy Rita Myers | Beth David



I've never been good with shots or medical procedures. I get anxious just thinking about it.

During previous flu seasons, I would psyche myself up to get an injection. More often than not, I didn't go through with it. When it did happen, it was because I was already at my internist when she would casually ask if I had the flu shot. When I

replied, "no," she would ask if I would like it now. Just seconds after a weak nod of my head, her nurse was in with the needle. Ouch! It was over quick.

I have to tell you that getting my Pfizer shot was very different. Back in early March, it wasn't so easy to procure the vaccine. Like many of you, I scrolled through multiple sites, hour by hour, until I nailed two appointments at Cal State Pomona. I was so excited that I drove up there extra early. As I waited in line, getting closer to the medical professionals, I got teary with emotion that finally, finally I would be vaccinated. I didn't care about the needle, sore arm, or the possibility of running a fever for a day or two. I was finally free.

I know many of you felt the same way. For me, after being fully vaccinated, I no longer had to fear that I may accidentally infect a senior or someone with a compromised immune system. There's a beautiful teaching in the Talmud that states, "*Kol yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*, all of Israel are responsible for each other." (Shevuot 39a) I felt so good to do my part to lessen the transmission of the virus and to finally be able to hug others and just relax. I know there are some fears out there about the vaccine and there's a lot of misinformation on social media sites. However, to have 94-95% protection against getting or transmitting COVID-19 and an even higher percentage of not being hospitalized or dying from it, are incredible odds. I wish


I had 95% protection against getting into a car accident or contracting cancer. How grateful I am to our medical researchers who have been able to create such an effective vaccine that has decreased the virus in our communities. I can only hope more and more people choose to be vaccinated.

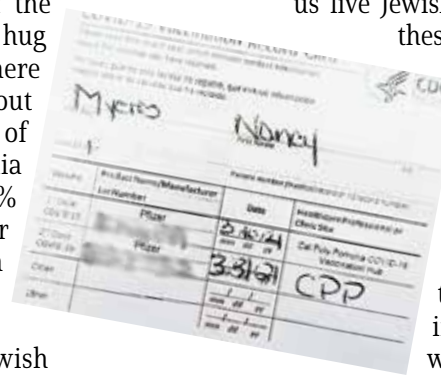
In the meantime, it is so good to see my congregants in the synagogue. The psalmist says, "*Hinei ma tov*

umanayim, how good it is when brothers/sisters come together." It really is wonderful to see people laugh together, eat and drink, pray and study in person.

I am appreciative of the capability of Zoom, Live Streaming, and Facebook Live. These technological ways of connecting will continue to evolve and help us live Jewishly. I will certainly continue to utilize these tools for meeting and to reach people when they can't come to synagogue. However, being in person, is just irreplaceable. We can talk, debate, and engage with one another easily and even, gulp, sing together, providing all are fully vaccinated, of course.

While there are fears of COVID-19 to be sure, we are undoubtedly in a much better place than where we were a year ago. We can strengthen one another as we learn, study, and celebrate the beauty of our tradition.

May you and your family be healthy and have many wonderful experiences this summer. And when or if there is a need for a booster, I promise you, I will not be a baby about it. I will readily extend my arm for the sake of life for you, me, and our community. *L'chaim.* 



For Some the Pandemic is Far From Over

Kathryn Miles | Executive Director, Jewish Family & Children's Service



In March of 2020, when the world shut down and we shifted to working and attending school from home, except, of course, for the amazing essential workers. They continued to put themselves at risk to ensure that the rest of us were able to do things like buy groceries, receive medical care, and

do our banking. I doubt that many of us thought that the coronavirus pandemic would last for more than a year. I certainly did not. After spending numerous holidays, birthdays and other milestones distanced from family and friends, we have started to shift back to some semblance of normalcy, recognizing that some aspects of our lives will never go back to what they were pre-pandemic.

We are a nation in mourning, with more than half a million people dead due to COVID-19. Many of us have lost loved ones or know people who have lost loved ones and may not have had the opportunity to say goodbye or grieve through our usual traditions. We are also grieving jobs lost, events cancelled, and opportunities missed: graduations, proms, weddings, baby showers, and summer vacations.

What became painfully apparent to me was the disparity of people's experiences during the stay-at-home orders. Yes, it was difficult for me to make the shift to working from home. It was a struggle to find toilet paper and cleaning supplies. Yes, living alone and only seeing family and friends on Zoom was lonely.

While this past year has been difficult for everyone, it is important to recognize that low-income communities and communities of color were impacted at significantly higher rates. Not only were the rates of COVID-19 higher among these groups, they also experienced higher rates of job loss, food insecurity and childcare challenges. At JFCS we saw firsthand the fear of deportation for people who are not in the country legally, stigma and judgement toward those who contracted the coronavirus, and distrust of the medical system.

People living in homes with instances of domestic violence and child abuse suddenly found themselves trapped with their abusers, unable to access the solace of school or work or to safely access services. The number of child abuse reports dropped drastically as children were not seeing teachers, coaches, and other adults in person.

As I write this, JFCS has a three- to five- month waiting list for counseling services. According to the people who are calling, we are one of the only organizations in the area that hasn't closed their waiting list. We are in the middle of a mental health crisis as the past year is catching up with us. People are experiencing increased anxiety as the world begins to open again. Mental health providers are tired. They have been supporting others while simultaneously experiencing many of the same challenges as their clients during this collective trauma.

I recognize that my job gives me a unique perspective on this situation. I am struck by the resiliency I have witnessed. I am hopeful that as we

emerge from the pandemic, we will be patient and kind to one another. Everyone needs to take re-entry at their own pace. We cannot know the impact that the events of the last 14 months has had on others. There are people who will jump right back into life and business as usual. Other people will proceed more cautiously, perhaps choosing never to return to pre-pandemic ways and habits. Let's set the judgement aside and recognize that both options are okay.

I am also hopeful that those of us who were fortunate enough to ride out the pandemic comfortably and safely in our homes will remember those who were

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in more challenging situations. These disparities will have long-lasting consequences on our society, and the challenges are not

over. We have yet to see what will happen when the moratoriums on evictions and utility shut-offs are lifted. There are programs for rental assistance but they are complicated to navigate. We need to advocate on behalf of those who need assistance to keep a roof over their head, the lights on in their home, and food on the table.

There are many positive changes coming to fruition as more people are vaccinated and we can gather together again. People are hugging, traveling, and celebrating. It is wonderful to see people enjoying life. It would be a shame for us to pretend that the disparities that existed pre-pandemic have not been exacerbated. 