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TOP STORY

## 'Protecting others' tops motivations to get vaccine

By Steph Leonard

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Sally and Roger Stutsman with their granddaughter, Sophie. Levi Lyle and his wife Jill with their family (left to right) Emerson, Ivy, Elyse and Olivia. Roxanne Warburton and her husband Mark with their teens Maverick, Kaetlyn, and Kennedy. Steve Hester and his wife Megan with their daughter, Paige.

Submitted photos

By Steph Leonard

As I write this June 30, the Delta variant mutation first identified in India, has become the fastest-spreading coronavirus variant in the U.S. Midwest region 7 — Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas — is the Delta hot spot, with the highest proportion and fastest growth among U.S. regions.

Yet as the Delta variant threatens, we have a window of opportunity and tools to prevent illness, suffering and unnecessary deaths in our communities: Two doses of Pfizer or Moderna vaccines have been shown to protect against Delta and current variants. They're free, safe and available. Kids age 12 and up can now be protected.

If you're still waiting to see about others' vaccination choices and experiences before you commit, these rural Iowans have something to share:

**Steve Hester, teacher, coach and EMT, North English, Iowa**

I am a science teacher, coach, EMT, and a member of a close-knit family that has older individuals in it, and it was an easy decision for me to get the vaccine. I contracted the virus at the end of November during an outbreak at our school with limited exposure chances. My positive test result caused a quarantine of my wrestling team that I was coaching, and they missed two weeks of competition. Even knowing how fast this virus was spreading, that was the moment I realized just how easy it was to contract this COVID virus and to possibly spread it with consequences for all of those whom you come into contact with.

In one of my classes, we talk about viruses and pandemics, so I have studied and taught just how fast a virus can mutate to a different and maybe deadlier version of itself. We also discuss vaccines and the most current technological approach with mRNA to create vaccines that are efficient and effective. These were just more reasons to get vaccinated even though I had contracted the virus earlier. I knew there was a chance I could still get re-infected with a mutated virus that could be a deadlier version of what I contracted the first time.

All this information was important in making my decision, but the main reason I jumped on my first chance to get vaccinated was because of my family and those who I love. I will do anything to protect my family, and during this pandemic it was the best way to make sure my wife, children, and parents would not contract the virus from me.

**Roger and Sally Stutsman, retired farmers, Riverside, Iowa**

We got our shots not only because it was the right thing to do, but because our 12-year-old granddaughter has compromised lungs, so we wanted to make sure she was safe from COVID.

It is such a relief for our entire family that we have all received the vaccination. We can now resume our activities without fear of COVID.

Considering polio and prior epidemics, where would we be today if our parents and others rejected the opportunity to control and eliminate polio by getting vaccinated? Getting vaccinated is about community: caring about others as well as yourself.

### **Roxanne Warburton, nurse, Spencer, Iowa**

I'm a farmer's daughter, and I've been a labor and delivery nurse for 25 years at our local hospital and help out in other units as well, so I got vaccinated to protect my patients and myself.

I was nervous to get vaccinated as I was one of the first to sign up for my vaccine in my area, but it was painless. I got a little sore arm but had no other symptoms or side effects from either COVID vaccine.

A family member of mine tested positive for COVID last summer, so my whole family had to quarantine for two weeks and miss our family vacation. It was so scary for me, as so much was unknown about COVID, and it's a devastating virus. It was also a huge inconvenience for me and my family, and we never wanted to feel like that again!

This COVID vaccine is 95% effective! It was a no-brainer for me and my family! My whole family (my husband Mark, who is our local Spencer police chief and even my three teenagers) didn't hesitate to get vaccinated! I gave my teens the choice, and they didn't hesitate; they said they want to be free! We all need to get vaccinated to stop the spread!

### **Levi Lyle, farmer, Keota, Iowa**

I sought to be vaccinated for the COVID virus because I feel it is important to be thoughtful to those who are at greatest risk. Since receiving the vaccination in April, I have experienced a sense of relief that I can be among crowds and know I am less likely to infect others or contract the illness myself.

I understand people may have strong opinions for or against vaccination. Those who purchase the organic aronia berries and tart cherries I grow or who have read the books I author about regenerative agriculture know I have a holistic view of nature, agriculture and personal health. Even those who eat a nutritious diet, exercise regularly, and generally have a strong immune system may come down with COVID, though, because it's a virus our bodies cannot yet easily recognize and adapt to.

For me personally, I got vaccinated because I have seen members of my community, young and elderly alike, suffer greatly due to COVID. It was the right thing for my family and community.

### **Gene Lucht, IFT Public Affairs Editor, Ankeny**

I got my Pfizer vaccine shots this spring. I had no side-effects at all. My wife had a sore arm for a day or so after her shot. We were both eager to get our shots and have no regrets. Now my two children in their 20s are also vaccinated.

While I understand that some people are concerned about the speed with which these vaccines were developed, I struggle to understand the outright refusal of others to get vaccinated. My grandfather was lucky enough to survive the flu epidemic of 1918. My father was stricken with polio at 15 and was lucky enough to survive at a time when many people died of that disease.

My children are lucky that they don't have to worry about diseases such as polio, but I think that sometimes we forget the importance of such vaccines and the fact that without them many more people would die every year.

For me, this was an easy decision.

- If you are skeptical about COVID or hesitant about vaccination, visit with your doctor.
  - If you are procrastinating or concerned about the time to get vaccinated, now's the time to get ahead of Delta.
  - If you're not concerned with your own susceptibility, is remaining unvaccinated worth the risk and burden to the rest of your family and community?
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