

DECEMBER 2021

A MESSAGE FROM DR. KLEINHANS

AND YOUR CRESTON
VALLEY PHYSICIANS



Dear Friends,

We are doctors who are also parents, caregivers and your neighbours here in Creston. As the pandemic continues to take a toll on our community, we see what our patients have given up these past two years. We hear of family members who have died from COVID. We empathize with you over not having seen loved ones in a very long time.

While I don't find it very useful to talk about the "total number of cases" in an area, I would like to share with you where we, as a community, are now. Since the start of the pandemic, Creston has had 425 confirmed cases. As of December 15, 2021, we had three active cases in Creston. The majority of spread happens through household spread and case clusters. In Creston, 73.6% of people 12 and older have had their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 69.1% are fully vaccinated. Unfortunately, this number places us in **the bottom third of vaccinated communities in the Interior Health region**. In contrast, 91.9% of Revelstoke residents are fully vaccinated - way to go!

A year ago, back in December 2020, we were all hoping that becoming vaccinated against COVID would be our ticket out of the pandemic, and that life would continue as we once knew it. And while vaccination may not yet be the

silver bullet we all long for, we are relieved to report that the vaccines have, indeed, reduced the severity of the COVID cases we see.

In British Columbia, we were able to start vaccinating children aged 5-11 against COVID at the end of November 2021. Let's be honest: the mere thought of an injection needle is enough to instill at least some fear in the hearts of adults and children alike! When the time came for my two youngest sons to get their vaccines, it was no different. Apart from the fantastic public health nurse and the very cool "Find Susie/Where's Waldo" poster at the clinic, what helped them tremendously was to understand what happens when we get vaccinated. By getting vaccinated against COVID, your body is building up an army of soldiers that will fight for you when exposed to the virus. So, if you are vaccinated and you then get COVID-19, your chances of getting severely ill are **much less** as you already have the soldiers ready to fight for you!

We understand that some members of the community and, in particular, many parents still have questions and concerns about the COVID-19 vaccination. We would like to address some of these issues here.

Let's talk side effects:

The pediatric COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5-11 is **a third of the adult vaccine** dose, and, as shown in a Pfizer study of 3000 children, side effects are much less common and less severe in children than in adults. The most common side effect in children is a sore arm. 40% of children getting the COVID vaccine are likely to feel fatigued. Other less common, but possible, side effects are headaches, chills and muscle aches. Apart from a sore arm, neither of my sons had any post-vaccine symptoms and were energetic as ever in the days following their vaccinations.

Early on, there were some concerns about myocarditis (inflammation of the heart) in youth. Fortunately, research has shown that there is a very low incidence of myocarditis in this age group. Most of the cases of vaccine related myocarditis are mild and self-resolving. On the contrary, the myocarditis you can get from actually contracting COVID-19 lasts longer and will make you much sicker.

Should I be worried about delayed side effects in the years to come?

It is unlikely that we'll see any long-term effects from the vaccine, and there are a few reasons for that:

- 1.** This is how the mRNA vaccine works. Think of Pfizer and Moderna as Snapchat messages - they deliver messages for your body to make a protein against the COVID-19 spike protein. They are only temporary messages that don't become part of your body. Once the messages are delivered, the mRNA part dies off. That's why most of the side effects happen in the first few days after receiving the vaccine.
- 2.** The second phase of the side effects are from your immune system responding to the

vaccine. Your immune response peaks over the weeks following vaccination, then reaches a plateau after about 4-6 weeks. So, if there are any serious side effects, they should be seen within this time frame.

To summarize, it is extremely unlikely that further side effects will surface two years down the road. That's just not how vaccines work.

But mRNA technology is so new!

Actually, this is not the case! Researchers have been studying mRNA technology since the 1960s. So, we do actually have long-term data on the safety of mRNA vaccines, which researchers were able to apply to COVID when the pandemic first reared its ugly head. This is the reason we were able to engineer the vaccine so quickly! We built on all the research that has been done in the past couple of decades - research which, I might add, has raised no red flags for the use of mRNA technology. In a recent issue of the Economist magazine, they mention using mRNA technology to create vaccines against Malaria and HIV. Isn't that just incredible?

Can the COVID-19 vaccine affect fertility?

There is **no evidence** that the vaccine would, in any way, impact fertility. It simply cannot. There are no hormones in the mRNA and the vaccine doesn't integrate into your cells. However, in adults who have contracted COVID-19, we have seen a five times higher risk of erectile dysfunction.

Do the benefits still outweigh the risks?

We know that children are not severely impacted by contracting COVID. Most of them will experience only mild symptoms. As parents and

caregivers, I know you are as grateful as I am that the first pandemic we are experiencing is not one that kills children - think polio and smallpox! Unfortunately, some kids do get very sick. In BC, we've lost children to MSIS (multi-system inflammatory syndrome). Every child death from a preventable disease is an unacceptable death. The vaccine may not be a bulletproof vest, but it truly does provide protection against severe disease and greatly reduces the risk of getting COVID and passing it on to others. On a community-wide level, every extra person that gets vaccinated moves us one step closer to getting back to "normal".

Personally, I believe one of the biggest benefits of getting kids vaccinated is that they wouldn't have to isolate if they were to come into contact with a COVID positive person. This would save them from disruptions to school and sports activities. We know first-hand what isolation does to our mental health - it's even worse for our children.

How long does the vaccine take to work?

Once you're two weeks post your first dose, you'll have a lower risk of getting COVID. Your second dose of the COVID vaccine should ideally be administered three months after the first (12 weeks), but no sooner than 19 days after your first dose.

My child has an allergy – are the COVID vaccinations still safe?

There is no increased risk of reaction if you have food or environmental allergies. The only thing to be aware of is an allergy to PEG (Polyethylene Glycol - used for constipation). This is extremely rare.

Essentially, getting vaccinated turns a potentially devastating respiratory virus into a mere cold.

It's still no fun to deal with, but at least you're less likely to require hospital admission and/or ventilation.

When it comes to mentally preparing your child to get the vaccine, our amazing Public Health nurses advise that you know your child best and you are best able to decide how much lead time to give them. Some children may do better hearing about their vaccination appointment on the day of. In Creston, the COVID-19 vaccination clinic at the Creston Health Centre (lower Level of Creston Valley Hospital) will be open until December 23, 2021 between 9:00 am - 3:30 pm. The clinic will be closed between December 24, 2021 and January 3, 2022. Children aged 5-11 require an appointment, whereas all persons 12 and older can drop in for their first and second dose. This means that if you are not vaccinated and taking your child for their shot, you can get yours at the same time. All COVID-19 booster shots must be booked appointments – either by booking online or calling 1-833-838-2323 once you receive your invitation to book. Consider coordinating to go with your child's best friend and celebrate with a DQ blizzard afterwards!

After almost two years of living in the midst of the pandemic, I think we've all come to accept that COVID isn't going anywhere anytime soon. My hope for all of us is to be realistic in how we approach the New Year.

You may have heard about the Stockdale Paradox. General Stockdale was a pilot in the Navy and on September 9th, 1965 his plane was shot down in northern Vietnam. He parachuted into a small village, where he was captured and severely beaten. He then spent the next seven years as a prisoner of war. Years later, when asked why he survived and others didn't, he answered, "Oh, that's easy. They were optimists". The optimists were the prisoners of war who said, "We're going to be out by Christmas". And Christmas would come and go. Then

they'd say, "We'll be out by Easter". And Easter would pass, then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. "The optimists died of a broken heart," Stockdale explained. "The survivors", he said, prevailed by marshalling, "the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of [their] current situation, whatever they might be".

We are resilient, and we will get through this, but we have to continue our efforts to get vaccinated, decrease the spread of virus and, in the process, limit the number of variants that may crop up. Please do your part by getting your COVID-19 vaccination, keep up with social distancing when in a crowd, wear your mask when indoors in public spaces and follow all public health guidelines.

As we reflect on the year that has been and look ahead to 2022, I am inspired by the words of Kristin Neff, a world leader on mindfulness. In her latest newsletter, she talks about gratitude as an important form of self-compassion. Because of the brain's negativity bias (we evolved for survival, not happiness), we tend to primarily focus on problems in our lives. She writes, "you may be feeling down about this seemingly never-ending pandemic, disrupted plans, stress, politics, inflation. Gratitude helps prevent us from being overwhelmed with negativity. The glass is half full as well as half empty, but it's very hard to see unless we make an intentional effort".

As I take stock of the blessings and challenges we were dealt in 2021, I am deeply thankful to our healthcare workers who have shown incredible resilience and compassion throughout the pandemic. This year, our healthcare workforce faced not only a great deal of COVID related illness and death, they also had to deal with vaccine protests right outside their places of work, and a surge in illicit drug overdoses.

2021 was the deadliest year to date for drug-related deaths in BC; fatalities were recorded in all age groups and in every local health area in

the province. Please ensure that you have a Naloxone kit if you think you may be in a situation where drugs will be present. Naloxone saves lives. If you are using alone, download the "LIFEGUARD app" for free as a harm reduction tool to prevent an overdose. If you are using and ready to make a change, please reach out to Mental Health at 301-MHSU (301 6478) . **Drug overdose deaths are 100% avoidable.**

2021 is also the year the harmful legacy of Residential Schools was revealed in even greater detail. I would like to reiterate the commitment made by the CEO of Interior Health, Susan Brown, acknowledging the harm done by Residential Schools and to doing the work that must be done if we, as a country, are to move towards a better future. We have a lot to learn; and in Creston, we are committed to building trust in our relationships with the Yaqan Nukiy people, and to collaborate in creating an environment that is welcoming and provides culturally-safe health care. I am grateful to those who worked hard to bring to light the painful truth of Residential Schools in our province; and to all of those who are committed to working hard to redress the injustices of the past. I am grateful to live and work on the unceded traditional territory of the Yaqan Nukiy within the Ktunaxa Nations. I am grateful to belong to the community of Creston.

And, I am grateful to each one of you, my fellow community members. Thank you for doing your part to keep our community safe. Let's tiptoe with care into 2022, and let's be sure to make it a good one! Let's continue to support our families, friends and neighbours and get through this pandemic, together.

**Dr. Nerine Kleinhans
and your Creston Valley Physicians**

For more information visit: [Letstalk.Creston.ca/covid-19](https://letstalk.creston.ca/covid-19)

