|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| |  | | --- | | **Graphical user interface, text  Description automatically generated**  **A Message from the Chief of Staff:  Addressing COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy**  Dear Veterans,  A picture containing person, indoor  Description automatically generatedEnglish writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley once said, “There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.” This statement is a perfect depiction of the hesitancy individuals may feel about receiving the [COVID-19 Vaccine](https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/).  This hesitancy is understandable. There is a lot of information (and misinformation) which makes it difficult in determining if getting vaccinated is the right choice for you. Let the following facts help you gain a better understanding of the currently FDA authorized COVID-19 Vaccines.   * No vaccine (actually, nothing in medicine) is 100% safe. All vaccines including those that protect against COVID-19 have gone through careful testing and have met rigorous standards set forth by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) before being released to the public. * Individuals perceive the development and timeline for emergency use authorization (EUA) of the COVID-19 Vaccine as “rushed.” Medical experts have been studying messenger RNA (mRNA) for decades using similar viruses to COVID-19 like SARS and MERS. The mRNA technology was actually developed in the 1990s to be prepared for a significant outbreak of a virus. This is just the first time mRNA vaccine has been broadly tested and used in clinical practice. It makes sense. Why start from scratch or recreate the wheel when there is previous research that can help to protect us from COVID-19? * COVID-19 Vaccines have been proven to be safe, effective, and are one of the keys to fighting this pandemic. Getting vaccinated is an easy step you can take to help keep your family and those most vulnerable safe. Although we may never go back to our “pre-pandemic normal,” we can only manage the pandemic if enough people get vaccinated. As vaccines roll out, we must still participate in recommended precautions (wearing a mask, practicing good hand hygiene, avoiding crowds, etc.) to significantly reduce the spread of the virus. * Severe allergic reaction to the COVID-19 Vaccine is extremely rare with reported incidence of less than 5 per million. After vaccination, individuals are required to be monitored for any reaction. Medical staff stand by and are ready to offer treatment if needed. Individuals may experience some side effects, which is a normal sign that your body is building protection. These side effects may include having flu like symptoms or may even affect a person’s ability to do daily activities. Before assuming the worst, discuss the vaccine with your doctor, who can access your risk and provide additional information on how to get vaccinated safely.   I decided to get vaccinated because I did not want to get COVID-19 nor spread it to others such as my family, coworkers and friends. I received my 1st vaccination between the holidays and felt that this was the “best gift ever”!  We are fortunate to have easy access to the vaccination. This is not always the case for non-health care workers. My parents, for example, are not able to get the COVID-19 vaccinate yet. Fortunately, they are scheduled to receive it in March even though they are of advanced age. Because of COVID-19, I have not seen my parents in over a year and am looking forward to reuniting with them as soon as both of them are fully vaccinated as well!  Before saying no to the COVID-19 vaccination or taking the “wait and see” approach, I encourage you to get informed and discuss your options with your healthcare provider.  Veterans who are enrolled and eligible who fall into one of the [current categories](https://www.northflorida.va.gov/services/covid-19-vaccines.asp), can call **352-548-6000 ext. 103755,** to schedule an appointment.  If you are unsure about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, here is an excellent collection of resources on covid-19 vaccine, including a frequently asked question section:  <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/faq.html>  Be safe,  Ilona Schmalfuss, MD  Chief of Staff | | VA Healthcare: Defining Excellence in the 21st Century | | **North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System** Malcom Randall and Lake City VA Medical Center’s 1601 Southwest Archer Road | Gainesville, FL 32608-1135 | PH: 352-376-1611  619 South Marion Avenue | Lake City, FL 32025-5808 | PH: 386-755-3016  The North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System is one of the nation's leading VA healthcare systems, employing more than 5,600 medical professionals and support staff dedicated to providing high quality care to Veterans residing throughout north Florida and south Georgia. The organization operates fifteen facilities to include two medical centers located in Gainesville and Lake City, and clinics located throughout a 50-county catchment area.  To learn more about the facilities and services offered by the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System, please visit [www.northflorida.va.gov](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.northflorida.va.gov%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7Ce208296d0bc74912cfd108d8d3623775%7Ce95f1b23abaf45ee821db7ab251ab3bf%7C0%7C0%7C637491766068787491%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=rpRZfIYtiZ%2F0w2jpXR92ALI25mzpRqEBl6UpmHfGUIQ%3D&reserved=0) or “like us on Facebook at [https://www.facebook.com/VANFSG](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2FVANFSG&data=04%7C01%7C%7Ce208296d0bc74912cfd108d8d3623775%7Ce95f1b23abaf45ee821db7ab251ab3bf%7C0%7C0%7C637491766068787491%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=0S5Bpg%2Blw99PASZDwt8OncIDysCgMLsg37%2FEifWZBK8%3D&reserved=0), or follow us on Instagram at [https://www.instagram.com/VANFSG/](https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.instagram.com%2FVANFSG%2F&data=04%7C01%7C%7Ce208296d0bc74912cfd108d8d3623775%7Ce95f1b23abaf45ee821db7ab251ab3bf%7C0%7C0%7C637491766068797461%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=bz93m4W0%2BjBv6yuQxqWX%2BXumZ3SwkatQTNC7YvXQyN8%3D&reserved=0)  For any questions about the content of this message, please contact the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System Office of Public Affairs at 352-348-7130 or email [vhanflpublicaffairs@va.gov](mailto:vhanflpublicaffairs@va.gov). | |