



*Serving the Communities of Blackstone, Douglas, Hopedale, Mendon, Millville, Northbridge, Upton, and Uxbridge*



You're confused about COVID vaccines and we hear you. In fact, we in the public health field are likely the ones who caused much of the confusion. We've tossed out terms such as "fully vaccinated," "up-to-date," and "protection against infection" when the first vaccine was released three-plus years ago. In many cases, we were giving inaccurate or incomplete information, not out of any agenda but, rather, based on research and information we had at *that time*.

COVID is a 100-year event, a new virus we had no knowledge of prior to its emergence in 2019, hence the term "novel." It turned into a worldwide pandemic and a killer. As we

scrambled to keep people safe and healthy, scientists at the same time were working at "warp speed" to find a vaccine or a cure, whichever they could. When the first vaccine proved effective, it was quickly rolled out in unprecedented time. What was not anticipated was how quickly and efficiently COVID and its variants and subvariants evolved to evade the manufactured and internal antibodies.

What we now know is that the original vaccine protected against the original strain but subsequent variants required a different formula, which came in the way of the bivalent booster, which helped reduce symptoms of the first two variants as well as the emerging Omicron. But each new variant became immune-evasive and required more protection. We also found the effectiveness of the vaccines waned over time, especially in older adults and those who are at-risk or immunocompromised.

Which brings us to today and our attempt to help clear up the confusion and give you the best information we have. If you have not been vaccinated since September 1 of last year, you do not have the most robust protection. You are not "fully vaccinated" or "up-to-date." In fact, let's forget those terms and just say you are not considered vaccinated, the same as if you didn't get this season's flu shot. Last season's flu shot will not protect you and neither will COVID vaccines prior to Sept. 1.

Also, like the flu shot, older adults 65 and over need a higher dose as their natural immunity decreases with age. Like the "high dose" flu shot seniors get in the Fall compared with the regular shot for most everyone else, an extra layer of protection with the COVID vaccine appears to boost protection.

So here's the basic message:

- **If you're 65 or over, in relatively good health, and have had one shot since Labor Day, it is recommended that you get a booster shot no sooner than four months after your first shot. If you are unsure, please talk with your doctor.**
- **If you are under the age of 65, are not considered at-risk or immunocompromised, and have been vaccinated since Labor Day, you're in good shape.**
- **If you have medical conditions that place you at-risk of serious complications from COVID, have comorbidities, or are immunocompromised, and have received one shot since Sept. 1, you can get a second shot two months after your first with your physician's approval.**
- **If you are in any of the above categories and have not been vaccinated since Sept. 1, please consider getting one for your protection as well as your family, friends, and community.**

The issue isn't that we've been purposely giving out misinformation; rather, we're still learning about this disease and as we learn more, our knowledge base changes. Our goal is to keep families and our communities well and we will be transparent about it.