

Dr. Charles Pearce

Emergency Physician, Vice President of Medical Affairs at Upland Hills Health, serving on the COVID-19 Incident Command Team



What concerns you most about the current state of the pandemic?

“As I write this nearing the end of December, there is a COVID related death every 30 seconds in the United States. The numbers in our state continue to improve, but who is to know how transient or durable that may be.”

Do you feel the development and approval of COVID-19 vaccines happened too fast? Please explain.

“The vaccination development and now deployment has been phenomenal- a testament to solid science, international collaboration, an infectious disease out of control, and courageous volunteers. I don't think there were any corners cut; in fact, I think safety has been paramount to the whole process.”

Do you feel the vaccine is safe? What is the most important piece of evidence that brought you to this conclusion?

“I do feel the current approved (Pfizer and Moderna) vaccines are safe. mRNA technology as a delivery platform has been around for 30 years. There has been significant research in both infectious disease and oncology. From the early days of the pandemic, I watched closely as the mRNA technology was spotlighted and then ultimately took center stage. I had faith in the principles and science behind the technology, but reserved judgement until the data of the trials started to come out this fall. Now that the data has been published, reviewed, and evaluated by the FDA, CDC/ACIP, I feel very comfortable with both the safety and efficacy of these two vaccines. In fact, I have already been vaccinated with the Pfizer vaccine and I can tell you that I wouldn't have done so without great confidence in both safety and efficacy.”

What concerns you most about the vaccine(s) or the vaccination allocation or distribution process?

“One concern of mine is patience. This first distribution/allocation is simply the groundbreaking ceremony in a massive, multi-national construction project that will take months to years to complete. We will get there. Great things are to come, but we need to continue our mitigation

practices (hand washing, face covering, physical distancing) until we at least have a solid foundation.

Throughout this pandemic, I have worried most about vulnerable populations and these populations continue to concern me. Equitable vaccination allocation to these vulnerable populations in our community, in our own country and abroad is essential."

Will you get the vaccine? In addition, what motivates you most toward this decision?

"Yes, I have already been vaccinated with the first dose. The day after being vaccinated, I had some soreness to my shoulder at the injection site and I had about an hour and a half of fatigue/malaise. I expect to have more notable symptoms after my second shot, but I view this as a small price to pay to eventually get ourselves back to a semblance of normalcy and most importantly to protect my community, my colleagues, and my family."

Dr. Sarah Fox

Family Medicine Physician, Vice President of Primary Care at Upland Hills Health, serving on the COVID-19 Incident Command Team

What concerns you most about the current state of the pandemic?

"We continue to see high rates of community spread of this illness, despite months of knowing what prevents the spread of this: social distancing, staying home when sick or exposed, hand washing, and consistent mask wearing. We are seeing some of our friends, neighbors, and family members end up with severe disease, resulting in hospitalization or death in some cases. Some cases have been quite prolonged, with patients in the hospital for weeks or months."



Do you feel the development and approval of COVID-19 vaccines happened too fast? Please explain.

"This vaccine development was certainly much faster than we typically have seen, but that does not mean it was done "too fast". Scientists were fortunate to be able to build on previous vaccine efforts for other SARS viruses, and thanks to scientific work from the last decade, the genetic sequence of the virus was shared worldwide months before some countries even had their first case of the virus. That allowed researchers to develop vaccine targets and start working through design of the production and study of vaccine safety at an accelerated schedule. The safety and effectiveness trials are not something that can be speeded up, so it

was very important to have those first preparation steps done quickly so that the researchers could take their time with the safety trials.”

Do you feel the vaccine is safe? What is the most important piece of evidence that brought you to this conclusion?

“I have confidence in the safety of the available vaccines. I have looked at the data from the vaccine research trials, and have read articles from the scientists who were involved in the evaluation of the safety of the vaccine, some of whom I know personally.”

What concerns you most about the vaccine(s) or the vaccination allocation or distribution process?

“I am concerned that the distribution may not be entirely fair-rural areas will see some delays to getting vaccine supply, and the process for allocating vaccine to different sites has not been entirely transparent. I am hopeful that as we see more vaccine be available that our rural population has the same access that those in more urban areas have. Storage and administration of this vaccine is something that is very complicated, and nothing on this scale has ever been attempted in our lifetimes- it will definitely feel frustrating that most people will not be able to get vaccinated for several months. I am hopeful, though that the delay to getting vaccine might help some members of the public feel more comfortable with vaccine safety by the time they would be in line to get the vaccine.”

Will you get the vaccine? In addition, what motivates you most toward this decision?

“Absolutely, no question. I have seen personally, how devastating this illness can be for patients and families- I myself lost my dad to COVID in early April. I have seen and will continue to see patients who have COVID, and it is important for me to have the extra layer of protection against this illness. My family will all get the vaccine when it is available to them as well. The vaccine is a crucial turning point for this- the beginning of the end of this pandemic.”

Dr. Rachel Hartline

Family Medicine Physician, serving on the COVID-19 Incident Command Team

What concerns you most about the current state of the pandemic?

“So many concerns! Though we are not at this very moment without available hospital beds, utilization remains high and this has clearly been a very tough year on us as a community of healthcare workers (and humans!). I worry about the way that this long-term continued stress affects us, and about the impact of the



pandemic on the individuals who have gotten sick—many have a prolonged recovery and lingering symptoms.”

Do you feel the development and approval of COVID-19 vaccines happened too fast? Please explain.

“Vaccine development and approval occurred in impressive time, but still took the necessary steps to be safe. There are a few reasons why a vaccine was developed so quickly:

SARS-CoV2 (COVID) looks and behaves a lot like SARS Cov1 (“SARS” from a few years ago) so folks were able to pick up from the work that was done trying to make a vaccine for that.

The COVID genome was sequenced and available very early—posted online from Chinese researchers last winter.

A vaccine was identified as a necessity early. I remember the first anything I listened to about COVID was back in Jan or Feb, before it was at all clear that it was even going to be a pandemic and the researcher was talking about timeline to a vaccine, and how it may be shorter because of the work that was done in 1 and 2 above.

*The government and drug companies have made it a priority, so barriers that would normally take a while to clear like showing efficacy in one phase before being ready to go with the next were not in the way. This is not to say that the drug companies were not required to progress through the normal phases of testing, but normally it would be **phase 1**; if things look good, then get greenlighted, collect supplies and patient and funds for phase 2, **then phase 2**; if things look good, get greenlighted and collect supplies and patients and funds for **phase 3**. This time around, the needs for phase 2 were being lined up during phase 1 so that if/when it showed appropriate response they were ready to roll. For example, millions of doses of the Pfizer vaccine were all ready to ship prior to the emergency use authorization, which normally Pfizer wouldn’t produce until after the authorization was granted since there is substantial financial risk to them that it might not be.”*

Do you feel the vaccine is safe? What is the most important piece of evidence that brought you to this conclusion?

“Each vaccine receiving emergency use authorization has gone through all of the usual safety checks and evaluation, and has been administered to over 20,000 people and monitored for 2+ months afterwards before it received emergency use authorization. The brightest scientific minds the world over have been working on this non-stop since it was clear that COVID was a problem, and now it is being offered to the US healthcare workforce—critical thinkers who I am proud to call friends and colleagues who have appraised the available evidence and also decided without hesitation that the vaccine is the safe solution that we need to end the pandemic.

What concerns you most about the vaccine(s) or the vaccination allocation or distribution process?

"I am most worried that because it is a new vaccine and was developed quickly, people will be concerned that it isn't safe and will hold off on receiving it. A vaccine only works if people take it!"

Will you get the vaccine? In addition, what motivates you most toward this decision?

"100%, as soon as humanly possible. I want life to get back to normal again; to hang out in groups, go to parties, to safely visit my grandparents, and to travel and this is the only safe way to achieve that! Also I don't want COVID or the risks that go along with it, and the vaccines are >90% effective at preventing infection!"