

Fwd: We Are At War-Are You Protecting Your Community? (UNCLASSIFIED)

From: Gillingham, Bruce L RADM USN SURGEON GENERAL (USA)

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To: USN NCR BUMED FCH VA DDL NMED-ALL-01; USN NCR BUMED FCH VA DDL NMED-ALL-02; USN NCR BUMED FCH VA DDL NMED-ALL-03

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Subject: We Are At War-Are You Protecting Your Community? (UNCLASSIFIED)

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Esteemed Shipmates:

This message is for our entire Navy Medicine team, especially those who have concerns about receiving COVID-19 vaccinations. As your Surgeon General, my first concern is your safety. I would never allow you to go into a combat zone without flak and Kevlar. By the same token, I am concerned that Navy Medicine personnel are electing to serve on the front lines of the war against COVID every day without the single best protection we have: the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine. The vaccine is our “biological body armor,” a safe, highly effective defense against a virus which can cause serious long term disability, even in those minimally symptomatic and, in over 500,000 cases so far, death. Tragically, we have lost seven active duty sailors, (four in the last month) and 53 Department of the Navy civilians thus far. Fortunately, our scientific panel, world class experts in their fields, assure me that the benefits of the vaccine far, far, outweigh possible side effects.

I recognize that receiving a COVID vaccine is voluntary. Absent a presidential waiver, I cannot make a COVID vaccine either mandatory or a readiness requirement. The choice is yours, and I ask that you make the best choice for your own health and, importantly, for those around you. Frankly, many have asked “what’s in it for me” noting that even if they get the vaccine they will not see an immediate relaxation of our current public health restrictions. As the adage “a journey of a thousand miles starts with a single step” reminds us, all of us have a small but very important role to play by getting vaccinated. It is estimated that 75% or more of us need to be vaccinated if we are to achieve the community immunity that will allow that return to normalcy. We are each a part of several communities: those of our families, friends, co-workers and the neighborhoods in which we live. Communities depend upon shared, coordinated actions to thrive and reach their “common” vision of happiness. This sometimes requires compromise and sacrifice. The COVID pandemic is one of those times. Please consider the impact of not getting vaccinated on your community. Ignore biased social media, examine the science and reach out to a trusted medical provider to address your reservations. We are truly in this together.

You are an ambassador of Navy Medicine and are on the front lines serving our patients every day. Sailors, Marines, Civilians and Contractors look to you as the source of medical knowledge and expertise. YOU are the doc they know. Each of us must become an exemplar if we are to defeat this virus. As medical ambassadors, we need to communicate the science and facts about these vaccines to our friends, families, and fellow service members. As I noted above, it is a biological body armor against a virus responsible for killing more than half a million Americans. I encourage our entire enterprise to be engaged in COVID conversations both within and outside our lifelines. If you know someone who has questions about receiving the vaccine, speak to them, make sure they are making an informed choice with accurate information. If they decide to get the vaccine, ask them to act and get it as soon as possible. Please share your own experiences, and help educate them on the tremendous benefits these low-risk vaccines provide not only for them, but for their shipmates, their families, and the community at large.

That the vaccines are available now is a triumph of medical research that began more than a decade ago. They are our safest and best weapon against this unrelenting adversary. By simply rolling up your sleeve you can don this amazing biological body armor, make a personal contribution to community immunity and project medical power – what a great return on a small but critically important investment!

We need everyone in Navy Medicine to join their vaccinated arms as we lead from the front in protecting all of the communities in which we live and serve.

With my continued respect and admiration, SG

V/R,

Bruce L. Gillingham, MD, CPE, AOA

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Surgeon General, U.S. Navy

Chief, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery

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