COVID-19 and flu vaccines can unite our community in combatting the virus

Since March, the El Paso community has learned to adapt and continues to do so in the face of the obstacles COVID-19 has placed in front of us. With all the uncertainty that 2020 offered, it is imperative in the new year, now more than ever, to stay healthy during the pandemic. Getting all recommended vaccines, including the flu vaccine, is one way to remain vigilant.

"Flu symptoms and COVID-19 symptoms share some similarities. If you have received a flu vaccine, that may help to eliminate one concern when you start feeling ill," said Dr. Alison Days of Healthy Days Pediatrics.

Getting vaccinated is also a step closer to preventing the spread of COVID-19. Vaccinations reduce the risk for a community that has become vulnerable to the pandemic.

"When there is a high demand for any vaccine, there will always be a question of its credibility. Do not let negativity-or inaccurate comments stop you or your children from receiving a vaccine," said Dr. Joel Hendryx of the University Medical Center of El Paso. "Getting immunized will not only protect you, but will also protect your families, your neighbors, and your loved ones."

For those who are hesitant to receive a COVID-19 vaccine due to fear of testing positive on a COVID-19 test, be aware that this is not true. An immunization will not cause a positive COVID-19 PCR test. However, when anyone gets vaccinated, the body works to develop an immune response to the virus. You *will* likely test positive to an antibody test, because the goal of the vaccine is to produce antibodies against the virus to protect you.

Another false claim about the COVID-19 vaccine is that it will give you the virus. The COVID-19 vaccine has no active virus and, therefore, cannot cause the disease or cause you to test positive on a PCR test.

"Receiving this vaccine will not give you the virus but will allow your immune system to recognize the virus," said Dr. Hendryx. "Keep in mind; vaccines are not created overnight. They are researched and tested to meet safety standards before being approved."

When receiving an FDA and ACIP approved COVID-19 vaccine, the CDC states that patients may experience soreness on their arm or a headache or fever. Do not be alarmed. Symptoms are a sign that the immune system is building tolerance and working towards protecting the body from COVID-19.

Many doctors and researchers have worked to get the COVID-19 vaccine approved and urge El Pasans to get their flu vaccine to slow the spread of this pandemic. For more information on vaccinations, visit www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/. Getting vaccinated will not only keep you safe but will reduce the risk of further illness in our community.

Dr. Alison Days and Dr. Joel Hendryx are members of the El Paso United COVID-19 Transition Task Force which is made up of medical experts, elected officials and non-profit organizations from across the Paso del Norte Region.