

Over the past several weeks, the Brain Injury Association of America (BIAA) has received multiple inquiries as to the safety of COVID vaccines for individuals who have sustained an acquired brain injury. We want to respond to these and hopefully, allay any fears.

Although each state is setting up their own priority sequence for vaccination, individuals with chronic health conditions are generally placed among the higher levels. As an example, in Texas, individuals with chronic health conditions are in the tier immediately below health care workers and are currently receiving vaccinations. Not surprisingly, a brain injury is viewed as a chronic health condition, an idea that was first published by BIAA 12 years ago. This perspective is now broadly accepted by the medical field.

When one is infected with COVID-19, the virus attacks the “weakest link” it finds in the body, which is why individuals with longstanding chronic medical issues are at greatest risk for infection, complications, and even death. Studies have shown that TBI triggers an inflammatory process in the brain that causes an individual to experience chronic issues. Such a neuro-inflammatory process places those individuals at far greater risk of developing complications from COVID-19, which itself is well known to cause chronic neuroinflammatory issues.

Brain injury treatment programs are therefore doing everything possible to get their patients and staff vaccinated as quickly as possible due to this recognized risk.

While the vaccine may cause transient symptoms, these are related to the general protective immune response that is desired to be triggered, such as arm soreness, headache and fever, but that generally resolves rapidly, often in as little as a day.

One of us has received both the initial injection and booster without a single symptom, and we are doing our best to see that the people we love the most, our families, get vaccinated as soon as they can.

There is no evidence that receiving the vaccine will make TBI symptoms worse; however, a COVID-19 infection can do just that. Our clinical experience has seen severe neurobehavioral disturbance, delirium, psychosis, and, sadly, deaths. To date, approximately 5 million Americans have been vaccinated without a single serious adverse complication or death. Yet, one out of every 10,000 Americans has died from COVID, and roughly 10-15% of individuals who had COVID have had long term complications. These numbers alone should make the decision-making easy.

Individuals who have sustained a TBI have led a lifelong courageous struggle to recover their health and independence. Our joint recommendation is an encouragement not to quit now based on rumors from poorly informed or unknowledgeable sources.

Get vaccinated. Get safe.

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