**With the Relaxing of Restrictions: How Safely To Expand One’s Social Pod**

 The social indicators suggest we may be approaching the end of the COVID-19 crisis. In many ways the public policy response to the pandemic has threatened and put at risk our national mental health and economic well-being. During the global outbreak of the SARS-COV-2 virus, there is no question COVID-19 has manifested a portfolio of symptoms unique to itself. It is important to realize however, that science is not a dogma; it is a process. 1&9 With this understanding, pursuing the correct process will help mitigate fear.

**During this transition how then should we, as individuals, move forward?**

The first step is to understand what we are dealing with. Regardless of when all social restrictions are lifted, the virus will still be with us. As with other viruses, the negative impact decreases as a population reaches “herd immunity”.7&8

This is achieved as members of a population are exposed to the virus and develop anti-bodies to that strain. Exposure and immunity occur naturally, through human-to-human contact, when it reaches the appropriate viral load necessary for the expression of symptoms. It can also be achieved artificially - through a vaccine (protein or protein fragment) or in some cases via another biological molecule (mRNA) - both of which are intended to create an immune reaction in the cells of the human body. 2

**So, what should one do if you have not achieved personal immunity?**

The human body is designed by its Creator to protect itself against adverse attack through its immune system. However, mitigating factors can undermine a body’s natural defenses. Strengthening one’s immune system therefore should be an on-going priority. The following are are some suggestions research supports that can aid in boosting the immune system:5,6&10

* Consuming a clean and healthy diet, plus intake of regular supplementation of Vitamin D3, Vitamin K2, Zinc, Quercetin and Vitamin C.
* A lifestyle that includes healthy/restorative sleep, exercise/movement, and fresh air/oxygen.
* Maintain healthy Interpersonal relationships which include face-to-face contact, physical touch, laughter, music, and intellectual & emotional connections. At the same time, be in control of your life and take steps to reduce and/or avoid exposure to environmental and emotional stress.

**How should one determine whether to take the vaccine?**

Be informed. Do your research. Before deciding, use reason and your critical thinking skills to weigh each scenario based on the benefits, versus the risks, to you. The references noted in this position paper refer to the ***Bibliography,*** which appears at the end, are given to assist you in this process.

Should you opt-out from taking the vaccine or it is not yet available:

* Be proactive. Research all treatment options that would prevent hospitalization. Then have a conversation with your physician and/or health providers beforehand to develop a ***treatment plan***. Your goal should be to minimize symptoms and avoid hospitalization.4

What should you do if you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms?

* Isolate yourself. Inform anyone with whom you have been in contact.
* Implement your ***treatment plan***.10

**Masks and Social Distancing: Are they effective?**

The answer to this question rests on the “susceptibility” vs. “viral load” factor i.e., the amount of virus one is exposed to at any given time. For an understanding of this topic, please refer to the video referenced in the ***Bibliography*** for a more in-depth explanation. 3

It is with hope that the information in this position paper will equip and empower individuals to become effective advocates for their own health. We as a community **can** resist the fear that creates anxiety, and make the safe transition to re-establish our vital, valuable, and critically needed social connections. These human interactions are necessary to recover and maintain our mental health and economic well-being.

*This Position Paper, respectfully prepared by NAMI Warren County NJ, Executive Committee, May 2021. It is not an endorsement of any treatment or protocol. The purpose of the information contained herein should be used in conjunction with consulting one’s healthcare provider.*

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