

## Should Prisoners Be Among the First Vaccinated?

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Should prisoners be among the first vaccinated? is the latest Covid related hot-button topic to take the stage as 2020 comes to an end. Very little has been publicized, but what little coverage the issue has received has subsequently opened a Pandora's Box of public outcry.

As a prisoner at the Beto Unit who has seen first-hand the devastating effects of Covid's virulent rampage through a vulnerable, aging population, you would immediately think I want to see inmates among the first groups of those vaccinated; however, this one still vacillates.

This is a very difficult, thorny issue, one that will probably be connected to prison reform. For those who have never been incarcerated, or had family and friends drug through the mud, the issue, in their minds, is clear: No prisoner should bypass anyone in the 'real world.' For the rest of society, who have a better understanding of prison and the life of the incarcerated, the answers vary wildly from yes, to yes, but... and even some who say no.

I fully understand both view points, having dealt with both sides of the coin at different times in my short 32 years of life. Let's start with why inmates should be vaccinated earlier than America at large.

It takes a very long time to create a vaccine. This one has been rushed out by not one, but two companies: Pfizer and Moderna. The vaccine needs to be mass tested; so, why not utilize a helpless, mass population as guinea pigs? Most would not object.

We do not have the capability to follow CDC guidelines related to social distancing and PPE. Using the unit I'm on as an example, consider this: We breathe the same air, surrounded by 180 people who are crammed into showers, the chow hall, medical, dayroom, etc. There's no avoiding anyone. Thus, to keep the contagion from rapidly spreading anew, why not vaccinate those coming into the system as well as those who have not previously had the virus.

CoV-SARS-2 affects the immuno-compromised more strongly than those with healthy immune systems. Sadly, many men and women enter lock-up with addictions that have ravaged their bodies and compromised their immune systems, making them far more susceptible to illness. By vaccinating said people locked up, they stand a greater chance of surviving.

Flipping the proverbial coin brings us to the opposite point of view, that inmates should not be vaccinated early. Rather than attempt to argue the 'Not At All' perspective, which is liable to fail, I'm now covering the but section in 'Yes, but...'

The public outcry is not over whether to vaccinate prisoners, but when. It was a great idea to start with Doctor's and Nurse's as they are continually surrounded by symptomatic and asymptomatic individuals trying to save lives. Next should be the older people found in nursing homes and care facilities. Men and women who have compromised immune systems.

"Prisons and prisoners are isolated from the rest of the country. All they can do is spread the virus among themselves. There is really no worry about them bringing it outside the razor wire." Undoubtedly some people actually think this way, and is a solid point since policy is in place to ensure no one leaves sick.

I'll say this from my own perspective: "Many of us have had Covid and it would be a colossal waste of money to vaccinate a group who already built up antibodies by fighting off the virus."

There are more reasons for both points of view; all are valid points for consideration by whoever ultimately makes the decision. Either way we will continue to survive the outbreak.

In conclusion, I, an inmate, have jumped off the fence to support the need of prisoners to be vaccinated, but... not at the expense of those outside the prison walls. We can wait until there are more doses available at a cheaper cost to the gracious tax-payers footing the bill.