

Listen to doctors and community leaders if you're hesitant about getting the COVID vaccine

BY THE FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM EDITORIAL BOARD

We're getting closer to the day when COVID-19 vaccines will be readily available.

That may seem unlikely, especially if you've waited weeks for a chance to get yours and you're spending hours checking in with every pharmacy and grocery store hoping for a shot. But three versions are approved in the U.S., distribution is speeding up, and in Tarrant County, the infrastructure is in place to give more shots than leaders can acquire.

So, what's your reason for not getting the shot?

Most Texans could be inoculated by the time the summer heats up. The main obstacle to truly suppressing the coronavirus pandemic will soon shift from vaccine availability to "vaccine hesitancy."

For some, it's simple logistics — elderly people who don't use the internet and haven't yet heard about the county hotline, where operators can sign them up (817-248-6299). Some can't travel much and must wait, unfortunately, until shots can be brought to their neighborhoods. These are fixable issues, though it will take time and resources.

In minority communities, histories of abuse and neglect by medicine and government are a factor in distrust of these inoculation efforts. General suspicion of vaccines stretches across political ideologies, and in this case, doubts are fueled by the seemingly quick development of the vaccines.

Public health leaders and government officials can only be so effective in countering these concerns. It'll take trusted community leaders, neighbors that people trust as having their best interests at heart. Take Edith Avila's effort in the largely Hispanic Diamond Hill neighborhood to help people register and get to vaccine appointments, chronicled by the Star-Telegram's Brian Lopez.

It will also help if every step is taken to serve communities that have been neglected. The UNT Health Science Center, one of the county's partners in the vaccination effort, recently announced that it would open a clinic in a Stop Six church. More of that, please.

Then, there are people concerned about their personal health situation and whether the vaccine is safe for them. Don't assume that it's not; talk to your doctor. Family physicians should make every effort to reach out to patients, address their concerns and offer advice.

Others waiting to sign up may be trying to do a noble deed: avoid "taking" a vaccine from someone who needs it more. This is a fine impulse, but we're at the point now where boosting the number of vaccines given is more important than who gets them. Every shot gets us close to herd immunity, and by getting one, you're doing your part to protect others.

At a minimum, register and get in line. Within weeks, all adults will be eligible for inoculation, and when ample supplies are available, arms will be needed.

One of the benefits of having doctors and community leaders take the lead is that it should help lessen the impact of politics on the issue. A recent poll that drew much attention found that Republican men and self-described Donald Trump supporters were the most hesitant groups to get vaccinated. It's somewhat odd, given the complaint that the Trump administration isn't getting enough credit for helping speed the development of vaccines.

But thankfully, the former president strongly recommended the vaccine in a television interview, and he's reportedly been inoculated himself. Politics should play no role in one's decision, even in this hyper-political era.

The easier the shots become to get, the more people who are on the fence now may decide to dive in. Right now, it takes several affirmative steps. But within months, getting inoculated could be as easy as walking into a local pharmacy, with no appointment. Some may relent when their doctor recommends it as part of an annual checkup.

And yes, some will choose to never get the vaccine. Browbeating or shaming won't work. Tapping trustworthy community figures to persuade as many as possible is more productive and better for overall public health.

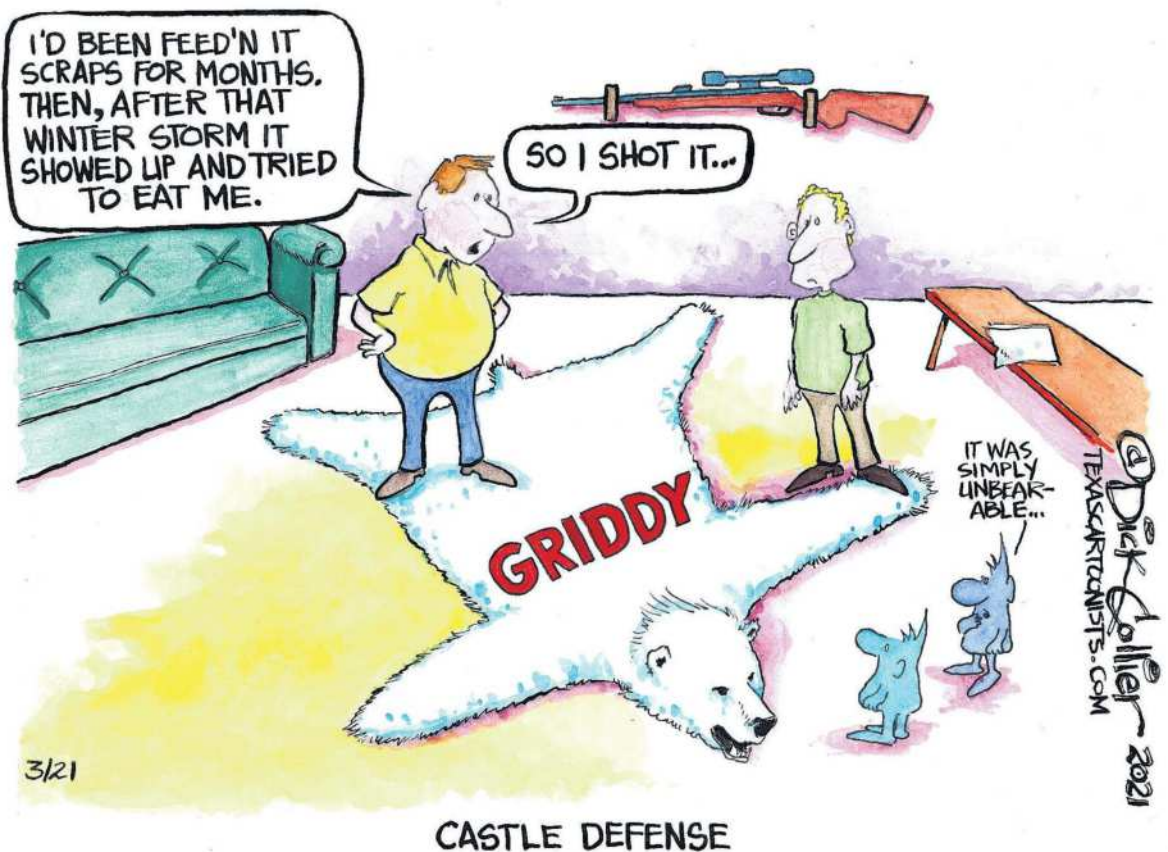
That includes doctors. If you're unsure of what to do or have questions, call yours as soon as possible.



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A service member gives a COVID-19 vaccination Feb. 26 at Globe Life Field in Arlington. The easier the shots are to get, the more people who are on the fence now may dive in. Within months, getting inoculated could involve just walking into a local pharmacy, with no appointment.

DICK COLLIER



CASTLE DEFENSE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The biggest border policy

We know a lot of people want to come to the United States across our southern border.

But here's the big difference between former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden: We know that Biden is going to work toward a solution using the best people for the best reasons and that politics are not part of his equation.

The Trump policy of separating children from their parents at our border was a permanent stain on the moral leadership of our country. If Biden does nothing else after banning this practice, I'll be proud I voted for him.

- Mark K. Bauer, *Haslet*

Not everyone can get out

I am the caregiver for my husband, and I'm very grateful that I received my coronavirus vaccine. But for my homebound husband, it's not been easy. When I registered him with Tarrant County Public Health, I put in detailed information about his health issues and informed the department that he is unable to leave our home.

We received notification that he could get his vac-

cine at Texas Health Resources in Euless. When I called the hotline to say he would not be able to travel there, I was told there was no option for the homebound.

Our county commissioners need to come up with a plan. Nursing homes were addressed. Let's not forget the homebound.

- Margaret Terrell, *Fort Worth*

I don't get this Dallas move

So, where was the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas last month when thousands of Texans were without water, power and heat? I just don't get this type of support for those here illegally. (March 18, 1A, "Abbott blasts Biden in Dallas as center readies to host migrant teens")

- Vince Bonano, *Fort Worth*

A proven way for big fixes

There is a better way for Congress to tackle our huge infrastructure needs than simply allocating funds: Lawmakers should seed the needed investment by re-establishing the National Infrastructure Bank. This has been done four times in the past, and

it always returned a profit on the investment.

We need about \$5 trillion for highways, roads, bridges, schools and water projects, all of which could be funded through the bank. It could also fund private investment such as high speed rail and broadband internet access.

This is a commonsense method to pay for needed projects without adding to our federal deficit.

- Gary Buresh, *Arlington*

Against pork, not against Texans

Don't believe the letter published Sunday that said Republicans voted against Texans' interests in unanimously opposing the COVID-19 relief bill. (4C) Republicans did not vote against helping individuals, schools, children or your jobs. They voted against the overwhelming amount of pork that smothered the COVID-19 bill.

If the funding to help those affected by COVID-19 were presented as a separate bill, I bet Republicans would have supported it. As it is, they were the only lawmakers concerned with the huge debt and wasteful spending of our tax money.

- Susan Kenemer, *Fort Worth*

It's so much better in the dark

The united steps taken by the city of Fort Worth, Downtown Fort Worth and the business community in support of the "Lights Out, Fort Worth" initiative to cut down on nighttime light pollution is an exemplary model for other Texas cities. (March 16, star-telegram.com, "Downtown Fort Worth will go 'Lights Out' this spring and fall to save migrating birds")

The community's commitment to harmony in nature and the built environment contributes to Fort Worth's unique spaces and sustainable quality of life.

Fort Worth is protecting dark skies while educating the public on minimizing light pollution — the least talked-about yet most easily reversible form of pollution. Light pollution affects our visual environment, greenhouse gas emissions, wildlife migratory and breeding patterns, and even driving conditions.

Scenic Texas, Scenic Fort Worth and our colleagues across the state applaud Fort Worth.

There's no question why the stars at night really are bigger and brighter there.

- Sarah Tober, *Austin*

The author is president of Scenic Texas, a nonprofit group that works to improve the state's visual environment.

His 'bad day' turns awful



LEONARD PITTS JR.
Miami Herald

He was having a bad day.

So said Cherokee County Sheriff's spokesman Jay Baker by way of explaining last week's mass shootings at three Atlanta-area massage parlors. The suspect, a 21-year-old white man whose name won't be used here, is said to have told police he suffers a sex addiction at odds with his Christian faith. They say he shot up the massage parlors as a way of removing sexual temptation.

Apparently, the idea of counseling never occurred to this guy. He couldn't keep his pants zipped, so women had to die. And, in the current climate, it is hardly irrelevant that six

of the eight people he allegedly killed — one person survived — were Asian women.

"Yesterday was a really bad day for him," said Baker, "and this is what he did." It was an odd, sympathy-for-the-devil kind of statement that rang blithely oblivious to the fresh trauma of a gun-scarred nation and, in particular, its Asian citizens. Hearing it, was anyone truly surprised by reports that Baker once took to Facebook promoting T-shirts describing COVID-19 as an "Imported virus from Chy-Na"? No.

And in so doing, this putative public servant became part of the problem for 22 million Americans of Asian heritage. For them, this tragedy was the all-too-predictable capstone of a year of elders assaulted on the streets, of a woman spat upon, of a boy sent to the emergency room, a pandemic year in which malice toward Asians — "Chi-

na virus!" "kung flu!" "Wuhan flu!" — was cheered on from the White House itself.

We may reasonably presume, however, that none of those 22 million people will respond by murdering random strangers. In America that has always been a form of problem-solving reserved almost exclusively for white men. And if some Asian person did go to that horrific extreme, it's unlikely he or she would afterward enjoy the solicitude of some sympathetic cop.

No, you have to be white to get that, i.e., to benefit from the national myopia that causes many of us to conflate whiteness with innocence. One is reminded of reporters who treated the Oklahoma City bombing as if it were America's first act of homegrown terror, like maybe Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was destroyed by a gas leak. Then there are the people in North Carolina who turned Olympic Park bomber Eric Rudolph into some sort of folk hero. "Bless his heart," one woman said.

More recently, there was the initial failure to

take seriously rioters who attacked the Capitol on Jan. 6. And even now, weeks after they shattered windows, injured dozens of police officers and even killed one, you have Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson describing the murderous white mob as people "that love this country, that truly respect law enforcement."

And so it goes.

Nine years ago, when it was argued in this space that America faced a wave of terror from right-wing white men, the idea was considered preposterous by some. Now it is the official stance of the Department of Homeland Security.

So this myopia, this lazy conflation of whiteness with innocence, cannot continue. It is a luxury America can ill afford. Certainly, every marginalized and put-upon community already knows this, has paid for the wisdom in a currency of tears and blood. But Baker's misplaced empathy is a red-flag reminder that some of us still don't understand. The suspect was having a bad day, he says? Poor baby.

Imagine how his victims felt.