



## Personal Reflections on COVID

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Many of you know that I've been living and working at our lake house in Montgomery County throughout the pandemic. We got vaccinated as soon as we were eligible. Only 34% of the county population is fully vaccinated. We have spent a fair amount of time in the City of Albemarle in Stanly County, and there only 32% of the population is fully vaccinated. The vaccination numbers in Orange County are nearly double those numbers, and my guess is that even more people are vaccinated in Chapel Hill. You can [find the vaccination numbers](#) on the state website.

For most of the time we have been careful whenever we were going to be around other people. Wearing masks to the grocery store or when going to Lowe's for mulch. Getting take-out food rather than eating in a restaurant. Not getting together with friends. Using hand sanitizer like there's no tomorrow.

Our usual Saturday morning ritual is to drive into Albemarle for breakfast at the Donut Dinette and grocery shopping at the Harris Teeter. The restaurant has limited seating capacity and the booths are close together. There usually is a line out the door on Saturday mornings. Since March 2020 we have ordered takeout, picked it up at the walk-up window, and eaten in our car. We have watched people go into the restaurant and hardly anyone was wearing a mask. None of the staff was wearing masks. We felt like we were careful. Not crazy careful but not reckless either.



### Dolly Parton Getting Her Vaccination

Then things started changing, and we started relaxing. Masks were no longer required indoors in most places if you were vaccinated. We found ourselves in crowded places around the 4th of July holiday and no one was wearing a mask. Last Saturday we went back inside the [Donut Dinette](#) for breakfast and the waitress welcomed us back enthusiastically. No one was wearing a mask.

Last weekend Robin and I started to feel like we had relaxed too much. I was reading more and more about breakthrough infections. In other words, people who had been fully vaccinated were becoming infected with COVID. I have been surprised at the numbers of people anecdotally who have reported breakthrough infections—such as professional athletes, members of the Olympic team, and women who attended a bachelorette party. True, the vaccinated are less likely to have symptoms if they are infected, and they are much less likely to get seriously ill. Still it has made me think we need to be more careful. If we head back to the lake for a weekend we will not be eating inside the Donut Dinette for the foreseeable future.

Then I came back to Chapel Hill on Monday, July 19. Initially I thought Carolina's indoor mask requirement was unnecessary. Now I'm fine with it. Some of my vaccinated colleagues are concerned about possible breakthrough infections with the new Delta variant of the virus. They may be worried about their own health or infecting others who are unvaccinated, such as children under 12. They may have friends or loved ones who are unvaccinated. Given the evolving knowledge about COVID, including the variants of the virus, I'm not going to criticize people who



may be more risk averse than me. I'm not overly concerned about getting infected, but I'm willing to wear a mask in the presence of those who are concerned about it. In fact, I'm now pretty much back to wearing a mask as I did for most of the pandemic.



I have no idea how many of my colleagues at the School are unvaccinated. Based on the numbers in the general population, it is reasonable to assume that a significant percentage of faculty and staff have not received the vaccine. I am mystified. There are some people who can't be vaccinated for health reasons, and there are some who have a genuine religious objection to being vaccinated. Those numbers are small. The Delta virus is highly transmissible and the overwhelming majority of people who have been hospitalized are the unvaccinated. There are recent stories of people asking to receive the vaccine as they are being put on ventilators. At that point it is too late. People who have not been vaccinated are at the greatest risk of getting infected and having bad outcomes, and low vaccination rates are increasing the risk for the rest of us. We are backsliding in controlling the spread of COVID because not enough people are vaccinated, which is jeopardizing our return to normal.

I'm currently reading *The Best and the Brightest*, which essentially is a book about how really smart people made incredibly bad decisions about the Viet Nam War. It is partly about how government officials and the military lied to the American people all the way through that conflict. There are other examples where the government has misled the public, especially in recent years, and that has undermined trust in government more generally. The science around COVID is science, however, not propaganda or marketing. I don't think I am being naïve in believing Anthony Fauci and other experts about the risks of the disease, and about the value of the vaccine. I encourage everyone to ignore the myths that are floating around the Internet, and that are being promoted by irresponsible television personalities. This is not about politics or ideology. It is about science and public health.

This is one of those times when we have a responsibility to the wider community, to our School, and not just to ourselves. For me that meant getting vaccinated. I'm willing to wear a mask to avoid possibly infecting people at the School, including those who are not vaccinated. I got tested at the Carolina Union last Monday morning because I had been around so many people on vacation and I worried that I could have been infected and not have any symptoms. [The self-administered test was easy, fast, and painless. Here is a link to the [Carolina Together Testing](#)



[Program.](#)] I was not infected, but I would have isolated if it had been necessary to protect others. I want everyone to enjoy their freedom, and at the same time I want everyone to recognize that sometimes freedom carries a responsibility to put aside personal preferences for the greater good.



If you are not vaccinated, please, please reconsider and get the shot. It is so easy. Here is a link to the [Carolina Vaccine Clinic](#), which is located on the top floor of Student Stores in the Student Stores Pharmacy. It is easy to make an appointment, or you can walk in—you only need your ONYEN, password, and insurance card. Please take care of yourself and help take care of everyone else. I'm wearing a mask to help protect you, but I'd honestly feel better about it if you were doing everything possible to protect yourself. Here is a link to [a recent post by Jill Moore](#) on Coates' Canons that contains helpful updates on law and policy related to COVID-19.

On a lighter note, I have adopted another health strategy in addition to getting vaccinated. I have consumed a fair amount of gin and tonic water during the pandemic, entirely for medicinal



purposes. I recognize that the ability of gin to combat the virus is not supported by a single peer-reviewed study. I don't think it can hurt, however. I highly recommend a gin from the [End of Days distillery in Wilmington](#). It has a great flavor and it comes in a regular version or a pricier version that has been rested in oak barrels. Both versions are great and it has become our go-to gin.



# END OF DAYS

## DISTILLERY