

## Why I Decided to Participate in a COVID-19 Vaccine Trial

Three weeks ago I received my first injection, of two, as a participant in a Phase III trial for the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine (AZD1222). I have a 67% chance of having received the vaccine, which is the hope of about 100% of the people in the trial. By chance, that day coincided with the news release by AstraZeneca about the impressive performance of their vaccine early on in late-stage trials - an announcement that preceded by about 24 hours admissions of problems with how some of those doses were administered, and concerns about how the company calculated overall efficacy.

That coupling of excitement with concern is a mirror of my own cognitive and emotional wrestling, for several months preceding my decision to participate in the Phase III trial.

My hesitations about participation revolved primarily around safety – both my own concerns and those expressed by family members. Those apprehensions were amplified by the news in September 2020 that the vaccine trial was put on hold due to suspected adverse reactions in several participants in the United Kingdom. [Online discussions](#) among scientists about the safety of vaccines developed in association with a U.S. presidential administration known for science denialism and self-advancing untruths (to be charitable) increased my apprehension. I had served as an Associate Dean for Research at my home university during the first six years of the Governor Scott Walker administration in Wisconsin, and witnessed firsthand the perils of the denial, politicization, and weaponization of science.

These concerns were largely assuaged as additional information became available. Assessment of putative adverse reactions of trial participants in the U.K. revealed they were unlikely to have been caused by the vaccine, and trials resumed worldwide. High profile scientists (e.g., Dr. Francis Collins, Director of NIH) associated with the U.S. vaccine effort, and for whom I have enormous respect and trust, testified to the [scientific rigor of COVID-19 vaccine development](#).

Simultaneously, my motivation to participate was growing. First, although this seems strange to write, as a biologist, I am curious about “all things life.” This was an opportunity to inject (sorry!) myself into a fascinating and important biological study. Second, within my world of family and friends are those who distrust science and have reservations about vaccines. This was my opportunity to model an alternative ethic. Third, unlike so many others, my life has not been upended by COVID-19. I have a secure job, access to excellent medical care, and no dependent

children. If anyone was in a good position to volunteer in a vaccine trial, I was. Fourth, and most importantly, this was an opportunity to address a concern that had haunted me for nine months. In a webinar aired last March, *New York Times* columnist David Brooks said that “pandemics leave in their wake a crisis of meaning.” Historically, pandemics have caused people to turn inward, hunker down, self-protect, and distrust others – behaviors that contribute to palpable shame once the pandemic is passed. In 20 years, when my grandchildren ask “Papa, you are a scientist. What did you do during the 2020 pandemic?” I would like to say more than “I protected myself”. As a scientist and Christian, participation in a vaccine trial presented an opportunity to live out the admonition common to all Abrahamic faiths, to “love your brother.”

In the Christian tradition, this is the season of Advent. It is a season of hopeful anticipation, of looking back, looking forward, and looking in. And, as I wrote [here](#), it’s a particularly fitting time for rollout of the first COVID-19 vaccines.

Rick Lindroth  
Vilas Distinguished Achievement & Sorenson Professor  
University of Wisconsin-Madison