

You're Not Fully Vaccinated the Day of Your Last Dose

March 24, 2021

For much of 2020, the world pinned its collective post-pandemic plans on a single, glimmering end point: the arrival of an effective COVID-19 vaccine. The resounding refrain of “when I’m vaccinated” has long conjured images of people shedding their masks, hugging their friends, and returning to a semblance of normalcy. And now some vaccinated people are doing exactly that. In recent weeks, I’ve heard dozens of stories from friends, family members, and co-workers about vaccinees who are immediately dropping their guards after their shots, in some cases discarding their masks and congregating with others. Deepta Bhattacharya, an immunologist at the University of Arizona, told me that one of his colleagues—another biologist—went out to a celebratory dinner right after getting a dose at a 24-hour clinic.

...

Although plenty of people have [documented their shots on camera](#), vaccinees aren’t taking many selfies at the two-week mark: The end of a waiting period is a pretty dull milestone, especially compared with the photogenic pizzaz of the injection itself, which comes complete with a needle-tipped syringe filled with lifesaving liquid. The day on which people are cleared to alter their behavior is, by contrast, devoid of “salient, concrete cues,” says Gretchen Chapman, a psychologist at Carnegie Mellon University who studies human behavior and vaccines. “Two weeks later, nothing happens; there’s no event,” she told me. “It’s not like your arm turns purple to tell you, *It’s time.*”

...