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## HEALTH OFFICER UPDATE ON COVID-19 VACCINE - October 29, 2020

The prediction was that if Phase III of the vaccine trials went well, we could have COVID-19 vaccine by the end of the year or first of January 2021. Now, Dr. Anthony Fauci states that he does not believe we will have a vaccine before January 2021, if then. From one perspective that is depressing, but from a public health perspective it is a good that when problems are identified, they are resolved before continuing with the trial.

The first two phases of the trials are about safety and dosage. The third phase is to learn how effective the vaccine is in preventing an infection with the virus. Some children's immunizations produce immunity up to 97 – 99%. But with respiratory viruses like this and influenza, the protection rate is lower. One would want at least 50% protection, and be ecstatic about a 60 or 70% immunity because that is the level needed for herd immunity for this virus.

The vaccine has not been approved, but people are already deciding whether they will accept it. Most people assume that a Health Officer would naturally push a COVID-19 vaccine. While vaccines have saved millions of lives and I fully support the use of vaccines, the reason is because I have done my own investigation of the studies instead of just accepting the statement that vaccines are safe. I carefully read how studies are developed and evaluated along with the peer review articles about the research. In previous years I naturally gave great weight to what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention advised. I don't automatically take their recommendations for COVID-19, because there is too much evidence that their scientific views have been muffled.

For any other vaccine, especially during a pandemic, I would start now trying to educate the public on the safety of the vaccine so that when it is available, they will seek this protection to avoid a disease for which we have such poor treatment options. But I promise the residents of Talbot County that I will not promote a vaccine until I see more of the research and am willing to get the vaccine myself. Please do not perceive this to be a statement against a COVID-19 vaccine. It is not. A safe and effective vaccine is our way out of this pandemic. But Health Officers across the country want a safe and effective vaccine with emphasis on *safe*.

The public has not always taken Health Officers' guidance relative to this pandemic because we advocated behaviors that interfered with your lives. That didn't stop us from trying to get the scientific messages to the public even when a few members of the public threatened us for the message we carried. When a vaccine is available for use, many independent scientists will have reviewed the data to identify any big concerns. I want to hear and evaluate the advice of the scientists, like Dr. Fauci, that will have both pros and cons concerning an approved vaccine before I make my decision. But I also will not let the Facebook epidemiologists and scientists with Google degrees make the decision about something as important as a vaccine to stop a pandemic.