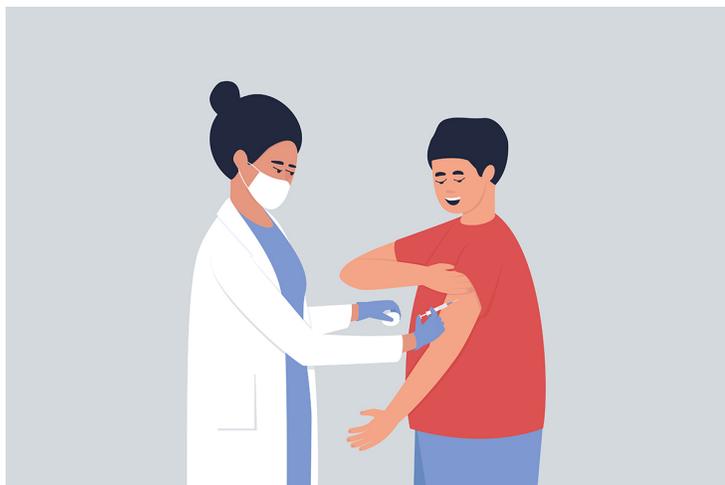


My Teen Getting Vaccinated Was a Real ‘Shehecheyanu’ Moment

By Jordana Horn Apr 26, 2021



What I’ve learned in my 17 years as a parent is that experiencing the world through the lens of your child can make life so much more intense than it would be otherwise. It’s more full of love and also more full of pain. When you look at your child doing something that makes you proud, your joy inflates with the speed of an inflating helium balloon. But when you see your child suffer, your system reacts as though it is your own body that’s bleeding, or your own heart that’s broken. Somehow, in having a child, the world and its wonders and pain are all magnified, amplified, multiplied.

My family has had a comparatively privileged pandemic experience — no one in my home has had Covid-19, and we haven’t had the threats of food and housing insecurity that so many others have. We’ve dealt with remote school, cancelled anticipated events, and more time together than we’d ever planned, and that’s been both good and bad. This being said, we’ve seen the vaccine in the distance as a light at the end of the proverbial tunnel.

I’m so relieved and happy to say that I’m now inoculated against Covid-19. When I received each dose, as the needle went into my arm, I closed my eyes to connect completely with the moment. I quietly said the Shehecheyanu — the blessing we say thanking God that we have lived to see a momentous day in our lives arrive. After a year of distance and fear, I had finally arrived at the moment of which I had dreamed: the beginning of the end.

I was a glorious moment — but it was *nothing* compared to how I felt when I finally got an appointment for my 17-year-old son to get his Covid-19 vaccine. After hitting refresh a gazillion times on the Walgreens app, with all the zeal of a new sleepaway camp parent clicking on camp photo uploads, I *finally*

got an appointment slot. I clicked on “yes” and wiped tears of gratitude from my eyes. I felt the same feelings I had when I finally got a vaccine appointment for myself — only these feelings were magnified, amplified, and multiplied.

I thought about these expansive, expanding emotions and more as I pulled into the Walgreens parking lot last week with my 17-year-old son next to me in the front seat. I thought about how I used to strap him into his hideous blue-and-yellow car seat back in the day, his little bare feet that refused shoes of any kind kicking like pendulums of an invisible clock. That little boy is now taller — far taller — than I am. He is everything I wanted him to be: kind, smart, empathetic, and loving. And he believes, as I do, in science.

Nobody ever expects a global pandemic to derail the anticipated trajectory of their adolescence. My son will never get to take his girlfriend to junior prom. The long-awaited summer program at a college — the one he’d been looking forward to all of high school — was cancelled. There are so many moments, big and small, that have been swept away in the passage of time and pandemic; they are nonexistent and irretrievable.

But, on the other hand, this year has given me the chance to truly see my son grow up, day by day, moment by moment. He has become the most focused and dedicated worker I know, devoting countless hours to his art projects and the animated movie he’s created entirely by himself, frame by frame. He has alternately been infuriated and amused by the ridiculous demands of online physical education, doing bizarre calisthenic contortions to fit between our living room furniture and the outlines of Google Meet camera boxes. He’s yelled at his younger sisters to be quiet during his online school too many times to count (spoiler: it never works). He’s had a relationship with his girlfriend that bears more resemblance to courting in the era of Downton Abbey (“Shall we take another turn around the neighborhood?”) than the 21st century, and the patience involved in that has led them to a deeper connection.

I feel so proud of him all the time. But this moment, which appeared ordinary from the outside — a mom and a son, masked, entering Walgreens — was a liminal one.

Fortunately, getting vaccinated is now a privilege afforded to every American over 16. It is quite literally the moment that we’ve been waiting for, here for the taking. It is a step into the future, one where we can protect those most in need of protection, as well as ourselves. It’s an expression of faith in science, in fact over fiction. And it’s signing a compact with society — a physical acknowledgement of the fact that, like it or not, or deny it or not, our destinies are all inextricably intertwined.

I *wanted* my son to get vaccinated. And there was never any question that he felt the same.

Watching my son get vaccinated shook my soul in a way not so different from when I saw him become a bar mitzvah in another world, four long years ago. In both moments, he took on an obligation to a community larger than just himself. In both moments, he exemplified that he had become the person I had dreamed he would become.

My gratitude on seeing this long-awaited vaccination was profound, but the few tears that trickled beneath my mask were ones of joy. As always, seeing my son experience something meaningful is and will be a joy greater and deeper than any feeling I experience for myself. I am grateful it was important to him. I am grateful it finally became possible.

And so, as we sat beneath Walgreens’ fluorescent lights, we said the Shehecheyanu together, on our respective plastic chairs. *Thank You, God*, I said, *for allowing him to arrive at this day*. And I thanked God for allowing me to live to see it.

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