

Episode 13 – Athletes & Vaccines

With Dr. Catherine O'Neal

Deon (00:00):

I think you already know that if you're looking to improve your understanding of immunization, Vax Matters is the podcast to listen to. So, let's get started. Welcome to Vax Matters. I'm Deon Guillory, and our conversation today centers around athletes and vaccines' perceived effect on athletic performance. Joining me is Dr. Katie O'Neal, an associate professor of clinical medicine specializing in infectious diseases at the LSU Health Internal Medicine Residency in Baton Rouge. She is also the chief medical officer at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center. Thanks so much for lending your insight and expertise, Dr. O'Neal.

Dr. O'Neal (00:42):

Absolutely. I'm so glad to be here.

Deon (00:43):

And we've had many conversations before, especially during the pandemic. Um, so I, I know that we are gonna get a wealth of information from you just because you're, uh, an expert and you, you know the ins and outs of all this. So, thanks again, uh, for joining us for this. Uh, so, so let's start with this, because when it comes to athletics and the COVID vaccine, it's, it's been controversial just like in, in other conversations when it comes to the v- to the vaccine and COVID. Um, but when you talk about professional players not getting the COVID vaccine and you also have stories of vaccines affecting performance, the pairing of athletes and vaccines has inspired quite the public discussion. Because you, you know, you hear some pretty famous players who get caught in not necessarily telling the full truth about their vaccination status. So, it is time to find out how vaccines really relate to athletes. So, Dr. O'Neal, let's start, uh, from the perspective of the athletes themselves. Are there any vaccines that athletes fear will affect their performance, and is it unfounded?

Dr. O'Neal (01:54):

You know, when working with, uh, athletic teams, the first thing that I'm just struck with every time is how into their health they are.

Deon (02:02):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (02:02):

How into every single day in every performance, and they want to be at the top of their game at every moment. And so everything they do is taken into consideration. Did I eat too much salt? Did I sleep well?

Deon (02:15):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (02:15):

Should I eat this banana or this apple? I mean, it gets down to that. So, of course, when it comes to medical decisions, they're really, really in tune to, how is this gonna affect me, and not just in the

long run, but tomorrow? So, when we spoke to athletes in the summer of 2021, as vaccines were really rolling out for that age group, I found the most common question wasn't, what are the long-term side effects? Of course, we talked about those. Or will this even affect my athletic health? It's, what day of the week should I get this vaccine? Because if-

Deon (02:43):

Hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (02:43):

... I have to practice on Thursday, should I get it on Wednesday or should I get it on Tuesday? And so they, they are very interested in making sure that they don't get hurt and that they bring their best game every day. And they knew that vaccines have side effects, especially muscle aches, a little bit of tiredness, a little bit of injection site pain, very common side effects of all vaccines. But they had received many, and so they wanted to be prepared for this one and make sure it didn't affect their game. I think when you talk about vaccines in young people, they're so used to getting them. You know, most high school and college athletes have received at least one vaccine in the last year, just part of the immunization schedule.

Deon (03:19):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (03:20):

So, they weren't fearful of the receipt of the vaccine, but just tell me how it's gonna affect this week and next week and let me make an informed decision about what day I take it. Um, and so I, I think that goes back to, if I'm a lead, I wanna be as healthy as possible, happy to, to do something to help my health. Let me just make an informed decision about what day to do it. The other thing that came up when talking to young people about the COVID-19 vaccine is I think that, by the time the vaccine became available to athletes, most people, um, had experienced somewhat of a, of an knowledge, you know, of an understanding of, of whether young people are truly affected by COVID-19. So, in the summer of 2021, you can imagine that in an athlete's mind, they mostly knew this is not very harmful to me. Most people in my age group are not hospitalized.

Deon (04:06):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (04:06):

I'm gonna have a cold for a week and a half. So, how does the vaccine help me as an athlete? You don't wanna get a cold in the middle of a season. In fact, if you look at athletes and what affects their health, more than 65% of illnesses that are not injuries in an athlete are just upper respiratory tract infections. So, they are well aware that a cold can take them down.

Deon (04:28):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (04:28):

Then there's the team-based approach. If I get a cold and then my buddy gets a cold, and we're all in the same section practicing, and then we all have a cold, we may not be able to play a game. And

that's a cold, a flu, a diarrhea illness. They are very aware of how viruses affect the team. And teams win games, not individuals.

Deon (04:47):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (04:47):

And so as a team, they make vaccination decisions and health decisions because teams make, win games, you know. And you can lose an athlete, but if you lose the whole team you're done. And you may be done for the season. So, I found that a very interesting, um, way to talk about vaccines with athletes, not something that I imagined would be probably the impetus for most of them receiving the vaccine. But it was, I want this team to succeed, and I don't wanna be the person who brings a virus into this team.

Deon (05:13):

Yeah. And, and I, I thought what was interesting about that is the day of the week, like which, which day is best. But it makes sense, like you mentioned, about the possible side effects, like, you know, the arm pain or, um, being, uh, you know, fatigued-

Dr. O'Neal (05:28):

Mm-hmm.

Deon (05:28):

... or anything like that. If you're fatigued, you really can't practice, you know.

Dr. O'Neal (05:32):

That's right.

Deon (05:32):

So, that, that-

Dr. O'Neal (05:32):

That's right.

Deon (05:32):

Yeah. It, it, it really makes, uh, sense. Um, i- in general, um, you know, the COVID vaccine aside, um, but in general, are there any vaccines that athletes, you know, fear could affect their performance?

Dr. O'Neal (05:50):

No. I think again, most athletes are young people-

Deon (05:52):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (05:52):

... and most young people are very used to following a vaccine schedule and, and take it for granted. We don't think about our routine medical care. We just go get it-

Deon (06:00):

That's true.

Dr. O'Neal (06:00):

... right? So, we don't think about how it affects our performance for the most part, until we have the opportunity to make a choice. And the COVID-19 vaccine is not on our immunization schedule. It's a choice. And so therefore when you give a person a choice and they say, hmm, do I want this? Don't want this today, don't want this later. And in that choice, it creates some doubt. Do I need this, right? I, I've never questioned whether I need the varicella vaccine or the measles and mumps vaccine. But because we gave the choice, then we question whether it's needed.

Deon (06:30):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (06:30):

And I think that opened up a great conversation, but ultimately what we saw, the majority of athletes, especially college athletes and NFL athletes choose is ab- absolutely, I want this because I wanna be healthy, 'cause I wanna be at the top of my game. I don't wanna be the person who brings my team down.

Deon (06:44):

Yeah. And that, that, and that's the key there, the whole team aspect of it.

Dr. O'Neal (06:49):

Absolutely.

Deon (06:49):

Because, you know, as an athlete, you know, that's what you're taught. You're taught about teamwork and it being one unit. And when one cog is out of place, that can mess up the whole thing. And no one wants to be that one cog.

Dr. O'Neal (07:06):

Absolutely. And honestly, it's an easier thing to talk about and more relatable, than what public health really is.

Deon (07:12):

Hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (07:12):

We're all a team.

Deon (07:13):

Yeah. That's true.

Dr. O'Neal (07:14):

This community's a team. My family's a team. We all have teams that we function, and my work team depends on me to be healthy. And so in all aspects of life, how do we wanna affect our team? And, and I think that, you know, the SEC, and the NFL and what I've seen, uh, those athletes do for their teammates is what we hoped our community would do for itself. And that's, let's stay healthy together-

Deon (07:36):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (07:37):

... because we, we wanna persevere through a-

Deon (07:38):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (07:39):

... through a global pandemic.

Deon (07:40):

Yeah. That's true. And it goes kinda back to that old, you know, cliché, there's no I in team.

Dr. O'Neal (07:45):

That's (laughs) right.

Deon (07:46):

Right.

Deon (07:46):

That's right.

Deon (07:46):

Yeah. Um, are there any additional vaccine requirements for athletes? 'Cause, you know, we, we, we all know the, the, um, schedule of, uh, vaccines that we all have to, uh, take as, as children and growing up. Are there any additional ones for athletes?

Dr. O'Neal (08:02):

There are not additional vaccines for athletes. There are... Most colleges require you, um, to be up to date on your vaccines before-

Deon (08:10):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (08:10):

... you're let into college. And honestly, the only place that I've seen outbreaks of measles and mumps in the last couple of years are on college campuses, and specifically around athletic teams. So, again, so important because they spend so much time in close proximity to-

Deon (08:24):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (08:24):

... each other while they're training. Uh, the influenza vaccine is recommended. Like it's recommended for everybody every year, but it's not, um, mandated for athletes.

Deon (08:33):

Mm-hmm.

Deon (08:33):

Um, and I know you... That kind of takes me to my next question. Um, you know, the, the f- uh, f- flu vaccine's not mandated, but have you seen where there may be, um, colleges or teams that are requiring a COVID vaccine for their athletes, uh, their teammates and things like that? Is that, what, what are we seeing there?

Dr. O'Neal (08:55):

We've only seen the requirement in professional sports. We have not seen the requirement in high school sports or college sports. Um, now we have seen college campuses go to a requirement.

Deon (09:05):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (09:05):

But that's individual, not necessarily for the athletes themselves. And, and I think what we're seeing is people adopting their own immunization schedule outside of, um, outside of our governing bodies, adding COVID-19 to our immunization schedule is, is organizations are saying, this is what... This is what we're ready to do.

Deon (09:21):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (09:21):

Because our team, whether that be for us, LSU or Southern or all the way down to the basketball team themselves, our team needs to be healthy.

Deon (09:29):

Yeah. And, uh, that's the point of it-

Dr. O'Neal (09:32):

Yeah.

Deon (09:32):

... at the end of the day.

Dr. O'Neal (09:33):

Absolutely.

Deon (09:33):

The health of everyone. Um, the effect of the COVID vaccine has been controversial, you know, and there's these conspiracy theories out there and the, um, sharing of misinformation on social media and everything. But can the COVID vaccine temporarily affect an athlete's performance? And, uh, and I know that's something that, um, you know, when an athlete is thinking about, um, the option of getting vaccinated, that's obviously something that thinking of. Is, is that, is, is there something to that?

Dr. O'Neal (10:10):

There are a multitude of side effects from COVID-19 and from the vaccine.

Deon (10:15):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (10:16):

So, we would, we would not be having an honest conversation if I said that, that if you got the vaccine, you should anticipate nothing-

Deon (10:23):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (10:24):

... right? Um, you're-

Deon (10:24):

That's not realistic.

Dr. O'Neal (10:25):

I put a needle in your arm, it hurts. It doesn't hurt that bad, but it hurts. And if you mount a really good immune response, you probably have some sort of symptoms. Whether that affects your performance or not is a whole nother level of understanding. Second to that, are there any severe side effects that somebody should fear would affect their performance? So, when you look at that, you have to look at the risk versus benefit of getting the vaccine versus not. And if you don't get it, your risk of getting the disease is higher. So, if I take people who are vaccinated and people who are unvaccinated, but get COVID-19, and I look at that risk, the risk is higher for people who get the

disease, that they won't be able to play. That they will have longer time out. And when an athlete is out for a certain number of days, then they have to stay out for longer to recover.

Deon (11:12):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (11:12):

So, there's an NCAA rule that if I'm sick for a certain number of days, I now have to stay out for longer just to have a recovery period. That's not worth it, right? So, if my vaccine's gonna gimme mild symptoms, I can sleep 'em off in 24, 48 hours. What I tell athletes is, the last time you worked out hard, harder than you've ever worked out. Were you sore for a couple of days? Did you have to recover? Did you feel successful? Because when I work out hard and I'm sore, I say, all right, that was great-

Deon (11:39):

Yeah (laughs).

Dr. O'Neal (11:39):

... right? And so your immune system's working out from the vaccine. You get a little tired, you should say, all right-

Deon (11:45):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (11:45):

... that's great. I did my job. When I get COVID-19 as a disease and I'm on my couch for two weeks, and I'm sniffly and I'm coughing, I can't recover well and then I have to go through a recovery period that affects performance. Did the vaccine possibly affect some of my performance? We haven't seen that, but there's a possibility. Will COVID-19 affect my performance? We've seen that.

Deon (12:06):

Hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (12:06):

It's well documented and it's hundreds to thousands of times more likely than the vaccine itself.

Deon (12:10):

Yeah. And also with, you know, someone who is not vaccinated, um, and they contract COVID, you also have to think about, you know, we are hearing a lot, uh, more about long COVID and its effects on you and, you know, who knows how long the long COVID will last.

Dr. O'Neal (12:27):

That's right. That's right.

Deon (12:28):

So, that's something else to think about.

Dr. O'Neal (12:31):

Absolutely. And we know that the COVID-19 vaccine, uh, decreases your chances of getting infected and also having long COVID.

Deon (12:36):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (12:36):

So, both benefits of just going ahead and getting the shot, even if you may have some mild symptoms.

Deon (12:41):

Yeah. Um, and I, I, I c- you know, we're having an honest, honest conversation here. I remember when I got my first, my first shot, well, the f- the f- the first dose of mine, um, you know, I had pain in the in- injections.

Dr. O'Neal (12:56):

Mm-hmm.

Deon (12:56):

But for some reason I had energy afterwards-

Dr. O'Neal (13:00):

Hmm.

Deon (13:01):

... which is crazy. But when I had my second dose, I was a total opposite. (laughing)

Dr. O'Neal (13:05):

I know.

Deon (13:06):

I was drowsy. I did not wanna move. But, you know, after maybe 12 hours, I was good to go.

Dr. O'Neal (13:13):

Yep. Yep.

Deon (13:14):

So...

Dr. O'Neal (13:14):

And that, that's a very common story. In fact, as we rolled out the vaccine and it became very obvious that for people who had not had COVID before, that second shot was really gonna be your immune booster-

Deon (13:24):

Hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (13:24):

... and you were gonna have those symptoms that said, Hey, I worked out my immune system. That's that achiness and that pain, and maybe even a little bit of fever. That's, that's your workout. We started to tell people, be ready for this.

Deon (13:35):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (13:35):

You know, make sure at about 12 hours, you're gonna feel achy. It's okay to take some Advil and Tylenol to alleviate your symptoms at 24 hours, you're gonna feel much better. And we've seen that march out time and time again. And I feel like having the expectation, knowing that that's gonna-

Deon (13:48):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (13:48):

... happen makes people feel a lot better-

Deon (13:50):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (13:51):

... about taking that booster.

Deon (13:51):

Yeah. And you don't, you don't mind it because you know what you get you-

Dr. O'Neal (13:55):

Absolutely.

Deon (13:55):

... you're going into.

Dr. O'Neal (13:56):

Yep.

Deon (13:56):

Yeah. Uh, can you tell us about the rumor and, you know, rumors are rumors. But in this day and age, you kind of have to talk about them-

Dr. O'Neal (14:07):

Mm-hmm.

Deon (14:08):

... and get to the root-

Dr. O'Neal (14:09):

Yeah.

Deon (14:09):

... and the truth of it all. But there's the rumor that the COVID-19 vaccine is causing sudden death among athletes. What is that all about?

Dr. O'Neal (14:19):

I don't know. It's hard to... It's hard to tell where rumors start, right?

Deon (14:22):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (14:22):

Sometimes you can pinpoint it, sometimes it's, uh, it's an internet rumor that has its, has its, um, night is in so far away that you can't, you can't really dig into it. I do know that, um, during the rollout of the vaccine for young people, and the beginning of, um, sports again, you know, really having collegiate sports, there was a, um, University of Florida player who, um, who had sudden cardiac arrest on the basketball, um, on the basketball court.

Deon (14:50):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (14:50):

And it was a very dramatic video. It was, it's very painful to watch. Um, he was recently honored at their last game of the season because they were able to resuscitate him and go to the hospital. And within, you know, minutes, the news is reporting, "I wonder if he had COVID. Maybe this is post COVID. Maybe this was the vaccine." Lots of rumor. Um, that, then the University of Florida had to come out and say, "Listen, we have to respect his medical history.

Deon (15:12):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (15:12):

But this is not due to COVID. And then it's in no way related to any sort of previous illness or vaccination. And then we're not gonna tell you anything else, because that's his privacy."

Deon (15:22):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (15:22):

So, so when we don't feel like we get the full story, rumors continue to run rampant.

Deon (15:27):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (15:28):

Well, that's one example. I'm not sure if that's where it came from, but I'll tell you watching him kiss the floor on his last game as a, um, as a player, this past year, was just amazing, because athletes go through so much and they're in the limelight a lot.

Deon (15:41):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (15:42):

And, um-

Deon (15:42):

There's that scrutiny.

Dr. O'Neal (15:42):

... and they persevere.

Deon (15:43):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. O'Neal (15:43):

Yeah.

Deon (15:43):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (15:44):

They do.

Deon (15:44):

Yeah. It's not easy.

Dr. O'Neal (15:45):

No.

Deon (15:46):

Not easy at all.

Dr. O'Neal (15:46):

No.

Deon (15:47):

Especially when, you know, there's that expectation for you as an athlete to perform at such a high level, and perform that level every-

Dr. O'Neal (15:56):

Mm-hmm.

Deon (15:56):

... single time.

Dr. O'Neal (15:57):

Yep. Yep.

Deon (15:58):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (15:58):

It's um, it's hard on you and it's what makes you, when you have a choice, you have to consider all of your options.

Deon (16:04):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (16:04):

Um, and luckily, most people have made that choice, and, and they do it for their family, for their team and for themselves.

Deon (16:09):

Mm-hmm. Um, does exercise affect a vaccine's effectiveness? Because I know one of the things that we found, um, when the pandemic started and how COVID, um, uh, is different in different people, healthier people were, uh, didn't have as extreme, um, symptoms, or, uh, didn't have to be as hospitalized as, as, as those who weren't as healthy. Uh, does exercise, uh, affect, uh, uh, effectiveness of a vaccine?

Dr. O'Neal (16:43):

So, let's talk about why your vaccine might not be effective. It, vaccines should work for most people.

Deon (16:49):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (16:50):

But everybody's a little bit different. Thank the Lord.

Deon (16:52):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (16:52):

And one of the things that affects a vaccine's effectiveness is you, the state of your immune system. So, what we see in the broad population is that people who have immunodeficiencies, people who are on medications that affect their immune system-

Deon (17:06):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (17:06):

... and then people who are older, um, your immune system just doesn't last, as long as you want it to. Those people have a harder time responding to the vaccine. So, people with immune issues, people on drugs that affect their immune system and then older people, are truly those people who have trouble responding to their vaccine. But we do have great evidence that an athlete who is over-exercising, who's sort of at the end of a really strenuous period right before they perform, their immune system is also compromised during that time. And there have been a lot of great studies that look at immunity in athletes and the susceptibility to a cold, right, in that high intensity training time, especially if you don't have enough recovery time.

Deon (17:47):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (17:48):

And, and so we know that their immune system is affected by extreme exercise. So, that's probably not the time to get your vaccination, right?

Deon (17:55):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (17:56):

And I don't think anybody who's about to go to the Olympics is going to receive their vaccination right before they get on the plane, unless it's required. The timing would be better if you got it several weeks before. But we know that the extremes of exercise can be harmful to the immune system. And on the other hand, we have great evidence that moderate exercise throughout your lifetime actually improves your immunity and immune re- response. So, like everything, how much should I eat?

Deon (18:19):

Right (laughs).

Dr. O'Neal (18:19):

How much should I... (laughs) You know, how much diet Coke should I drink a day? Moderation is your friend. And anything that we do in the extremes is bad, including exercise.

Deon (18:27):

Mm-hmm. Just take it easy.

Dr. O'Neal (18:28):

Take it easy.

Deon (18:29):

Take it-

Dr. O'Neal (18:29):

Do it right.

Deon (18:30):

Yeah, yeah. Um, something else that, uh, you know, there's always a controversy. Um, and we saw, um, in the last, uh, last fall, I guess that would be the right season, um, football players, um, some very, very well-known ones, some future Hall of Famers. Um, also there are some, uh, NBA players, um, whose vaccination status caused some controversy. Uh, touch on that a little bit, and, you know, how that, in a way, helped shape the conversation around the COVID vaccine.

Dr. O'Neal (19:21):

It's been really interesting to watch people pick platforms, and to watch people use those platforms for their own benefit. What, whatever that may be.

Deon (19:29):

Hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (19:30):

It's hard for me to understand. Um, what I go back to is, who do you receive your information from? You know, if I want to cook a gumbo, uh, I don't know that I would ever listen to an NFL athlete tell me how to cook one, but I'm sure gonna find a Cajun person.

Deon (19:42):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (19:42):

Maybe somebody whose last name is Guillory, right?

Deon (19:45):

Right (laughs).

Dr. O'Neal (19:46):

And then I'll take your advice.

Deon (19:46):

I got a co- I have a cousin who's great at-

Dr. O'Neal (19:48):

(laughs)

Deon (19:48):

... uh, making some gumbos. I'll hook you up with them.

Dr. O'Neal (19:49):

That's right. that's right. And if I wanna know anything about my garden, I'm gonna call my parents and I'm gonna call the ag center if I really need help, right?

Deon (19:56):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (19:56):

And if I wanna know about medicine, I'm gonna call my doctor. And I'm gonna get on the website for the local hospital if I don't have one, 'cause I'm lucky enough to be so healthy that I've not needed a doctor yet, which were a lot of people. But where am I finding my advice? And it is not somebody's platform. But we found that people who have a lot of likes and have a big platform, um, found their voice-

Deon (20:16):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (20:16):

... and gave their opinion. And opinions are great, but they're not information and they're not education, they're opinions. And so we've watched our country deal with that, and I continue to only be able to give my own advice, which is find your expert, whether it's gardening, gumbo or the vaccine.

Deon (20:31):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (20:32):

Find your expert because that's who is in it to win it for your community and your team. And if you don't know them personally, they're not part of your team, I don't know that they have a vested interest in your health.

Deon (20:43):

Yeah. And I think that's, that's the key, at the end of the day, is making sure that you are getting the facts and that right information from the right source.

Dr. O'Neal (20:56):

That's right.

Deon (20:56):

Yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (20:56):

That's right. Hard to find the right source sometimes. You know, there-

Deon (20:58):

That's true.

Dr. O'Neal (20:59):

There are so many when you Google a topic, it's tough.

Deon (21:03):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (21:03):

Um, but, and that's why-

Deon (21:03):

And there are 100 pages that you could-

Dr. O'Neal (21:03):

(laughs) That's right. that'S right.

Deon (21:05):

... possibly go through.

Dr. O'Neal (21:06):

But Google's not part of your community either.

Deon (21:08):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (21:08):

And usually, in your community, part of your team, you can find somebody who can give you the answer to the question you're asking.

Deon (21:15):

Mm-hmm. And I, and I love that you said, you know, the, anyone who's a part of your community has your best interest at hand.

Dr. O'Neal (21:19):

Absolutely.

Deon (21:19):

Yeah. Oh, I love this conversation.

Dr. O'Neal (21:21):

(laughs)

Deon (21:22):

Uh, Dr. O'Neal, is there anything else, um, you wanna touch on for our listeners, um, just about athletes and vaccines, just as a whole?

Dr. O'Neal (21:33):

You know, I, I think that we've covered a lot of, a lot of it today. One of the things that I learned about athletes that I also thought was incredibly interesting about the spread of disease is that, um, people who are roommates are more likely to spread disease. People who rode in a car with each other are more likely to spread disease. But the actual act of playing a sport does very little in increasing the risk of spread. We were so worried about that football field, or that basketball-

Deon (21:57):

Oh yeah.

Dr. O'Neal (21:57):

... game or that volleyball game. But when we really spread infections is the same, no matter if I'm an elite athlete or just driving home from the soccer field, 'cause I'm a soccer mom, right? It's in the car chit-chatting while I'm eating my Canes, and, uh, somebody sneezes, and then we all have COVID.

Deon (22:11):

Right.

Dr. O'Neal (22:11):

And so we have to protect ourselves, whether I'm an elite athlete, or the person driving them, or the person on the plane by looking at our pod and our team and saying, how are we interacting? Who's sick? Who feels bad? And I learned that athletes are no different from us in the end.

Deon (22:26):

Mm-hmm.

Dr. O'Neal (22:26):

That it's not about the game, it's about our team.

Deon (22:29):

Yeah. And wanna make sure that that team is as close to 100% as possible.

Dr. O'Neal (22:35):

Absolutely.

Deon (22:35):

Yeah. Dr. O'Neal, thank you so much for the insight and the great conversation.

Dr. O'Neal (22:39):

Sure.

Deon (22:41):

And that's a wrap for today. Thank you for joining us. We hope you learned some new facts you weren't aware of. A new episode is on its way soon, so stay tuned for more.