

# **RETURNING TO SCHOOL: WHAT HEALTH LEADERS NEED TO KNOW**

Category: Covid-19, Policy Blog

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With the start of the 2021-22 school year around the corner and some schools starting this week, the entire country is again facing thousands of local decisions about under what conditions schools will reopen, in view of the major upheaval caused by the delta variant of coronavirus. This strain is highly contagious, on the same level as measles and chickenpox, therefore public health officials are urging strict enforcement for mask wearing, physical distancing and vaccination. To increase support for vaccines we must double down on containment and mitigation measures, including extensive testing, isolation, use of masks and social distancing of 3 feet at school campuses, under CDC guidelines. To quote Dr. Rachel Levine, Assistant Secretary for Health at HHS, "We must cocoon a child surrounded by vaccinated adults." This means that all teachers must be vaccinated, and children must wear masks while in school. We all play a role and what the pandemic has taught us is that we are all interconnected.

## **Other Vulnerable Groups**

Amidst these decisions weighing heavily on the minds of elected officials and public health officers, one piece of good news is that Pfizer will be seeking another Emergency Order Authorization in the fall for its new COVID-19 vaccine for children ages 5 to 11 years old. (Younger than 5-yrs-old groups will take longer, because of the size of clinical trials and the cautious approach to de-escalate dosage when treating toddlers and infants).

Dr. Anne Edwards with the American Academy of Pediatrics reported on a national call with HHS and the CDC that pediatricians are seeing a lot of respiratory illness in medical offices, the ICU and regular hospital beds. She and all medical staff strongly encourage everyone in the 12-and-older age group who are eligible to get vaccinated. Studies show that no one is more trusted than Pediatricians, therefore the physician should take the time during medical visits to clear up any questions for the family. We all need your help as trusted leaders in your community. Dr. Amy Mullins, from the American Academy of Family Physicians, added that when confronting vaccine hesitancy, data shows that there is no single public message that will always overcome.

In addition, evidence about the safety of COVID-19 vaccination during pregnancy has been growing, including in the early months of pregnancy. There is a trove of surveillance data, according to Dr. Peter Marks from the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). Pregnant and recently pregnant women are more likely to get severely ill compared with non-pregnant people. These data strongly point to the conclusion that the benefits of receiving a COVID-19 vaccine outweigh any known or potential risks of vaccination during pregnancy. During the week of August 11, the Centers for Disease Control advanced this information and posted recommendations on their website. [Learn More.](#)

## **Vaccine Boost**

The FDA recently authorized a third dose or boost of the MRNI-type vaccine for those people who are immune-compromised, ages 15 and over. Further, the evidence and rationale for taking this next step tells us that if a patient is only taking two medications for the underlying health condition, there is very little risk when taking a third dose. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) will have to issue final guidance on this matter.

When administering immunizations, providers may wish to separate the administration of shots, especially when dealing with live viral vaccines and fever is present). Soon the CDC will disclose real world evidence.

We ALL need your Help and the enlistment of public and private employers to take extra steps, such as time off from work to get vaccinated and providing free rides to vaccination sites.