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# AAP News

## Our collective efforts will help us emerge from pandemic

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Dr. Beers

As I write this, the fourth wave of COVID-19 cases has hit, just as America's young people are heading back to school. Parents and pediatricians are worried, because this time, the virus is targeting the unvaccinated, many of whom are children.

Even our top infectious disease experts can't say for certain when SARS-CoV-2's contagiousness will peak or what new variant may emerge next. But all agree the virus is not done with us yet, and the three most important things pediatricians can do to stop it are to:

- encourage eligible patients to get the vaccine;
- work with communities and schools to promote universal mask use and other layers of protection, and
- urge the Food and Drug Administration to move quickly on clinical trials, so we can safely vaccinate children under the age of 12 as soon as possible (<https://bit.ly/3CzrDr7>).

To all of you doing this important work, your courage and resilience has been remarkable throughout the pandemic and the ensuing dangers, setbacks, surges, lockdowns and attacks on science and even some of our members.

To all of you who want to get off this ride, I understand. For 18 months, we've been on a rollercoaster of heartbreak and hope. As the United States once again stands on the precipice of rising COVID cases, pediatricians are working overtime to combat anger and misinformation and allay anxiety and fear to keep children safe.

Last month, we took the lead on recommending universal mask-wearing for children in grades K-12 school settings (<https://bit.ly/2BMPtW5>), because it's so important for schools to open for in-person learning - and stay open. Sadly, the simple act of wearing masks in common sense situations to decrease the spread of COVID-19 has become an intensely political issue.

For all of us who feel worn down as our efforts to keep children and families healthy are attacked, it may help to know our nation has been here before.

Though there was no vaccine for the influenza pandemic that raged around the world and across the United States more than a century ago, masks played a role in the political and cultural wars of the day, igniting protests, petitions and defiant bare-faced gatherings.

Many communities imposed mandatory ordinances. Passing these ordinances was a contentious process with protestors calling them "autocratic and unconstitutional." Fines of up to \$200 were imposed for failing to comply



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with these ordinances and prisons swelled to capacity.

Today, disagreements about the severity of the pandemic and the merits of masking and vaccinations divide families and communities, and lead to threats against health workers and the dismissal of proven public health measures. They also cost lives.

But pediatricians have risen to the occasion. Against a wave of attacks and the rise of the highly transmissible delta variant, the AAP and its members continue to protect children and families.

Each conversation you have with a reluctant, concerned or even angry family; each time you speak out about the risks of SARS-CoV-2 to children; each opportunity you seek to educate your patients, your community and the public about safe and effective measures to keep children healthy makes a difference. You may not always see it, as you have these conversations one patient, one family, one person at a time. But from where I sit, I see the collective progress you are making together. And I can tell you that what you are doing matters and is making a difference.

Pediatricians remain the most trusted messengers of information about child health, including the COVID-19 vaccine. And it is through the Academy's work of policy, advocacy and education and your acts of truth-telling and compassion that we will find our way to the other side of this pandemic, patient by patient, family by family, community by community.

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