

My name is Alexandra Hall; I live in the city of Menomonie, and my son attends the high school.

None of us wants to be continuing to debate this issue, but it would be a dereliction of duty not to given the very high rates of COVID we've been seeing in K-12 students since school started. They are far higher than they were last year at this time. In fact, more than 1/5th of all cases in those aged 0-9 have now occurred in just the first 23 days of September.

The current consensus among most disease experts is that we will never eradicate COVID – it will continue to be among us from here on, and we will all eventually be exposed, if not infected. What we can do, however, is manage **how** that happens in order to minimize how much suffering and death occurs. To accomplish this, there are two main strategies.

The first is to vaccinate as many people as we possibly can, as well as we possibly can. I'm not going to use these remarks to try to convince those of you who don't want it, but rather to point out that we are just a few months away from most people who want protection from vaccination being able to get it. The Pfizer booster was approved just Friday, and Moderna's and perhaps J&J's will be approved in the next several weeks. More importantly, it is likely that vaccinations for children aged 5-11 will become available in the next month or so. So we are only a month or two away from people being able to get protection via vaccination if they want it – it makes sense to do what we can to mitigate transmission until they have that opportunity.

The second strategy to minimize suffering is to keep the pace of infections slow enough so that our hospital systems don't get overwhelmed. Hospitals are a shared resource that we need to protect – if they're overfull, then no one gets good care, whether it be for COVID, a heart attack, cancer, a broken arm, or appendicitis. And as we've already seen in other regions of the country, otherwise avoidable suffering and deaths then occur. Our Wisconsin hospitals are now full, and our cases continue to go up. This is not sustainable. We need to slow the transmission to help preserve this vital resource.

We know that mask requirements slow the spread of COVID. It worked all last year, and three studies published in just the past two weeks also show that masks in school and communities make a significant difference in rates of COVID infections. It is ridiculous to think that if we continue to carry on as we have been that we will not suffer the devastating consequences we've seen happening around the country and even around the state. Please require masks in the K-12 schools.

Thank you.