



Wisconsin Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



Healthy Kids
Collaborative



Wisconsin Medical Society



WISCONSIN ACADEMY of FAMILY PHYSICIANS

May 14, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

We write today to share the modified text of a press release we distributed to the media on April 22nd. Please feel free to amend it and use it to communicate with your local school districts and public health departments who are beginning to face significant resistance from some parents and guardians who oppose face coverings and SARS-CoV-2 testing for kids. While we are entering a hopeful phase of the pandemic, with peeling back of mitigating measures for those that are fully vaccinated (a development that happened after this earlier press release), younger adolescents have just become eligible for vaccination and children younger than 12 cannot yet be vaccinated. We are at a transition point in the pandemic where we excitedly await more broad vaccination coverage yet still have the opportunity to keep kids safe using the successful strategies we have employed over the last year. The release seeks to strongly encourage parents, educators, and communities to continue to use trusted mitigating measures, specifically universal masking in schools, for this largely unvaccinated population for the time being. Please use it as you see fit to share that message with your local stakeholders.

We appreciate your partnership and commitment to assuring a healthy future for Wisconsin's children.

Sincerely,
UW Health
Healthy Kids Collaborative
Children's Wisconsin
Wisconsin Medical Society
Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
WI Academy of Family Physicians

Medical Providers Call for Continued Attention to Preventing the Spread of COVID-19 & Highlight the Importance of Focusing on Children

As Wisconsin sees a shift in cases of COVID-19 in children, including those from new and more infectious variants, such as the UK strain (B.1.1.7), medical providers are calling on the community to continue to work to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through vaccination and mitigation measures, including masking, in unvaccinated populations. Recent weeks have shown an increase in weekly case numbers in those under the age of 18 in Wisconsin.

Interactions between children and the opportunity to participate in school, sports, and extracurricular activities is critically important for children's health and wellbeing. Over the course of the year, Wisconsin schools developed robust and effective mitigation protocols to help prevent in-school transmission of COVID-19. Similarly, many children's activities have created safe environments to allow children to participate meaningfully in activities outside of school. While we await vaccines for all ages of children, it is essential that we do all we can to continue to protect our children from exposure to COVID-19 while still allowing them to participate in activities that stimulate their brains, promote physical activity, and connect with their peers. As medical providers and health care organizations, we support the ongoing use of universal masking in schools and in children's activities that involve close contact.

While the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic is borne by older adults, the risk of severe illness in children should not be taken lightly. While many children will have only mild symptoms with COVID-19, some children will develop more severe illness requiring time in the hospital and even in intensive care units. Teenagers may be more likely than younger children to develop severe breathing problems or long-hauler syndrome. Children with complex medical problems are vulnerable to becoming sick from COVID-19. Children of all ages may develop Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C), an inflammatory condition affecting different organ systems in the body, after exposure to COVID-19. The average age for MIS-C is 9 years old. To date, there have been over 3,000 cases of MIS-C in the US. We are just beginning to understand the long-term impact of SARS-CoV-2 infection in children. While children account for a small portion of total deaths from COVID-19, in the US over 300 children have died from COVID-19 since the pandemic began. While the numbers are thankfully not large, for the families who have had critically ill children or lost children to this disease, this has been a uniquely devastating time.

Children who are at least 12 years old are currently able to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. In the coming months, young children may also have the opportunity to be vaccinated for COVID-19 as well. The COVID-19 vaccine is extremely effective at preventing severe disease and death from COVID-19 and at decreasing the spread of the virus. As more and more members of our community are vaccinated, including children and adolescents, less disease will occur in our communities. Vaccinating children protects them from severe disease, protects those around them, and will allow them to more quickly return to more normal times. As medical providers and health care organizations, we ask for your help in getting as many members of our community, young and old, vaccinated as possible. This is just one of the ways we have learned to care for each other and ourselves.

While testing does not protect us from COVID-19, it helps us to identify and contain it. Remember that if you or your children have new symptoms, even if they are mild, getting tested for COVID-19 helps prevent the spread to those who are unable to be vaccinated.

As medical providers and health care organizations, we are asking for your support. Help us protect our children and community members by encouraging the following:

- Continued universal masking in schools (children and staff should wear masks that consistently cover their mouth and nose)
- Three activities: Masking in public places, watching your distance, washing your hands

- Only participating in activities and school when well
- Getting tested for COVID-19 when you have symptoms, even if they are mild
- Getting the COVID-19 vaccine as soon as you are eligible and help others in your life do the same to cut down on the overall spread of COVID-19 and prevent further variant formation

"While the development of the COVID-19 vaccine has been a modern medical triumph, and we are extremely optimistic about the data we're seeing about its effectiveness in younger kids, now is not the time to get complacent," said Dr. Michael Gutzeit, chief medical officer of Children's Wisconsin. "We have come so far and we all have a role to play in limiting the spread of COVID-19. Until the vaccine is available to all ages, we strongly encourage everyone to continue to wear a mask, continue to practice social distancing when possible and, as always, continue to wash your hands thoroughly and often. Prevention remains the most effective strategy in overcoming this pandemic and we know these safety precautions work and can go a long way to limiting the spread of the disease."

For more than a year, providers have worked with parents, guardians, teachers, coaches, and schools to balance the need to respond to the pandemic with the psychological, social and economic effects of that response on Wisconsin's children and families. It has become clear that a resurgence of misinformation about the safety and efficacy of masks, underappreciation of the potential impacts of COVID-19 on children, and exposure to new COVID-19 variants threatens the delicate balance that has protected kids to this point. With young adolescents newly eligible for vaccines and great hope for vaccine availability for younger ages in the coming months, we urge patience, persistence, and reliance on the tools we know work to protect children.

"It is our collective responsibility to protect the health and well-being of our most important and precious resource - our children," said Dr. [Ellen Wald](#), chair of the Department of Pediatrics at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. "Together, we must assure continued adherence, at least until the end of this school year, to the mitigation strategies that we know to be extremely effective in providing protection during in-person school and co-curricular activities, including athletics. As custodians of the safety of our children, please join in this effort."

The data we're seeing indicate we're at a critical point, according to Dr. [Dipesh Navsaria](#), president of the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and UW Health pediatrician. "What's happening now is a threat to the careful, thoughtful, collaborative work we've done, and will undo the hard-won progress made," Navsaria said. "Over the last year pediatricians, public health professionals and so many throughout our state have worked to keep our children safe and get them back in school. We need your help, your care, your love and your work to protect children and communities throughout the state."

Please look to the following resources for guidance and safe practices regarding schools and sports activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- Wisconsin Department of Health Services

- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
- Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association