The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

We must have a plan to vaccinate kids
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As one of my colleagues organized her COVID-19 vaccination recently, her six-year-old daughter stomped a foot and loudly asked “What about us?"

Indeed, what about them? On Monday, every adult in the country became eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine. But as usual, kids have been left out of the mix. First Focus on Children has presented the Biden Administration with a few ways to solve this.

The problem: Vaccine-hesitant adults — the 20% of the population who plan to refuse the vaccine unless forced — have shifted the burden of herd immunity to our children. In addition to being unfair, this selfish act places our children in mortal danger and ignores a central fact: There is no vaccine for children.

The solution: Continue to support the rapid development of a children’s vaccine and be ready to distribute it by creating a national plan tailored to the specific needs of children.

The challenges: Let’s start with the fact that kids can’t drive, so they can’t just take themselves to a vaccination site. Add to that:

- Vaccine-hesitant caregivers
- Racial inequities in vaccine distribution and use
- The perception that COVID-19 does not affect children.

The imperative:

- **Funding:** Set aside funds from the American Rescue Plan specifically to design and implement a children’s vaccination program.
- **Distribution:**
  - Create a detailed plan to make vaccines available at child care facilities, schools, community health centers, recreation centers, youth sports venues and other places where children spend their time.
  - Make special provisions to reach children with disabilities and chronic conditions, as well as children in congregate care and juvenile detention settings.
- **Outreach:**
  - Launch a public education campaign aimed at overcoming vaccine hesitancy and the perception that children are not affected by COVID-19.
Address systemic inequities by targeting a diverse representation of community leaders trusted by parents, grandparents, and caregivers.

Reach out to immigrant communities, including translation of materials into the top 15 non-English languages spoken in each state.

The background:

- **Impact of COVID-19 on kids:**
  - More than 3.5 million children have tested positive for COVID-19 and nearly 300 have died.
  - More than 40,000 children have lost a parent to COVID-19 so far.
  - Increased child poverty, with increases particularly acute for Black and Hispanic individuals, as well as for children.
  - Rampant hunger with 13 million children (1 in 6) projected to experience food insecurity in 2021.
  - For more on this, see our fact sheet, The REAL Impact of COVID-19 on Kids.

- **State of kid vaccines**
  - Pfizer's vaccine has been found safe and effective in children aged 12 to 15.
  - Both Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna are testing their vaccines in children as young as six months.
  - Dr. Anthony Fauci has said he expects all kids to be able to receive a vaccine by early 2022.

The time bomb: School

The pandemic has already disrupted every aspect of our children’s lives. Record numbers of children are failing classes. Mental health crises among young people have soared. We cannot get kids safely back in school – i.e. back to something resembling normal life – unless they are protected from this virus, as the adults in their lives are.

The conclusion: The Administration must be ready to distribute a children’s vaccine as soon as one is available, especially to those who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its economic, social and emotional fallout. For more on how all this would work, check out our letter to the Administration.

And please feel free to reach out directly to me by email, text or phone for more information.

Best,

Michele Kayal