

PRINT SCRIPT-A preventable problem: Kids and the need to vaccinate

The American Academy of Pediatrics says COVID-19 cases among children and teens jumped 84% in one week's time with more than 72,000 kids acquiring the disease between July 22 and July 29. That's alarming pediatricians and medical providers including Dana DeShon, an APN for OSF HealthCare who specializes in Pediatrics.

DeShon's office and others across the Peoria, Illinois based OSF HealthCare Ministry are now vaccinating children 12 and older against the COVID-19 virus. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recently advised that the vaccine can be given at the same time children and adults receive other vaccinations.

The Pfizer vaccine is the only one approved for use in children 12 and over, and it requires two doses. DeShon recommends getting [pre-teens and teens vaccinated](#) now so children can be fully vaccinated in time for the new school year.

"Now is the time we should be getting that vaccination to make sure that those kids that are 12 and older are protecting not only themselves and their family and those who they are around, but also their peers and younger kids who have not been able to get that vaccination because they're not eligible or old enough to get that."

Research indicates the delta variant is associated with an estimated 60% higher risk of household transmission than the alpha variant, which was already much more transmissible than the original version of the virus. There are also suggestions the delta variant could carry a much higher risk of hospital admission in unvaccinated individuals.

DeShon says children can get very sick or suffer long-term complications, particularly if they acquire [multisystem inflammatory syndrome \(MIS\)](#) – a serious condition related to COVID-19 in which different body parts become inflamed, including the heart, lungs, kidneys, brain, skin, eyes or gastrointestinal organs. In the United States, nearly 4,200 children have been diagnosed with it.

DeShon also points out more than 400 children have died from COVID-19. She says as a medical provider, it's frustrating to learn about those deaths because kids are dying from a preventable disease.

"It is definitely not as high of a percentage as what we would see in the older population, but I still think 400 is way too much more than we would see. It's double the amount we would see in an influenza season."

DeShon says if your child has had COVID-19 and plans on playing sports, they need a medical clearance due to concerns the virus may have damaged the child's lungs and heart.

As an ambassador for a United Nations Foundation campaign called Shot@Life, DeShon and others lobby Congress to fund vaccine support for children in low-income countries. She's concerned about children missing *all* necessary vaccines because the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted many parents to avoid wellness check-ups which also include vaccinations.

Parents are skipping vaccinations that should be given [according to a schedule recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices \(ACIP\)](#). DeShon says globally, the number of missed vaccinations is staggering.

“Statistically, I think we’re still about 23 million doses behind for missing those vaccinations. We haven’t seen anything lag like this since about 2009, so it’s been a long time since we’ve seen any problems with this. And it’s not just a United States problem, it’s a worldwide problem.”

There are 14 diseases that can be prevented through childhood immunizations.

“Those prevent about a million deaths in children per year. It also helps to prevent hospitalizations. Up to 8 million hospitalizations are prevented when we get those vaccinations.”

DeShon says more than 400 million illnesses are also prevented by giving those childhood vaccinations. The impact of not vaccinating children has been seen with outbreaks in areas with low vaccination rates. For example, two years ago there were measles outbreaks in areas of the U.S. with resistance to vaccinations against the highly contagious disease.

Diseases that have been mostly eradicated, such as polio and meningitis, could return, DeShon says.

“That’s always the concern – that if we are not catching up those kids in those areas that we should get those levels of vaccination rates, that we will definitely see surges of those diseases that have been far off for a long time, now coming back.”

DeShon is also concerned delayed wellness visits could allow parents to miss developmental delays or medical problems that require intervention.

She also advises, if you have concerns about the COVID-19 vaccine or any other immunizations, do your research and then speak with your child’s pediatrician or primary care provider.