

Memo

To: Interested Parties
From: United States of Care
Date: September 27, 2021
Re: Back to School: Celebrating vaccine progress, navigating questions

As many American parents and children consider a return to in-person schooling, questions and confusion over vaccinations and potential mandates are common. This month, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration officially gave its full approval for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccines for individuals 16 years of age and older. While hundreds of millions of people have already safely received COVID-19 vaccines, the FDA approval of a vaccine may now instill additional confidence to get vaccinated for those who have been waiting. This is a critical step toward protecting our families and moving the United States closer to broad immunity.

As of [September 17, 2021](#) over 180 million people, age 12 and over, have been fully vaccinated while 210 million have received at least one dose. Additionally, boosters are beginning to be administered to immunocompromised individuals with additional guidance being regularly released.

For many parents it has been a straightforward decision to vaccinate their child and the data shows that if a parent has been vaccinated themselves, they are more likely to do the same for their child. However, as we have seen play out across other demographics, some parents still have questions or concerns about vaccine side effects in children. Some of these concerns are tied to the fact that the vaccine remains available under emergency use authorization (EUA) for individuals 12 through 15 years of age and there is still no clear timeline for full FDA approval of all the available vaccines. Here again, the data makes the case for messaging that relays the basic facts about vaccines and encourages parents to seek guidance from their family physicians.

Key takeaways detailed in this memo:

- The data reiterate that the most effective messengers for adults — making decisions for themselves or their children — remain each family's doctor.
- Advocates should encourage parents to talk with their child's pediatrician, which in some cases may have the dual benefit of leading both parent and child to get vaccinated.
- Kaiser Family Foundation's COVID-19 Monitor (conducted mid July-early August) found that parents who have been vaccinated are more likely to vaccinate their children against COVID-19. In addition, more than six in ten parents of children who have received at least one dose of the vaccine say they have talked with their child "a lot" about the vaccine, compared with about a third (35%) of parents of unvaccinated 12-17 year-olds.
- deBeaumont Foundation polling found that 76% said the Delta variant increases the likelihood of their children getting a COVID vaccine, including 48% who said it makes them "much more likely."

Current trends and enthusiasm:

The [COVID-19 Vaccine Monitor](#) survey from the Kaiser Family Foundation included data on parents of adolescents 12-17 years old. Among those parents, 41% reported their child had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine while an additional 6% said that they planned to get their child vaccinated right away. A further 23% said they would “wait a while to see how it is working” before getting their child vaccinated; 9% said they would do so only if required by their child’s school.

Fear of Being Left Behind:

Falling behind in school and its impact on the entire family have proven to be common concerns amongst parents heading into the 2021 school year.

- About four-in-ten parents of children ages five and older say at least one of their children fell behind academically (39%).
- More than a third (36%) of parents say their child fell behind in their social and emotional development and about three-in-ten (29%) say their child experienced mental health or behavioral problems due to the pandemic.
- Nearly four-in-ten parents say they or another adult in their household left a job or changed work schedules to care for their children in the past year.
 - Parents in a household with an employment disruption are more likely than those who didn’t experience a disruption to say their child fell behind academically (51% vs. 32%), fell behind in their social or emotional development (49% vs. 28%), or that they experienced mental health or behavioral problems (41% vs. 21%).

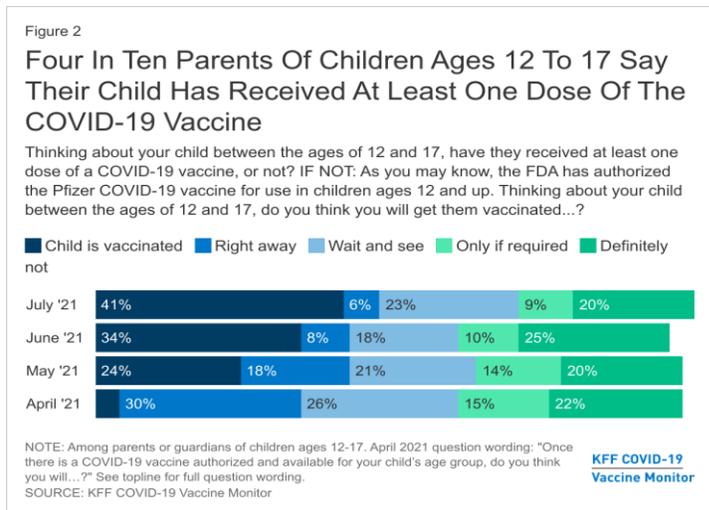
Understanding hesitancy and concerns:

Parents have some questions and concerns about the vaccine that are similar to those we have seen across other demographic audiences. The [KFF monitor](#) found that among parents of unvaccinated children:

- 88% percent had concerns about the long-term side effects
 - One-in-five of these parents have children who have personally expressed concerns about the vaccines’ side effects or negative vaccine reactions.
- 79% believe their child might experience serious side effects from the COVID-19 vaccine
- 73% fear the COVID-19 vaccine may negatively impact their child’s fertility in the future

Delta Variant and Schools

A [recent survey from the de Beaumont Foundation \(dbf\)](#) reported parents are more likely to get their child vaccinated ahead of the school year due to the increased presence of the Delta variant (41%). Eighty-five percent of parents said the spread of the Delta variant makes them more likely to support mask requirements in schools.



When asked to choose from a list of nine priority areas, all parents — vaccinated, unvaccinated, Democrats, and Republicans — chose “*maximize the safety of students*” over statements about community spread, equity, academics, full reopening of all buildings, adult safety, no restrictions like masking or distancing, sports, and mental health.

The KFF COVID-19 Monitor report included an important note that puts parents’ questions and concerns in context, stating that they “don’t necessarily reflect a resistance among parents to vaccines more broadly.” Just nine percent say they have delayed or skipped some childhood vaccines for their children. Yet even among parents of 12-17 year-olds who say their children are up-to-date on other childhood vaccines, fewer than half (43%) say their child has received a COVID-19 vaccine.

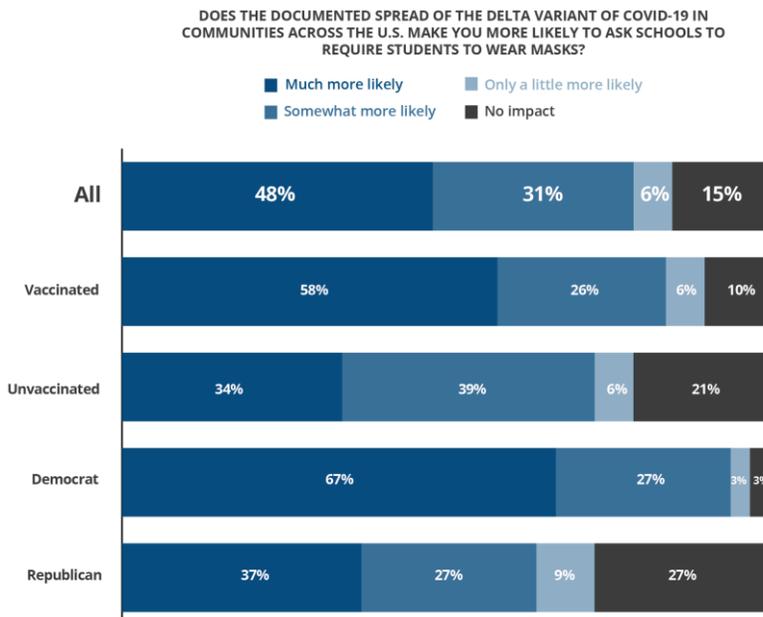
Messaging to meet parents where they are:

Across all the data on parents and their intentions to vaccinate their children, it is clear this audience remains conflicted and are looking for assurances. With the return to school being imminent for so many and the threat of the Delta variant only growing, possessing a proper understanding of who the most effective messengers are is vital. Below is information from KFF regarding parents’ most-trusted sources of information for the COVID-19 vaccine for children:

- 78% of parents say they trust their child’s pediatrician “a great deal” or a “fair amount” to provide reliable information about COVID-19 vaccines for kids.
- Large majorities of parents say they trust the CDC (66%) and their local public health department (62%) at least a fair amount to relay information regarding the vaccine.
- Schools and other parents are lower on parents’ list of trusted information sources, with 44% saying they trust their child’s school or daycare for vaccine information and 38% saying the same about other parents they know.

Additionally, dBF and Made to Save pointed to four arguments that parents said were the most convincing and compelling for why they should vaccinate their child:

- The COVID-19 vaccination is the best way to protect our children from more dangerous variants.
- Vaccinating children can help the country reach herd immunity and can protect mental and physical effects of lockdowns and other restrictions.
- Parents can protect their children from needing hospitalization or having lasting COVID-19 symptoms.
- Vaccinated children can go back to school — in person and without masks — to get the education they want, need, and deserve.



Parents, like the populations that express strong vaccine hesitancy, are not monolithic. They are weighing important concerns when it comes to deciding to vaccinate their children. The clearest path forward is to provide parents with the basic facts and encourage them to seek guidance from their family doctors.

About this document: This memo highlights some of the latest research from our partners in the Vaccine Hesitancy Research Consortium on parents and their views on vaccinating their children. It was created by assembling studies and polling results conducted over the past six months, interviewing researchers, and interpreting their findings. The analysis and resulting messaging recommendations in this document can form the baseline for how we, as health and vaccine advocates, engage in the effort to address people's concerns and help the country reach maximum vaccination levels.

Research Used In Document:

- Kaiser Family Foundation:
 - <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-parents-and-the-pandemic/>
 - <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/poll-finding/kff-covid-19-vaccine-monitor-july-2021/>
- DeBeaumont Foundation:
 - https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/parents-and-school_long.pdf
 - <https://debeaumont.org/changing-the-covid-conversation/poll-parent-confidence-rises/>