

# Bill Kaplan: Listen to doctors, get vaccinated

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Please listen to doctors about getting vaccinated to save yourself and loved ones, as well as end the pandemic (I do listen as I am married to one of America's leading doctors). Louisiana GOP Senator Bill Cassidy, also a doctor, said: "Whenever politicians mess with public health, usually it doesn't work out well for public health. And, ultimately it doesn't work out for the politician, because public health suffers, and the American people want public health."

The U.S., including Wisconsin, is in the midst of another COVID-19 surge, mainly among the unvaccinated. "From January 1, 2021 through July 22, 2021, over 98 percent of COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin occurred among people who were not fully vaccinated" (Wisconsin Department of Health Services). Vaccination prevents infection, hospitalization, death and community spread. Growing evidence also suggests full vaccination significantly reduces reinfection among people infected in 2020 with COVID-19 (CDC).

Importantly, a new study highlighted by the Commonwealth Fund, is eye-popping: "The success of COVID-19 vaccination campaigns in many states demonstrates the real-world feasibility, and impact, of achieving high vaccination coverage. By the end of July, the five highest performing states - Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine and Rhode Island - had fully vaccinated an average of 74 percent of adults (Wisconsin - 60.6 percent) and lowered rates of COVID-related hospitalizations and deaths compared with other states. In contrast, the two states with the greatest burden of cases, hospitalizations and deaths currently - Florida and Texas - had fully vaccinated only 59.3 percent and 55.6 percent of their adult residents, respectively." The study concluded that if Florida and Texas had vaccination rates similar to the New England states, the two Sunbelt states "could have averted more than 70,000 hospitalizations and 4,700 deaths by the end of July."

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Wisconsin doctors (and other health care leaders) understand data and science. The Wisconsin Medical Society said: “As Wisconsin and the nation continue to see dramatic increases in COVID-19 infections – primarily due to spread of the Delta variant among the unvaccinated population – the state’s largest physician organization is calling on all health care entities to require that their employees be vaccinated against COVID-19. ... The only hope to beat this virus is through a significant increase in vaccinations.” Accordingly, Wisconsin health systems, including the nationally renowned rural Marshfield Clinic Health System, have endorsed requiring their employees to be vaccinated. Nationally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers are supportive of President Biden’s requiring federal workers to get vaccinated.

There are three groups in Wisconsin that urgently need more people vaccinated: rural residents, Blacks and teenagers. The Marshfield Clinic Health System is doing a full-court press to reach and vaccinate rural Wisconsinites. Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett has prioritized answering questions and reducing understandable mistrust to increase vaccinations among Blacks. And, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services is using social media to reach teenagers.

We are all Wisconsinites and can defeat COVID-19. Listen to doctors. Please get vaccinated. The life you save may be your own, a family member or someone you care about.

*– Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the Wisconsin State Journal from 1995 – 2009.*