

Bill Kaplan: Vaccinations will end pandemic

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COVID-19 does not care whether you are a Democrat or Republican; we must unite against our common enemy – the virus. It's long past time to end personal attacks and vitriol from all sides. Former GOP state Senator Dale Schultz once said: "We're better than this." Unvaccinated Wisconsinites will not be persuaded to get a shot by disparagement. Respectful engagement is needed.

Wisconsin is facing a surge in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths. The MJS reported: "People who were not fully vaccinated were nearly three times more likely to test positive for COVID-19 and nearly four times more likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 related illness Those who were not fully vaccinated were about 11 times more likely to die of COVID-19 than vaccinated residents." Moreover, the high number of unvaccinated allows COVID-19 deadly variants to spread more rapidly.

Vaccinations will end the pandemic and allow us to reclaim our lives. A new Health Affairs study on vaccine effectiveness: "We estimated that by May 9, 2021, the U.S. vaccination campaign was associated with a reduction of 139,393 deaths" (between 1,534 to 2,950 averted deaths in Wisconsin). And, the Washington Post highlighted a study by epidemiologists: "Vaccinating more people is the only way to slow the spread now"

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This is urgent: our kids are in great danger. The American Academy of Pediatrics said: "As of August 19, over 4.59 million children have tested positive for COVID-19

since the onset of the pandemic. Over 180,000 cases were added the past week ...
." Some kids have died; others may have long-term health effects. Now that the
FDA has begun to give full approval to vaccines it is imperative that children over
the age of 12 be vaccinated. They are the future.

Doctors and nurses understand the vaccines' importance. An American Medical
Association (AMA) survey showed that over 96 percent of doctors are fully
vaccinated. The AMA said: "Practicing physicians across the country are leading by
example" And, the Wisconsin Medical Society agrees with the AMA: "The only
hope to beat this virus is through a significant increase in vaccinations." Moreover,
a poll done for the American Nurses Association indicated that 88 percent of nurses
were vaccinated or would do so. And, the Wisconsin Nurses Association supports
mandatory vaccinations for health care workers.

Wisconsin should listen to their health care experts. Our health care system is close
to a breaking point. Doctors and nurses are struggling with burnout. The COVID-19
surge will preclude timely care for other serious health care problems. Time is of the
essence. This is especially important for rural residents, Blacks and teenagers.

It's time to convene a summit of farm organizations to enlist their help in a rural
vaccination drive. Similarly, the media and urban public health departments should
publicize the Black Coalition Against COVID-19's
(www.blackcoalitionagainstcovid.org) efforts to increase vaccine acceptance and
address misinformation. And, let's ask teenagers how to reach their peers most
effectively.

Naming, blaming and shaming is not a strategy. Listen to doctors and nurses - get
vaccinated.

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