



Joint News Release

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For Immediate Release

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Berrien County Health Officials Urge COVID-19 Vaccination for Adolescents

Vaccines offer safe, effective protection for youth ages 12 and up

(Benton Harbor, MI) --- The Berrien County Health Department and Spectrum Health Lakeland are urging parents of adolescents 12 years and older to have them receive the COVID-19 vaccine. With families turning their attention to the start of the next school year, it is important to send students back to the classroom with the safe, effective protection the COVID-19 vaccine provides.

To address lingering hesitations and answer parent questions about COVID-19 vaccines, medical experts from Spectrum Health Lakeland and the Berrien County Health Department will host a Facebook Live discussion, "COVID-19 Vaccines and Kids," streamed on Wednesday, August 4 at 12:30 p.m.

Vaccination is the leading public health prevention strategy to end the COVID-19 pandemic. The scientific evidence shows that COVID-19 vaccines offer strong protection against the virus, including more contagious variants, such as the Delta variant. Currently, no COVID-19 vaccine is authorized for children younger than 12. Clinical trials to test the efficacy and safety of the vaccines in younger children are underway, and a vaccine for younger children could become available as early as late fall. Across the United States, approximately 38% of adolescents ages 12-17 have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine to date; in Berrien County, approximately 30% of this same age group has initiated vaccination.

In addition to receiving the protection against the virus, fully vaccinated students will not have to miss out on school, sports games and practices, and other extracurricular and social events if they're identified as a close contact to someone who tests positive for COVID-19, according to current CDC recommendations. An unvaccinated student who is identified as a close contact will still need to quarantine and refrain from all school and sports activities during their quarantine period.

"Getting your child vaccinated for COVID-19 is a big decision and it's understandable that parents have questions," said Anne Dudley, DO, pediatrician, Spectrum Health Lakeland. "As a pediatrician, I encourage all my patients age 12 and older to get vaccinated. The vaccine has been used under the most intensive safety monitoring in U.S. history and is proven to provide safe and effective protection against COVID-19. As children head back to school, being fully vaccinated allows them the opportunity to return to a sense of normalcy as they safely participate in events and activities they may have previously had to miss out on."

Achieving higher levels of COVID-19 vaccination among eligible students as well as teachers and staff is one of the most critical strategies to help schools safely resume operations.

“We all know that in-person learning is the best place for kids to develop academically, grow in social skills, and build emotional resilience,” said Rex Cabaltica, MD, MPH, medical director, Berrien County Health Department. “Our goal is to protect this ability to attend school in person for as many kids as possible during this upcoming school year.”

The Pfizer vaccine is widely available in our community, including at several Spectrum Health Lakeland and Berrien County Health Department locations. More information is available at bchdmi.org/COVID19 or spectrumhealthlakeland.org/vaccine

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