

Increased Vaccination Rates Help Our Schools

By Steve Tietjen, Ed.D.
Merced County Superintendent of Schools
&
Salvador Sandoval, MD, MPH
Merced County Public Health Officer

It has been more than a year since the COVID-19 health crisis disrupted our lives.

While most schools are back in session, we have a long way to go before we can get back to a more normal school day. Our local school boards, teachers, administrators and support staff have all worked hard to get us back to a point where our students can return to their classrooms, but not all students are back and not all students are able to attend a full day. Working together, we can have all students attend a full day of school, and a vital next step is for those eligible to “take the shot.”

Merced County’s vaccination rate is currently hovering right around 29 percent, which is far below where it should be to achieve herd immunity. Herd immunity is when enough people are resistant to the cause of a disease — in this case the COVID-19 virus — that it has nowhere to go. We need about 100,000 more people in Merced County to get vaccinated to reach herd immunity for COVID-19.

The Pfizer vaccine is being administered to youth 16 years of age and older. The Food and Drug Administration just approved it for the 12- to 15-year age group. Once it has the stamp of approval of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, which is anticipated later this week, it will be made available to this age group as well. It is also anticipated that late this fall the vaccine may be approved for children as young as 2 years old. The same rigorous studies that were done on adults have been replicated in the younger age groups.

While we understand that there is hesitancy by some to get the vaccine, we encourage you to take another look at the data and consider getting vaccinated for our community.

If you are unsure about the vaccination, the best place to start is consulting your primary care physician and learning more about how the vaccines work. You can find more information on the different vaccines [here](#).

School district superintendents are planning now for full in-person returns this fall so students can reconnect with their friends and learn in a supportive environment with adults who truly care for their well-being. To this end, vaccination clinics are planned at many of our local high schools.

Vaccines are a valuable tool and until we achieve a sufficient level of immunity to COVID-19, we must continue to use masks, maintain our social distance and practice other hygienic measures.

For our children's sake and the most vulnerable in our communities, and to get all our kids back to school this fall, we encourage you to "take the shot."