

Dear School and Community Leaders,

As local pediatricians, we continue to see firsthand the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 virus on children and their families. In our offices, we have treated patients who are sick with COVID symptoms. Some of them have needed hospitalization for severe cases and complications. We have watched as students, including many with special needs, missed out on in-person instruction and school services because of the pandemic. More and more teenagers have been coming to us with depression and anxiety as they struggle to maintain routines and connect with others. On a daily basis, we work with parents who are overwhelmed with the stresses and fears this pandemic has brought on their families.

With these experiences in mind, our pediatric groups strongly recommend that local school districts follow the current CDC and AAP guidelines for universal masking, physical distancing, and other measures that have been proven effective in slowing the spread of the COVID virus. We understand that following these guidelines can feel like an inconvenience. We have worn masks every day at work for the past seventeen months because we know it helps protect our patients and their families.

In addition, we highly recommend vaccinations for everyone who is eligible. Numerous scientific studies have proven these vaccines to be safe and effective. The vaccine not only protects the people who get it, but also those around them, particularly children under 12 who are not yet eligible. Without higher vaccination rates, the virus will continue to spread and mutate, prolonging a pandemic we all want to end.

This is not a political issue. Our job as pediatricians is to promote the health and wellbeing of the children and families in our community. Full time, in-person instruction is a goal we share with educators, who we know are working extremely hard to create the safest possible environment for student learning. The CDC and AAP have stated that mask wearing, physical distancing, and vaccines are the best ways to help slow the spread of COVID. For the safety of children in our area, we hope that local school districts and community leaders will follow this critical guidance.

Sincerely,

Dawn Bard, MD, Utica Pediatrics

Stephen Eadline, MD, Slocum Dickson Pediatrics

William Fuchs, MD, Slocum Dickson Pediatrics

Karen Griffith, DO, Utica Pediatrics

Jonathan Henderson, MD, Utica Pediatrics

Rekha John, MD, Slocum Dickson Pediatrics

Emerita Pizarro, MD, Slocum Dickson Pediatrics

Taryn Rio, MD, Slocum Dickson Pediatrics

Marc Ritter, MD, Sauquoit Valley Pediatrics

Julius Simon, MD, Slocum Dickson Pediatrics