

# A PLEA FOR HELP

Community Members,

We are your local physicians, nurse practitioners, and healthcare professionals who live and work beside you in our communities. Many of you know us by our first names; we have delivered your children and your children's children. We have cared for your parents, your friends, and you. We worship together at church, have shared meals, and cheered for our children at sporting events.

While we all come from different backgrounds and can have differing opinions regarding the best places to eat, or whether to root for the Cubs or the White Sox, the Bears or the Colts, and yes, on whether to vote Democrat or Republican, we can all agree that COVID-19 has drastically altered our lives over these last eighteen months.

When the pandemic first began, we were the ones on the frontline treating an unknown disease, caring for patients, trying to save lives, and at times, the ones being infected. We spent countless hours educating ourselves on guidance that changed daily, if not hourly, all to try to get a better idea of how best to treat our patients. We worried about taking the virus home to our families, and many of us suffered from the emotional burden. We have watched with our own eyes as patients struggle to breathe, isolated in their room, while their loved ones waited helplessly for any updates. We have watched the virus destroy families, local businesses, the economy, our children's education, and our way of life.

For the first nine months, the only tools we had to treat patients were therapeutics and oxygen. Our best treatment was to try to keep people from getting sick in the first place. Masking, social distancing, and good hygiene practices were the tools we had to fight the virus. Then as we began the New Year, two vaccines were approved by the FDA.

These vaccines are a medical miracle. The Trump administration provided funding and support for vaccine development. Continued funding and support from the Biden administration allowed Americans to have some of the largest vaccine stockpiles in the world. These resources allowed us to develop, test, and administer a vaccine that was almost 95% effective against COVID-19. It took efforts from both sides of the political aisle to deliver these results.

Over the last month, cases have risen sharply in 47 states. Indiana has seen daily cases climb from a few hundred to more than 1,000 - and hospitalizations have also increased.

According to the CDC, we are experiencing substantial community spread in Pulaski County. Thankfully, deaths have not seen a similar increase. However, with increased cases and hospitalizations, more deaths are likely - and not just for COVID-19 patients.

When hospitals and doctors are forced to allocate resources for one disease, patients with other afflictions suffer. Many in the healthcare profession have a foreboding feeling of "Here we go again." Many may not be able to handle the surge. Shortages of healthcare workers are already being experienced across the industry. We fear another wave, similar to the one experienced during last year's holiday season, could have substantial long-term effects on healthcare for years to come.

The current vaccines available have been administered to millions of people around the world. No vaccine is 100% safe nor 100% effective, but real-world data shows that these vaccines pose exceedingly small risks, and the success rate remains high. We hear of the vaccines' dangerous side effects, but most people don't understand that the same side effects present in those positive for COVID-19. The difference is that those side effects are often far worse in positive patients.

The most recent data from the CDC and the Kaiser Family Foundation have found that almost 98% of all new cases, hospitalizations, and deaths are from unvaccinated individuals. The numbers reinforce what we see locally. Further disease and death are entirely preventable, but because of disinformation, people continue to die of COVID-19.

We are pleading with you! Regardless of your political views or your feelings about the government, PLEASE listen to us - your local healthcare professionals, those you have trusted to provide you care in the past, the ones who have risked their lives and the lives of their families throughout the pandemic, PLEASE sign-up to get fully vaccinated for COVID-19.

Even if you feel that you are in a low-risk population, the contagiousness of the Delta Variant means you will probably get sick eventually. Pediatric cases and hospitalizations due to COVID-19 have already increased dramatically compared to previous strains. Worse, the more COVID-19 continues to spread and mutate, the greater the chance our vaccines will no longer protect against the virus.

We have been hailed as "healthcare heroes" for much of the past year, and the outpouring of support has been overwhelming. Ironically, now that we can truly bring this pandemic under control with vaccines, our guidance and expertise are dismissed and labeled as "fake news."

For years, vaccines have protected people from Polio, Measles, Mumps, Rubella, Hepatitis, and Meningitis. Newer vaccines have been developed to protect children from Chickenpox and HPV. The flu shot is administered to hundreds of millions of people across the country annually. We see confidence in these vaccines; please have that same level of confidence in the COVID-19 vaccines.

All three vaccines are readily available across the state. Currently, those 12 and older are eligible to be vaccinated. For those under 12, masking remains crucial in protecting them against COVID-19. If you have questions or concerns about the vaccines, please ask us.

To find a location or schedule a vaccine, visit [www.ourshot.in.gov](http://www.ourshot.in.gov). PMH is hosting a vaccine clinic on August 10th from 4 PM – 7 PM. If you need assistance scheduling a time, please call Laura at (574) 946-2166. Vaccine appointments can also be scheduled through the Pulaski County Health Department by calling (574) 946-6080.

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