

Homework to Start the School Year

Posted on Sep 01, Posted by [Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31](#) Category [Wisconsin](#)



Sen. Smith writes about the things we can do to stop the spread of COVID-19 and protect our children as they begin their new school year.

EAU CLAIRE, WI - We've reached that point of year again when kids are excited to return to the classroom, see their friends and begin a new school year. As adults, we can understand their excitement, but it's up to us to make sure kids can have a safe and successful school year.

In recent weeks, we've seen a drastic turn of events in our fight against COVID-19. Like many other states, Wisconsin is experiencing an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations and deaths. This is ramping up just as schools are preparing to welcome back our children. This should alarm all of us. The good news is we have tools at-hand to reverse this trend and help our schools stay open.

With all that we've learned since the beginning of the pandemic, we know how to stop the spread if we do certain things. The easiest is getting vaccinated. On August 23, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the Pfizer vaccine. Prior to this announcement, the COVID-19 vaccines met the FDA's "rigorous, scientific standards for emergency use

authorization,” and now we can be even more confident knowing the safety and efficacy of the vaccine is confirmed.



The COVID-19 vaccine can prevent you from getting COVID-19 or becoming seriously ill or dying of COVID-19, according to Mayo Clinic. Additionally, the vaccine can prevent you from spreading the virus to others and get us closer to reaching herd immunity. Fifty-one percent of Wisconsinites are now fully vaccinated, but we still have work to do to protect kids who are too young to get the vaccine.

When polio raged across the country, people celebrated the discovery of a vaccine and eagerly lined up to get vaccinated. The same goes with chicken pox and other communicable diseases. Of course, the first reason folks get vaccinated is to protect themselves and their family, but also to protect others in their community.

The COVID-19 vaccine is free for Wisconsinites. If you haven't received your vaccine yet, you can receive \$100 for doing your part to protect your community. If you get your first vaccine dose by September 6, you'll be eligible to receive \$100 just by visiting 100.wisconsin.gov.

We have to move forward. We are at a pivotal time in getting through the pandemic. We owe it to our loved ones, our frontline healthcare workers, our local businesses and our children's future to get vaccinated so Wisconsin can flourish during this critical time.



We don't have to look back this year if we get vaccinated and wear a mask when we're indoors and around others to stop the spread. The reason to wear a mask is no different than staying home when you're sick or keeping children home from school if they have symptoms: so they don't infect others.

With school open now it's even more important to stop the spread. Next to long term care facilities, schools are probably the most vulnerable to the spread of communicable disease. Anyone could be carrying the virus without knowing it before they infect others. That includes children who can spread it to other children and the adults in their school. We must all do our part to keep kids at school, teachers teaching and support staff working by limiting the spread and preventing schools from being short-staffed.

Before our kids head back to school, we adults have some homework to do. Talk to your doctor or head to [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to learn more about how you can protect yourself and your loved ones. We all want to see our kids have a good year and it's our job to set them up for success.

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