



Dear Neighbor,

Last week, I published an [op-ed in the Palm Beach Post](#) laying out my thoughts on the steps our local and state leaders can take to combat the spread of COVID-19. I wanted to make sure you had a chance to give it a read.

Here's what I had to say:

"Last week, I met virtually with local leaders and some of our best area physicians, including a pediatrician. They told us something that no one wants to hear: the virus is out of control in Florida and our children are in serious danger.

While we all hoped to have the COVID-19 pandemic behind us by now, we are still very much in the thick of it. With the rapid spread of the Delta variant, cases are going up, hospitalizations are going up, and Florida has become the epicenter of the pandemic. Each day, Florida seems to break new records, and not in a good way. Last Monday we had more than 28,000 new cases statewide and over 14,000 hospitalizations—both the most in a day throughout the entire pandemic. This is straining our health care system and causing serious staff shortages.

But that's only part of the story. This is not our old pandemic coming back, it's more infectious and attacking defenseless people we love the most—our children. Children around the country, including in

Florida, are in ICU's, some on ventilators fighting for their lives. In Florida, more than 170 children are hospitalized.

The new COVID-19 variant is almost exclusively causing illness in unvaccinated people. And here's the thing, children under the age of 12 are not yet eligible for COVID-19 vaccinations. Doctors are telling us that our sons' and daughters' lives are being put in danger by unvaccinated people. They are spreading the virus to both vaccinated and unvaccinated persons, and that while mask wearing is important, the only way we are going to stop COVID-19 in its tracks is through vaccination.

The good news is that COVID-19 vaccines are safe, no cost, and easily available in our area. There is free daycare when you get your shot. And any time now the FDA will give them full approval. Unfortunately, the internet is full of misinformation and there are some whose allegiance is to politics instead of science.

In Palm Beach County alone, medical professionals tell us that we need to vaccinate at least an additional 250,000 people to prevent further community spread. Palm Beach County, our school board, and our cities have received millions of dollars from the federal government under the American Rescue Plan. I believe some of that money should be used to make this happen.

There is no knight in shining armor coming our way. It is my belief that every adult must take responsibility and take action. The President and some of our nation's largest employers have rightly begun requiring vaccinations for employees, and I believe our local leaders should consider taking similar measures to tackle this urgent challenge, including the following:

- Local governments, constitutional officers, and the school board could survey their workforce to determine who has been vaccinated. They could undertake an educational campaign and use incentives and disincentives to get unvaccinated employees to get life-saving shots. If that's not working, they could require all employees to be vaccinated, or, alternatively, require regular

testing of all employees not vaccinated and hire only vaccinated people. Where union concurrence is needed, contracts could be re-negotiated. Exceptions should be allowed to comply with disability laws and first amendment religious rights;

- All private businesses and non-profit organizations, especially child care centers, health care providers, and nursing homes could consider doing the same. Those worried about competitively losing employees should think about the alternative. One infected person can infect everyone in the room and endanger their families and customers, and blow up their health insurance premiums.;
- The state could allow private businesses (like cruise shops) to require proof of vaccination for customer service; and,
- Ever individual over the age of 12 should get themselves vaccinated and reach out to family and friends to do the same.

I've heard a variety of arguments against such policies. Some say it is overreaching and denying people's freedom to make their own medical decisions, or that it's illegal to require vaccination, or their employees will quit and go elsewhere. Here's my response: I believe vaccination against COVID-19 is not a punishment, it's life-saving. Vaccinated workers have the right to work in safe places. Children have no choice and depend on responsible adults. Neither federal nor Florida law prohibit employers from requiring the vaccination of their employees. For those concerned about their unvaccinated employees going elsewhere, I ask, do you really want your workplace filled with people who will endanger others and run up health care costs?

I know there are courageous local leaders who are reviewing their vaccine policies. My hope is that they will inspire and create a model that will save lives and livelihoods and the people we cherish the most—our children. We can beat this pandemic, rebuild our economy, and return to living our lives freely. But to do that, we must protect ourselves and our families against this virus with mask wearing, social distancing, and, most importantly, vaccination."

Stay healthy,



Congresswoman Lois Frankel



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