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November 4, 2021

A letter to the residents of Cowley County,

As expected, the news about COVID-19 vaccine now being available for children aged 5-11 has met with mixed response. Regardless of what you personally believe about COVID-19 and vaccination I have some interesting information that I believe is pertinent and should be shared with the community. I am providing this not to scare you, Halloween is over, but to inform you because you won't find this information on Facebook or Twitter or the network news.

During 2020 the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic humanity was spared large scale morbidity and mortality (illness and deaths) in the pediatric (children) segment of the population. For whatever reason the classic SARS-CoV2 virus preferred an older host to infect.

It is well documented internationally and locally that the elder population (people over 65) were the most greatly affected, especially when severe illness and deaths occurred. The next group largely affected was anyone who was older than 30, overweight and had pre-existing poor health conditions (obesity, diabetes, etc.).

In July of 2021, a mutated COVID-19 virus (variant), now referred to as the Delta variant, arrived locally. It was quickly noted that the Delta variant was equally capable of infecting children as well as any other available host.

Today I listened to a colleague in public health detail a Kansas case involving a family of four. None of the family members were vaccinated, the children are too young to have been vaccinated. One of the children brought home the virus which spread to the other three family members. All cases of illness escalated in severity resulting in hospitalization. Currently the father is in ICU and on a ventilator in one hospital, the mother is in the same condition in a different hospital and both children are also in ICU and hospitalized in separate hospitals. None of the hospitals are in the same town. Four family members, all hospitalized, all in ICU, all in different towns. I am hoping that they all recover but wonder what long term effects they will carry from the severe illness that they currently have and how it will affect their lives in the future.

As of today, in Cowley County, we have been spared the tragedy of a child taking seriously ill and dying from COVID-19. However, we have not been spared increasing illness in the pediatric age group. Listening to the report of what is occurring in Kansas has prompted me to wonder not if it such a tragedy will occur locally, but when? Here are some facts to look at.

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COVID-19 Cases in Cowley County Children by year:

2020	Age 5-11	Age 0-18		2021	Age 5-11	Age 0-18
July	1	4		July	4	19
August	1	3		August	37	119
September	2	11		September	53	157
October	3	8		October	50	120
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>26</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>415</b>

Comparison of Cowley County COVID-19 Delta:

Total Cases vs Pediatric Cases:

			Age 5-11	Age 0-18	% of total	
July	2021	<b>153</b>	July	4	19	12.4
August	2021	<b>488</b>	August	37	119	24.4
September	2021	<b>592</b>	September	53	157	26.5
October	2021	<b>386</b>	October	50	120	31.0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>1619</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>25.6</b>

As you can see the illness rate in our county is currently growing in the 0-18 age group. So far in November the trend is continuing with more children falling ill. (Data out next week).

One year ago, as a community, we were at the mercy of COVID-19 not knowing what to expect. During 2020, we had NOTHING to combat this illness with. During the months of November through January we lost nearly one life daily to COVID-19.

Today we have vaccines that have been proven to prevent the illness. While you consider the merits of vaccine, please consider what is currently happening. One child dying from this disease will be one child too many. Vaccination can prevent illness and save lives.

I truly hope everyone will stay well.

Thomas Langer, MPA  
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