

Contact:  
Shannon McCormick  
O: 614.932.9950 / M: 614.477.2719  
[shannon@mediasourcetv.com](mailto:shannon@mediasourcetv.com)  
Alayna Curry  
321.843.1343  
[Alayna.Curry@orlandohealth.com](mailto:Alayna.Curry@orlandohealth.com)

## **SURVEY FINDS MOST PARENTS NERVOUS TO TAKE THEIR KIDS FOR VACCINATIONS DUE TO COVID-19**

*Experts warn low vaccination rates can cause the next pandemic of dangerous, preventable childhood diseases*

Orlando, Fla - Vaccination rates in the U.S. have plummeted amid COVID-19, something experts warn could lead to the next pandemic of dangerous and preventable childhood diseases. A new national survey by Orlando Health finds while the vast majority of parents (84%) believe vaccines are the best way to protect their children from infectious diseases, two-thirds are still nervous to take their kids to their pediatrician's office due to COVID-19.

"It is imperative that parents keep their routine wellness visits with their child's pediatrician," said Alix Casler, MD, a pediatrician and chair of the Department of Pediatrics for Orlando Health Physician Associates. "While we are doing as many visits as possible virtually, coming in for vaccinations is important not only for protecting your child, but also to preserve herd immunity against these terrible diseases."

Like many physicians, Casler has put protocols in place at her practice to keep patients as safe as possible. Some of these include seeing one family at a time, having patients wait in their cars rather than a waiting room and implementing COVID-19 screenings, putting patients and parents at ease and making them more likely to keep their appointments.

"All it will take is a case of measles entering our community and we will see loss of life that is completely and totally unnecessary," said Casler. "It can be hard for people to grasp just how important universal vaccinations are because they've never seen how devastating these diseases can be. Measles and whooping cough outbreaks are a thing of the past thanks to vaccines, and we'd like to keep it that way."

The survey also found that skepticism about vaccines is a major issue, with 38 percent of parents responding that they don't believe their child needs all the vaccines recommended by their pediatrician.

"The only reason that we have herd immunity against so many diseases is because upwards of 90 to 95 percent of children are vaccinated," Casler said. "Once we drop below that level, no one will be presumed safe."

It's something Cynthia Velasco worries about as her 5-year-old son AJ prepares to go to kindergarten. "He's so excited to go to what he calls 'big boy school,'" said Velasco. "And while I'm confident that the schools are doing all they can to keep students safe, it makes me nervous that his immune system has been largely untested as we were socially distant for the past several months."

Velasco says her pediatrician's office has been very helpful in reminding her when AJ is due for vaccines and ensuring they see him for a wellness visit before school starts. "Making sure that he is protected from these diseases is really important to me, and because I know our pediatrician's office is taking steps to keep their office safe, staying up to date on his vaccinations far outweighs the risk of getting sick at that appointment."

Casler says it is also very important for the whole family to get their flu shots as soon as possible this season. "The fact is that we have a safe and effective method to reduce the impact of influenza through a vaccine. We're hoping that people will be lining up to get their flu shots so we can at least take something off of the table in terms of very serious illness as the nation continues to battle this pandemic."

She is reaching out to patient families who are behind on their scheduled vaccinations to get them caught up before they go back into schools and other public places, something she says should be a priority everywhere, especially in areas hit hard by COVID-19.

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*Courtesy: Orlando Health*

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#### **ABOUT ORLANDO HEALTH**

Orlando Health is a not-for-profit healthcare organization with \$5.6 billion of assets under management. The system spans nine Florida counties with nearly 450 locations that include 13 wholly-owned or affiliated hospitals and emergency departments; rehabilitation services, cancer centers, heart institutes, imaging and laboratory services, wound care centers, more than 300 physician offices for adults and pediatrics, and 11 urgent care centers in partnership with CareSpot Urgent Care. In FY18, Orlando Health served approximately 167,000 inpatients, more than 2.7 million outpatients, and more than 20,000 international patients. The organization is home to the area's only Level One Trauma Centers for adults and pediatrics, and is a statutory teaching hospital system that offers both specialty and community hospitals. Nearly 3,600 physicians have privileges across the system, which is also one of the area's largest employers with nearly 20,500 employees. Additionally, Orlando Health provides more than \$620 million in total value to the community in the form of charity care, community benefit programs and services, community building activities and more. Additional information can be found at [www.orlandohealth.com](http://www.orlandohealth.com).