

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Morgan Griffith  
Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations Hearing  
“Putting Kids First: Addressing COVID-19’s Impacts on Children”  
September 22, 2021**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

Thank you, Chair DeGette, for holding this hearing.

Overall, children are at lower risk than adults for severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to COVID-19, but there is still a risk, particularly for those who are unvaccinated. After a decline of cases in children earlier this summer, cases in children have increased again and currently make up 28.9 percent of all reported COVID-19 cases.<sup>1</sup>

It is still unclear as to the definitive underlying reasons for this change. Some have hypothesized that these trends might be due to the Delta variant’s high transmission rate, others have suggested that it might be because many adults are now protected by vaccines and therefore adults are making up a smaller proportion of the reported infections and hospitalizations. Others think it might be because many children who largely stayed home last year are now going outside of their homes more, creating increased exposure to the virus compared to what they experienced over the last year and a half. It is also likely that it is a combination of

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<sup>1</sup> Children and COVID-19: State-Level Data Report, American Academy of Pediatrics, *available at* <https://www.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/children-and-covid-19-state-level-data-report/>.

all of these factors, but it is important that we continue to study these trends to better understand the risk of COVID-19 in children.

I understand that parents are worried about the safety of their children and want to ensure that their kids are safe. I have children and share that concern. We owe it to our kids to keep them safe, and to do so by following the science.

In addition to keeping our children safe from getting infected with COVID-19, it is also important to look at the impacts of COVID-19 on our children holistically because it is not just the SARS-CoV-2 virus that can cause harm to our children. Many of our children are suffering from elevated levels of anxiety, depression, obesity or eating disorders, and lagging educational and social development resulting from the pandemic and school closures.

There have also been concerns over increases in abuse and neglect of children during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impacts of many schools teaching remotely since educators are mandatory reporters, and serve as our primary reporters in the U.S.<sup>2</sup>

These concerns underscore the need for our children remain in schools for in-person learning. Thankfully, children can be back in schools and be safe – the two are not mutually exclusive. I'd call on all States and local districts to focus on

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth York Thomas, Ashri Anurudran, et al., *Spotlight on child abuse and neglect response in the time of COVID-19*, Elsevier Public Health Emergency Collection, Lancet Public Health (June 30, 2020), available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7326432/>.

keeping schools open. Prioritize our children, not politics. Even President Biden recently agreed: “if schools follow the science...and implement safety measures....children can be safe in schools, safe from COVID-19.”<sup>3</sup> Let’s make sure we are living up to that promise.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that everyone 12 years of age and older get vaccinated. In addition, vaccine manufacturers continue to conduct clinical trials and collect data on vaccines for children 11 years of age and younger. In fact, Pfizer and BioNTech recently announced that its COVID-19 vaccine is safe and appears to generate a robust immune response in a clinical trial of children aged 5 to 11 years-old, and plans to submit the data to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and other health regulators as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup> In addition, Pfizer-BioNTech expects to release clinical trial data for children aged 6-months to 5-years old as early as the end of October.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Moderna expects to have data about its vaccine efficacy

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<sup>3</sup> Remarks by President Biden on How the Administration Is Helping to Keep Students Safe in Classrooms, Brookland Middle School, Washington, D.C. (Sept. 10, 2021), *available at* <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/09/10/remarks-by-president-biden-on-how-the-administration-is-helping-to-keep-students-safe-in-classrooms/>.

<sup>4</sup> Pfizer and BioNTech Announce Positive Topline Results from Pivotal Trial of COVID-19 Vaccine In Children 5 to 11 Years, Pfizer (Sept. 20, 2021), *available at* <https://www.pfizer.com/news/press-release/press-release-detail/pfizer-and-biontech-announce-positive-topline-results>; Berkeley Lovelace Jr., *Pfizer says its Covid vaccine is safe and generates robust immune response in kids ages 5 to 11*, CNBC (Sept. 20, 2021), *available at* <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/20/pfizer-covid-vaccine-is-safe-generates-robust-immune-response-in-kids-ages-5-to-11.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Berkeley Lovelace Jr., *Pfizer CEO says Covid vaccine data for kids under age 5 may come in late October*, CNBC (Sept. 14, 2021), *available at* [https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/14/pfizers-covid-vaccine-data-for-kids-under-age-5-may-come-in-late-october-ceo-says-.html?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=newsletter\\_axiosvitals&stream=top](https://www.cnbc.com/2021/09/14/pfizers-covid-vaccine-data-for-kids-under-age-5-may-come-in-late-october-ceo-says-.html?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axiosvitals&stream=top).

for young children in the late fall or early winter.<sup>6</sup> I encourage all parents and children to talk to their doctors about getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Another tool in our toolbox to keep children safe is accessible testing. Children experience symptoms that are consistent with COVID-19 symptoms for a variety of reasons. Thus, there needs to be a robust and regular testing strategy to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in schools, prevent schools from unnecessarily quarantining children and their families, and to avoid reverting back to remote learning.

I look forward to today's discussion and learning more about how best to keep our children safe, not just from the virus itself, but from the secondary harms of the virus. I thank the witnesses for being here today and being part of this important discussion. I yield back.

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<sup>6</sup> Aria Bendix, *Vaccines could get authorized young kids this fall. Here are the drug companies' most likely timelines*, BUSINESS INSIDER (Aug. 31, 2021), available at <https://www.businessinsider.com/when-can-young-kids-get-vaccinated-timeline-2021-7>.