

**Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Oversight & Investigations Hearing
“Putting Kids First:
Addressing COVID-19’s Impacts on Children”
September 22, 2021**

As Prepared for Delivery

COVID RISK

This pandemic has taken a toll on all of us. It has been a challenging time for everyone, particularly for those who have lost loved ones.

Let me be clear: no parent should have to bury their child. One death from COVID-19 is too many.

But we need to have an honest conversation about what our response is doing to kids.

CNN and MSNBC will have you believe the greatest threat to America’s children is COVID-19.

They are wrong...

... and their fear mongering is making it harder for parents to assess risks and make the best decisions for their children.

The truth?

- If infected with COVID-19, children ages 0 to 9 have about a 0.1 percent chance of being hospitalized... for ages 11 to 19, it is about 0.2 percent.
- Recent data from Public Health of England found that COVID-19 poses a lower risk of hospitalization to unvaccinated children than it does to fully vaccinated 40 to 49-year-olds.
- According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 0.00 percent to 0.03 percent of all reported child COVID-19 cases have resulted in deaths.

I know the Delta variant is scary.

It is more infectious – but from what we have seen so far, it is **not** more severe.

Rather than accept this reality too many elites and people like President Biden want us to continue to live in fear for more control.

And because of that fear, too many elected officials continue to push policies focused **ONLY** on COVID-19 and cruel restrictions—restrictions that they themselves don't want to follow.

They are eroding trust in public health.

Where is the consideration of other aspects of health and children's overall well-being and mental health?

OTHER FACTORS

Emergency room visits for mental health for children ages 5-11 and 12-17 increased by 24 percent and 31 percent since the start of the pandemic.

Visits for suicidal ideation, attempts, and self-harm among children rose by more than 2.5 times.

What about their education and future?

One study found that each month of school closures cost students between \$12,000 and \$15,000 in future earnings.

In Maryland, 41 percent of all Baltimore City high school students earned below a 1.0 GPA in 2020.

What about their social, emotional, and physical development?

Mask-wearing and social isolation are taking a toll.

Shutdowns and isolation contributed to children and teens gaining weight at an alarming rate.

This was a COVID-19 policy that actually made children more unhealthy and more at risk to COVID-19. How is this following the science?

Our kids are in crisis, and unfortunately, this Administration is more focused on political favors, than science.

SCHOOL POLICIES

President Biden promised he would lead with science and truth.

But his administration is guilty of what Democrats claimed of the Trump Administration: prioritizing politics over science.

In May, the CDC was exposed for working with some of Biden's biggest campaign donors – powerful teachers' unions – to draft what is supposed to be scientific guidance for schools.

Thanks to the teachers' unions influence, the guidance put out by the CDC likely led to MORE school closures.

6 feet of social distancing was a major roadblock to keeping schools open – and although CDC Director Walensky recommended 3 feet to her hometown prior to running the CDC, when she became Director, she kept it at 6 feet.

Ask yourself why.

Recently, we saw Biden's CDC ignore science and AGAIN cave to teachers' unions.

On May 13, the CDC announced that fully vaccinated Americans could stop wearing masks indoors – which upset the teachers unions.

After receiving private threats about public statements criticizing the Administration, the CDC promptly issued an update – now all people in schools should wear masks regardless of vaccination status.

U.S. v. EUROPE

It is even more frustrating when you realize the U.S. is an outlier for COVID-19 policies for kids.

Our CDC recommends masking kids 2 years and older, but our international partners do not.

The European CDC recommends masking adults, but **not** kids in primary schools.

The World Health Organization and UNICEF specifically recommend **against** masking children aged 5 and under.

For children ages 6-11, the WHO and UNICEF **actually** consider other factors when making decisions about masks – among them, the impact of on learning and social development.

Why don't we?

It is time the U.S. consider the safety and overall well-being of our children.

Let's put our kids first.

Thank you. I yield back.