

Are you concerned about future disease outbreaks?

Evidence suggests the likelihood of pandemics has increased over the past century because of increased global travel and integration, urbanization, changes in land use, and climate change. These trends will likely continue and intensify. It is crucial leaders identify and limit emerging outbreaks that might lead to pandemics by expanding and sustaining investment to build preparedness and health capacity. However, there is much we can do at the individual level to protect ourselves, which can start with getting vaccinated.

With vaccines readily available, which mitigation strategies do you feel would be most effective should COVID-19 cases or other diseases spike again?

Longstanding public health practices proven effective in reducing the spread of infectious diseases include washing hands, engaging in physical distancing, and wearing a mask when in public areas or large public gatherings.

- These will continue to be important first-line practices in protecting ourselves, our families and our communities in the event of future resurgence and/or pandemics. These practices, which limit the spread of infectious diseases and reduce infection in our communities, not only protect people from serious illness and death, but also provide the opportunity to:
 - Find and implement prevention and treatment options to eliminate the spread and manage the disease to optimize health outcomes.
 - Focus care and resources on the vulnerable and severely ill to minimize surges on the healthcare system.
- When it comes to maintaining overall health, vaccines remain one of the most powerful and effective ways to limit the spread of disease and protect our communities, including the most vulnerable, from serious symptoms and death.

What do you think is the reason behind the decrease in routine vaccination rates nationally?

We are seeing the largest sustained decline in childhood vaccinations in approximately 30 years. Because of the pandemic, physicians' offices were forced to close and many routine vaccines were missed. With the lockdowns, which inevitably pushed people to seek telehealth alternatives instead of on-site visits, and vaccine hesitancy and misinformation campaigns on the rise, it is no surprise we have seen a decrease in vaccination rates everywhere.

We need immunization rates to catch-up for our communities, or we will inevitably witness more outbreaks, more sick children, and greater pressure on already strained health systems.

With the heavy decrease in vaccination rates, have you taken steps to contact your patients to schedule appointments and make sure children have received the childhood vaccines?

Vaccines prevent dangerous, and potentially deadly, diseases. In fact, most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease. I always inform every parent that vaccines are one of their best allies in preventing viral infections and maintaining their family's health.

How do you best urge people who are hesitant about getting vaccinated to do so?

I think the best protection we have against deadly diseases – next to vaccines – is information. As preventive medicine physicians, we understand vaccines are crucial to public health, but only if patients receive them. That's why I'm really proud of the ACPM for creating the Vaccine Confident Campaign. Through this effort, we're working to boost vaccine confidence and help instill assurance around all vaccines by providing the necessary tools to better inform the public so everyone has the best chance to be healthy.

A 2021 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) showed that more than 240,000 lives were saved, more than 1 million hospitalizations were prevented, and more than 14 million cases were averted because of COVID-19 vaccinations in the U.S.

The three key points everyone needs to know are, vaccines are safe, they are effective and available, often for little or no cost and everywhere from your doctor's office to your local grocery store pharmacy.

What are three to five key lessons learned from COVID-19 that our viewers/readers should know about maintaining overall health?

We've learned preventive measures work: wearing masks, adhering to safe social distancing norms, washing hands, and getting vaccinated. In today's fast-paced world, it might be easy to forget these preventive measures once so essential to our daily life. As a preventive medicine physician, I'd like to highlight the one major lesson everyone needs to remember – prevention has the power of keeping our community healthy. Preventive measures like keeping up with routine vaccinations are key to maintaining overall health.

Lesson 1:

Vaccines are our best chance to remain healthy: The positive results from the COVID-19 vaccine trials show, once again, vaccines are a powerful tool to prevent disease.

What we've learned: Getting vaccinated is a must. Some people are concerned about the vaccine's side-effects, but they fail to see nothing compares to contracting the actual disease. Getting vaccinated not only will protect individuals from contracting the disease for most cases, but also in breakthrough cases, it will prevent severe symptoms, including death.

Lesson 2:

The best way to prevent the next pandemic and maintain overall health comes from prevention: Longstanding public health practices that have been proven effective in reducing the spread of infectious diseases include washing hands, practicing physical distancing, and wearing a mask when in public areas or large public gatherings.

What we've learned: These will continue to be important first line practices in protecting ourselves, our families, and our communities in the event of future resurgence and/or pandemics. These practices, which help limit the spread of infectious diseases and reduce infection in our communities, not only protect people from serious illness and death, but also provide the opportunities to:

- Find and implement prevention and treatment options to eliminate the spread and manage disease to optimize health outcomes.
- Focus care and resources on the vulnerable and severely ill to minimize the burden on the healthcare system with overwhelming caseloads.

Lesson 3:

Masks are crucial tools to controlling the spread: When the pandemic began, a global effort to ensure everyone practiced behaviors to keep themselves and others safe was needed – including the widespread use of masks indoors and outside.

What we've learned: Not all individuals practiced preventive measures such as mask wearing, keeping a 6-foot distance, or washing hands frequently. Masks are one of our best prevention strategies, as they help keep germs from easily spreading.

Lesson 4:

Information is our best weapon against deadly diseases: I think the best weapon we have against deadly diseases – next to vaccines – is sound scientific-based information.

What we've learned: As preventive medicine physicians, we understand that vaccines are crucial to public health, but only if patients receive them. That's why I'm proud of the ACPM for creating the Vaccine Confident Campaign. Through this effort, we're working to boost vaccine confidence around all vaccines by providing tools to better inform – so that everyone has the best chance to be healthy.

Lesson 5:

Addressing persistent racial and ethnic disparities in health is important: COVID-19 exacerbated existing health disparities across marginalized populations. These individuals have experienced disproportionate rates of infection, hospitalization, and death as a result of COVID-19.

What we've learned: Hospitals should ensure anti-racism, equity, and inclusion are promoted in their patient care and employment practices. To be fully accessible, health care must be geographically relevant, culturally competent, and able to support persons with low literacy levels. However, hospital systems are increasingly partnering with community-based agencies to address the social determinants of health. In order to make a true impact, these efforts need to be expanded.