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OUR VIEW: YOUTH

Drowning risk can be reduced

It seems like a simple solution: Help kids learn to swim to reduce the risk of drowning.

But the Mankato Clinic Foundation, Connecting Kids and other organizations took the idea seriously when a young Somali child drowned recently in North Mankato's new swim facility at Spring Lake Park. The foundation and groups that give swimming lessons teamed up to provide free swimming lessons to Somali families to not only provide education but also to give the Somali community a chance to heal from the tragedy.

Why it matters:

Swimming lessons and water safety instruction can significantly reduce the growing trend of death by drowning.

Some 25 youth recently completed their last of seven swimming lessons at the North Mankato pool. Another 25 were scheduled to start another round the next week.

The children had a chance to learn to swim but also overcome their fear. A Mankato Clinic social worker was on hand to give the kids an introduction to the classes and assure them that they did not have to get in the water if they were afraid.

Some families were apprehensive at first but were comforted by the number of swim teachers and others who stayed after the pool closed to help them with their lessons, said Mohamed Ibrahim, a parent who also does outreach work for Mankato Refugee Services.

Accidental death by drowning has been on the rise during the pandemic, according to a recent report. There were 29 drownings in Minnesota by July 1 this year in Minnesota, more than any year in the past nine, according to a report in the Star Tribune. Drownings reached 56 in Lake Michigan in 2020, beating the record of 49 in 2012.

Drowning is the leading cause of unintentional injury death among children ages 1-4 and the second leading cause of unintentional injury death for youth ages 0-17, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In the U.S. an average of 11 people a day die from drowning.

The United Nations General Assembly for the first time in its 75-year history issued a resolution on drowning prevention, noting the "2.5 million preventable deaths in the past decade" and that drowning "has been largely unrecognized relative to its impact."

And there remains a significant disparity in drowning between whites and other ethnicities. Blacks, for example, are 1.5 times more likely to die by drowning than whites, according to study by the CDC. The authors found fear of drowning related to the lack of swimming ability in Blacks was a key factor. But they also found that community based swim lessons contributed to lower rates of drowning among Blacks.

Studies show parents also play a big role in kids learning to swim.

So the free swimming lessons, which are available to children of all races through scholarships with Connecting Kids, will play a big role in water safety going forward for many in the Mankato community.

On Thursday, Mayo Clinic Health System donated \$6,000 to the cause and to other youth activities.

The swim lesson effort is another example of how the Mankato area can respond to the needs of its neighbors to ensure and protect the health of its youth. The community and parents play a significant role in getting kids into swimming lessons and reducing these preventable deaths.

For more information on how to apply for a swim lesson scholarship locally, go to swimnorthmankato.com/programming.

OTHER VIEW

Merging in-person with online

Marin (Calif.) Independent Journal

A silver lining in the dark clouds of the pandemic has been local governments mastering online meetings.

Because they were unable to hold in-person meetings, agencies turned to online programs that enabled the public to not only view the meetings, but participate.

As the threat of COVID-19 infections has tapered off and public health lockdown orders have been

relaxed, municipalities are getting ready to resume in-person meetings.

The question they all face is how do they include online participation?

There should be little debate over whether they should continue to allow online participation. That door has been opened and it shouldn't be slammed shut.

Those running the public meetings deserve some patience as they work to integrate both formats into orderly discussions.



Return to masks? No way

The CDC wants us to go back to wearing masks indoors, even if you've been vaccinated. This is where I get off.

If you'll forgive a little testifying, I've tried hard to be reasonable throughout the pandemic. I've bent over backward to give public officials the benefit of the doubt until proven otherwise. This pandemic was a once-in-a-century calamity, and there was neither the living memory nor a readily available political playbook for how to handle it.

I didn't lose my temper when health officials admitted they lied about the need for masks in order to protect the supply for health-care workers. Though I did lose my temper when some public health experts said that mass gatherings needed to be banned — unless you were protesting for racial justice.

But I held off condemning New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's grave errors too harshly — chief among them, disastrously sending COVID-19 patients back to nursing homes — until it was revealed he lied about what he knew to protect his book sales and political ambitions.

I took the middle position on masks, criticizing extremists on both sides who tried to paint them as tyrannical impositions or symbols of moral superiority.

However, I was always pro-vaccine, which is why, despite my negative views of the Trump presidency, I always gave him ample credit for Operation Warp Speed, which brought miraculous vaccines online in record time.

So, with my self-indulgent celebration of my own reasonableness out

of the way, I'm here to say that I'm done.



JONAH GOLDBERG
Tribune Media Service

In a world without a vaccine, mask-wearing made sense. Even some of the lockdowns were justifiable for a while, not because the data supported all of them, but because there wasn't any data available yet, and policymakers have an obligation to err on the side of saving lives.

Up to a point.

Yes, if you've been vaccinated, you can still die from COVID-19, but the odds are infinitesimally small. As my American Enterprise Institute colleague Marc Thiessen recently demonstrated in the Washington Post, if you've been vaccinated, you're more likely to die from a lightning strike than from the virus.

But the CDC isn't recommending mask-wearing to protect the vaccinated. It claims, without providing supporting data, that the vaccinated need to wear masks to protect the unvaccinated from the new delta variant.

Let's assume the CDC actually has the data to support its policy. There are three primary arguments to require the vaccinated to mask up.

First, we need to protect unvaccinated adults, who account for nearly all COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations. There would be a good case for this if vaccines weren't readily available. But they are. At this point, if you choose not to get vaccinated (without a medical excuse), I think that's profoundly foolish, but that's your choice.

Second, there's the matter of children under 12 who still can't get the vaccine. My heart aches for any

child who dies from COVID-19 — or anything else. Fortunately, the death rate for children is statistically miniscule. According to the CDC, of the more than 600,000 deaths from COVID-19, only 335 have been kids under 18 (and it's unclear how many of them had significant additional health issues). According to the CDC, roughly twice as many kids die in car accidents every year. We don't ban kids from cars.

The third argument, usually only hinted at, is that we need to keep COVID-19 from mutating into an even more dangerous variant that can defeat vaccines. This is a real concern. But masking and even lockdowns won't prevent that. As best we can tell, the delta variant came from India. We could require Americans to wear masks and even get vaccinated, but that wouldn't stop the virus from mutating somewhere else. And unless we want to ban global travel indefinitely, or until we vaccinate much of the planet (which we should do), we have to live with that possibility.

Meanwhile, there are real costs to backsliding back into masking and, heaven forbid, school closures, lockdowns, etc. — which some people are already agitating for. This stuff is terrible for kids, infuriating for adults, and (rational or not) profoundly disruptive of social peace and trust. The chief incentive for getting vaccinated — after protecting yourself and your loved ones — is the promise of getting back to normal.

Public health officials, who often do a terrible job of concealing how much they love driving public policy, are taking us in the wrong direction. We shouldn't blithely follow them.

Rioters and anti-vaxxers of same bent

As I listened to the testimony Tuesday of Capitol and Washington D.C. police officers who were attacked by the violent mob in Washington on Jan. 6, I wondered how many of the terrorists bothered to get their coronavirus vaccines. Guessing wildly, I'm going to say: Not many.

I couldn't help thinking it because there's an overlap between anti-vaxxers and the rioters. Both were and are guided by disinformation intentionally distributed to pit Americans against one another — by forces internal or external, or both. We used to call that propaganda. Now, too often, we call it politics.

Both the rioters and the anti-vaxxers believe what is demonstrably wrong to the detriment of others. The rioters believed that the 2020 election was stolen from President Donald Trump. The anti-vaccine crowd embraced Trump's initially blasé attitude toward the virus, despite his having been vaccinated since, and despite massive evidence supporting the efficacy of the vaccines, which, until recently, were close to putting the virus to bed.

You recognize the common denominator.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that anti-vaccine people are prone to riot or that they'd even condone what happened on Jan. 6. I know a few such people, and they flatly would not. Anecdotally, however, I can say that everyone I know who refuses to get a coronavirus vaccine also voted for Trump, even if most people I know who voted for Trump raced to get their vaccines. And, though my

unvaccinated acquaintances would never raise their voices much less a fist, they might not mind too much that others took to the barricades and took back the election.



KATHLEEN PARKER
Washington Post

This is because they really do believe that someone (the deep state, Anthony S. Fauci, Nancy Pelosi, Charles E. Schumer, Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, take your pick) is trying to pull the wool over their eyes. First it was the masks, then the vaccines — two innovations which they believe were conceived to test the willingness of the populace to form a line and board the train. Of course, they stole the election! They had to, right?

I wish I were kidding. In the South, where I now live, you'll hear plenty of this nonsense. Therefore, if one wishes to change minds, it becomes necessary to take seriously that which is nonsense. To wit: The deep state is trying to overtake the country, "vaccinate" its citizens to make them obedient with the goal of "herding" them into camps, cubicles (or whatever) to be controlled for government use (or whatever).

If all this is true, then you'd have no choice but to decline the vaccine and resort to whatever measure necessary to preserve "freedom."

Pointing out to anti-vaxxers that they're as wrongheaded — and possibly as dangerous — as the rioters would surely meet with ridicule. They're not violent, after all. They are something — the passive twin to the rioters' aggression. Both operate from a posture of certitude; both threaten the health and welfare of the nation.

One was sudden, relatively short-lived and will be handled through a legal process that seems to be well underway. The other — the one that refuses to take part in creating herd immunity essential to controlling the coronavirus — is slower and, ultimately, more cruel.

I'm not blind to the troubles I may be causing with this assessment, but I'm weary of playing nice with people who are plain wrong and causing 300 million Americans, give or take, to suffer. COVID cases are taking off again, hospitals are filling up and people are dying.

To put it bluntly, the 25% to 30% of Americans refusing to get the vaccine are putting their own lives at risk, threatening our doctors' and nurses' ability to take care of other sick folks, and by mixing among vaccinated people, possibly causing even more infections. This news has me entertaining uncivil thoughts that probably violate the Constitution: I'm no longer against making people prove that they've been vaccinated before entering public places. But even in my darkest fantasies, I would never grab a Confederate battle flag and breach the Capitol to ensure that I get my way.

The good news is that the bad guys of Jan. 6 ultimately will be brought to justice.

But the "bad guys" of the vaccine resistance, assuming they survive, likely will get away no matter how many others they infect.

This seems to me most unfair and a very bad business, which is a polite way of saying, and the horse they rode in on.

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