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Pediatricians Support Access to Vaccines for Florida's Children

Ending vaccine requirements for school entry would cause a ripple effect across Florida communities and will limit family choices

Tallahassee, FL — The Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (FCAAP) and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) are concerned that this week's announcement by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Surgeon General Joseph A. Ladapo, MD, to end vaccine requirements for school entry will put children's health at risk and negatively impact Florida's communities.

"The ripple effect of removing vaccine entry requirements would affect all of us, not just those with children in school," said **FCAAP President Rana Alissa, MD, FAAP**. "Infants, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems would be at much higher risk. Our state's theme parks, grocery stores, movie theaters, sports arenas, and the waiting rooms in doctor's offices and hospitals will all become places for contagious disease to spread easily – making every outing or gathering a risk."

In Florida, just under 89% of kindergartners were vaccinated for the 2024-2025 school year. This is below the national average of 93%, and below the 95% immunization threshold that is important to achieve widespread community immunity from the most infectious diseases like measles. Florida law allows parents to exempt their children from the state's school vaccine requirements. Ending these requirements only creates confusion and increases the risk for widespread disease.

"For many kids, the best part of school is being with friends: sharing crayons, playing at recess, and sitting together in class," said **AAP President Susan J. Kressly, MD, FAAP**, who is also a Florida resident. "When illness spreads in the classroom, nobody is spared. Teachers miss school and are hard to replace, especially in the midst of a teacher shortage. Parents miss work, which hurts their families' income. Keeping students on track for learning becomes difficult with multiple absences. In peak flu seasons, schools have had to close to stop the spread. This could become a routine occurrence in Florida with the removal of school immunization requirements."

The proposed removal of vaccine requirements can only be effectuated through changes to Florida administrative code and statute, meaning Florida families still have a choice and a voice to protect their families and communities. FCAAP and the AAP urge clarity and answers for Florida families, and encourage everyone to advocate for their right to be safe within their communities.

FCAAP and the AAP believe every family should have access to immunizations to keep their community healthy. Children spend a significant amount of their daily lives in their school community and are better able to learn when the environment is as healthy as possible. When everyone in the class is vaccinated, diseases have a hard time spreading.

“Removing policies that keep our children healthy creates unnecessary confusion and fear,” **Dr. Alissa** said. “Schools are tight-knit networks of children, educators, and families, making it easy for contagious diseases to spread. Widespread childhood immunization helps keep children and teachers focused on learning, keeps caregivers at work instead of at home with sick children, and allows families to safely participate in community activities.”

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About the Florida Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics:

Through its approximately 2,900 members, the Florida Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics promotes the health and welfare of Florida’s children and supports pediatricians and pediatric specialists as the best qualified providers of their health care.

About the American Academy of Pediatrics:

67,000 primary care pediatricians, pediatric medical subspecialists and pediatric surgical specialists dedicated to the health, safety and well-being of infants, children, adolescents and young adults.