



## **Healing in the Midst of Emotional Strife; Latest COVID-19 Vaccine Information The AAFP Is Here to Support You as You Serve Your Patients and Community**

January 8, 2021

Dear colleagues,

I write to you today with a heavy heart. This week, our nation experienced an unimaginable insurrection against our government. As I watched in disbelief, my mind turned to all of you and to our patients and communities who are still in the midst of the physical and emotional turmoil of a global pandemic. We have suffered much.

It will take our country time to heal from the deep divisions that have been created by politics, racism and the physical separation necessary to combat COVID-19. I am not telling you anything new when I say people are struggling — many of us are hearing from patients about the mental toll that the past year has taken. The AAFP wants to equip you with resources to help you provide behavioral and mental health care to your patients. With this in mind, we recently joined the Behavioral Health Integration Collaborative. You can learn more and get links to the collaborative's resources in a recent [AAFP News story](#).

Not only are our patients struggling, but many of us are as well — we are human, after all. In addition to facing the same challenges as others in our country, we are grappling with the toll these challenges are taking on the patients we care so much about. It is extremely important that we pause and take time to care for ourselves and address the emotions we are dealing with. The AAFP has a variety of resources to help you focus on your well-being through [Physician Health First®](#). In addition, our January Virtual Town Hall will focus on the importance of physician well-being, especially during the times we are living in. Our guests will be two fellow family physicians sharing their personal perspectives on why taking care of their emotional health is vital for their own well-being and enhances the care they provide for patients. Please make plans to [join us](#) on January 13 at 7 p.m. CT on Facebook, Twitter or YouTube.

While Wednesday's events are certainly fresh and raw for most of us, we still have a spreading pandemic to fight. The COVID-19 vaccines are an important way to help us do this. Since my last email, a second vaccine has received an emergency use authorization (EUA) from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). As a reminder, our [COVID-19 vaccine webpage](#) is your one-stop shop for all the details you need, including patient education videos.

We know that distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine is a challenge across the country and that many of you are having difficulty getting the vaccine for yourself and your staff. The AAFP is working hard to make sure federal and state officials are aware of these issues and ways they can be addressed. Here are a few of our recent advocacy efforts:

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- Yesterday, we had the opportunity to meet with members of President-elect Joe Biden's transition team to share these concerns and highlight the role that family physicians can and should play in COVID-19 vaccine education, distribution and administration.
- On December 23, we joined forces with a number of other primary care organizations to send a [letter](#) to the National Governors Association (NGA) calling on the nation's governors to prioritize community-based and independent primary care physicians and practices for vaccination and calling for greater collaboration with these physicians on vaccine education and distribution.
- Also on December 23, we sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Alex Azar drawing his attention to the fact that community-based family physicians are facing difficulties securing access to the vaccine for themselves and their practices.

I encourage you to get involved and have your voice heard. We have set up a [Speak Out](#) so that you can write to your governor urging action on these issues. I also encourage you to stay connected with your local public health offices given the important role they are playing in vaccine distribution.

In closing, I would like to remind you about our [consumer immunization campaign](#) aimed at reducing vaccine hesitancy and encouraging people to get their immunizations. These resources, along with those found at [aafp.org/vaccines](http://aafp.org/vaccines), are important tools you can use to help educate your patients about the importance of getting vaccinated.

I remain in awe of the resilience, strength, and commitment that you continue to demonstrate to our entire nation. Your Academy and I are here for you as you process, and help your community process, all that is happening in our country and around the world. Please do not hesitate to contact us if there is more we can do to support you.

Thank you for all that you do!

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