

## **Rob Gundermann: Let's not lose the momentum on vaccinations**

It's gut-wrenching. Only 12% of more than a billion people in India have been vaccinated against COVID-19. Ignoring recommendations against mass gatherings, the pandemic has raged, killing nearly a quarter million and overwhelming hospitals. Massive outdoor fires now light the sky as bodies are cremated. What a stark contrast to the U.S. and Wisconsin where widespread vaccination is already having a dramatic impact in reducing numbers of deaths and infections.

With more than 100 million people fully vaccinated in the U.S., our COVID numbers continue to fall. The president now says he wants 160 million people vaccinated, or 70% of the U.S. population, by July 4. The confidence in vaccines is a game-changer and is pushing us toward a restored normalcy. That's exactly why we can ill afford to pull up short now. The pandemic has been a grueling marathon that has taken millions of lives, and we need as many people as possible to be vaccinated against COVID-19 in Wisconsin.

According to the state Dept. of Health Services, around 36%, or 2 million, Wisconsin residents have been fully vaccinated. A fantastic achievement in such a short amount of time, but nearly 60% of our state's population needs to be vaccinated. So how do we convince the rest of Wisconsin to do that?

Science and research tell us the majority of the vaccines are more than 90% effective in protecting you from the virus and can help in preventing death. If you needed the strongest reason to push up your sleeve, that's it. These vaccines are also easily accessible around the state, with no cost to you. Vaccination is fast, efficient and puts you back in control of your life — freeing you to do more things with family and friends. You will be confident that your health and others around you is protected. It's not perfect, but it's our best shot, literally, at keeping COVID away.

If you've not chosen to vaccinate, please consider this. As a human being, one of the most selfless things you could possibly do is to be vaccinated. You're protecting yourself from a deadly virus, plus everyone around you — family, friends, and strangers. You're also telling COVID itself, we've all had enough. Enough of not going to school, to work, to church, seeing our elderly loved ones, our friends or simply rejoicing in a family gathering. As Wisconsinites, we're tough. We can endure the long winters. But after a

year of being cooped up and socially isolated by COVID, let's face it, we all want out of the stress this has brought upon us. Vaccination offers a true lifeline of proven protection. It provides every person with the power to fight back on their own terms in restoring normalcy into their lives.

There will always be arguments against vaccinating, and everyone has the right to have their own opinion. They range from personal beliefs, past injustices, to flat-out falsehoods, politicization and more. But as the numbers of deaths and infections drop dramatically in our state and country, the voices of influential community leaders, doctors, nurses, and others are getting louder. They sense the momentum and their message is simple: Vaccines are working, and we need every Wisconsinite to rally to get their shots and push this over the goal line. The pandemic thrives on confusion, misinformation, and inaction. Getting vaccinated takes that away, combining proven science and common sense to allow us to make the final push. Let's do this Wisconsin!

*Rob Gundermann is the director of the Wisconsin Immunization Advocacy Coalition and president and CEO of the Coalition of Wisconsin Aging and Health Groups.*