“Stay S.A.F.E.R.”: Travel Guidance During an Ongoing Pandemic

In response to inquiries by Pediatricians and the patients they care for, this guideline was written by the Florida Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (FCAAP) to offer a framework for discussions about travel during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Background

- On January 12, 2021, well over 2 million U.S. children have been diagnosed with COVID-19.
- Over 22.5 million Americans have been infected with the virus resulting in over 375,000 fatalities.
- The United States is in the midst of a COVID-19 surge with a weekly average of 415 cases/100,000 population and a 7-day average testing positivity rate of 19.4%. The FCAAP believes it safer to travel when rates are ≤10-25 cases/100,000 and positivity rates are <5%. Thus, travel is a currently a relatively high-risk undertaking.
- Origination of travel may be problematic for Florida. Currently, 13 states are in the severe outbreak category. Travelers from these states can significantly spread COVID-19.
- FCAAP strongly recommends against nonessential travel at this time. All nonessential travel should be postponed indefinitely until the pandemic is under better control.
- Recently 2 vaccines have been approved for Emergency Use Authorization. With limited vaccine supply, the CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has approved vaccination in identified high risk groups. Children may not have vaccine access until mid or late 2021. Currently there is not enough data to make a recommendation on travel for those who have been vaccinated. This document will be updated once that data is available.


S: Social Distancing

- Stay home if you are sick or don’t feel well.
- Individuals 2 years of age and older must wear a mask at all times.
- Stay at least 6 feet apart from other people who are not from your household in both indoor and outdoor activities.
- Wash hands often or use hand sanitizer with at least 60% alcohol content.
Choose safer social activities. Avoid crowded places and gatherings where it may be difficult to stay at least 6 feet away from others not a part of your household. Gatherings of 10 or more people carry very high risk.

A: Avoid Nonessential Travel

- This is the most important of these current Stay S.A.F.E.R. recommendations.
- Accompanying adults are at highest risk for COVID-19 during travel and are the most likely the spread it to others.
- CDC recommends that U.S. citizens, particularly travelers with serious underlying medical conditions, avoid nonessential travel.
- Unique to children, Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) has been reported in healthy children and adolescents 2 to 4 weeks after the onset of Covid-19. [Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C)]
- Evidence suggests that children with underlying conditions are at increased risk for severe illness: medical complexity, severe genetic disorders, severe neurologic disorders, inherited metabolic disorders, sickle cell disease, congenital heart disease, diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease, chronic lung disease and immunosuppression due to malignancy or immune mediating medications. [CDC guidance for underlying medical conditions]

F: Follow CDC Guidelines and Recommendations

- States have taken varied approaches on determining metrics for deciding when to reopen their states.
- In light of conflicting local and state opinions, we recommend adhering to national CDC guidelines and recommendations.

E: Expertise

- As Pediatricians, we are entrusted to provide medical guidance to protect the health and wellbeing of children. Families are the life support of our children, and advice we provide impacts the health of the entire family and community in an ongoing pandemic.

R: Resources

- Remain diligent by frequently reviewing the latest recommendations concerning travel during COVID-19, travel requirements and restrictions, U.S. COVID-19 risk levels, local community disease rates, and recommendations specific to your locale. The following are valuable primary resources that you should visit frequently due to the rapidly dynamic nature of COVID-19:

  [Information from the CDC about COVID-19 for health care professionals]
Conclusion

While we recognize families with children are eager to travel, we advise following scientific evidence-based guidelines in conducting discussions and formulating decisions about travel within the United States. In light of the current surge situation in the United States, nonessential travel cannot be recommended. Adopt the “Stay S.A.F.E.R.” mindset. Part of any travel discussion must include questions about whether community cases are increasing at the intended destination or too high at the travel origination and if hospitals are at capacity with patients with COVID-19. Due to the current status of COVID-19 in the U.S. at this time, the safest recommendation is to postpone all nonessential travel.

FCAAP Guideline Review, Update, and Writing Panel, January 12, 2021

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