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OPINION

## NYC's new vaccine policy erases kids from public life

By **Karol Markowicz**

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Hey, remember the children? We used to say things about them like, “They’re the future,” or “They should be exposed to culture,” or even “They should definitely go to school.” But the last 17 months have seen our society put kids dead last again and again. Now New York City is seemingly looking to banish them from public spaces altogether.

Announcing a “new approach,” **called the “Key-to-NYC Pass,”** the mayor decreed that unvaccinated persons won’t be able to participate in most indoor activities in Gotham.

Hizzoner explained it thus: “The key to New York City. When you hear those words, I want you to imagine the notion that because someone’s vaccinated, they can do all the amazing things that are available in this city. This is a miraculous place, literally full of wonders. And if you’re vaccinated, all of that is going to open up to you. You have the key. You can open the door.”

Left unsaid: Children will be waiting outside the door of this miraculous place of wonders. The mayor’s announcement included no exceptions for kids, leaving city parents, as well as potential tourists to New York, in limbo once more.

Asked about the announcement, Dr. Dave A. Chokshi, the city’s health commissioner, gave the impression that children were simply forgotten when the policy was crafted — neglect that is fully in line with how kids have been treated throughout the pandemic.

“Many of them are settings where there won’t be children involved,” Chokshi said. “For those that may involve children, this is something that we have to take into consideration.” Children will be taken into consideration after the announcement of a policy whose formulation didn’t take them into consideration. Got it.



Bill de Blasio speaks during his news conference on Tuesday.

Even before the mayor's announcement, New York City was starting to close its doors to kids. Last week, the Met Opera banned all kids under 12 from its performances.

And some restaurants have pre-emptively stopped allowing kids inside. Asked whether kids can dine inside after it announced indoor dining for vaccinated individuals only, the restaurant Frenchette responded to one parent: "Unfortunately, indoors is vaxxed only."

There is no vaccine for kids under 12, that's true. But there are plenty of studies that show unvaccinated children have the same COVID risks as vaccinated adults. When will it be finally time to follow the science in regard to kids? (In Europe, where the approach is saner compared to ours to begin with, there are expressions of regret over the cruelty of COVID policy to kids: Witness the Bild newspaper's widely viewed video apology to German children for what COVID hype did to their lives.)

The problem isn't just dining or cultural institutions, though closing those off to children should be enough of a wake-up call to adults that things are going horribly wrong. On Tuesday, Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter echoed the mayor's language in a tweet: "Vaccines are our passport out of this pandemic, and every person vaccinated is another person protected from COVID-19. As a parent, I encourage all families preparing to return to [@NYCSchools](#) this fall to get your student age 12+ vaxxed by Aug. 9."

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Parents, even those who were vaccinated themselves, are understandably skittish about giving the vaccine to children, who likely don't need it. Again: Kids are at minuscule risk from the virus, and they transmit at a far lower rate than do adults. If schooling becomes contingent on vaccination status, New York City kids are in for another year of educational chaos.

If a city wanted to force out its families, it would not do things much differently than New York has done. We used to understand that families were the key to a thriving Big Apple. Now we push children out of public life, as if they are lepers, and treat them as an afterthought.

New York parents deal with a lot to raise their children in the city, but it's worth it when they get exposure to unique cultural events or unusual cuisines. Close off those opportunities to little ones, and more families will flee the city. Their leaders are already telegraphing to them that this is the choice they should make.

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