



THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF  
IMMUNOLOGISTS

**Statement of AAI President Jenny P. Ting, Ph.D., and  
AAI Committee on Public Affairs Chair Ross M. Kedl, Ph.D.,  
Opposing Unprecedented and Dangerous Strategy to Achieve Herd Immunity for COVID-19**

**November 16, 2020**

Recent news reports indicate the Trump Administration is considering an unprecedented and dangerous strategy to achieve “herd immunity” by intentionally allowing COVID-19 to infect healthy Americans. Herd immunity is attained once a certain percentage of a population (in this case, 60%-70%) has developed antibodies which protect them from the infection, limiting spread of the virus to others, including those who cannot be vaccinated (such as newborns and the immunocompromised). The American Association of Immunologists (AAI) – the nation’s largest professional society of research scientists and physicians dedicated to studying the immune system – agrees that we need to reach herd immunity in the population but emphasizes that vaccination is the only proven, responsible way to accomplish this goal.

Indeed, there are no known infectious diseases for which herd immunity has been achieved by allowing unimpeded spread throughout the population. Smallpox, for example, was a devastating, rampant global infectious threat for centuries, over which time herd immunity was never achieved. Instead, it was achieved through a concerted, long-term global vaccination campaign. Similar conclusions regarding the development of herd immunity can be drawn from other infectious diseases for which we do (e.g., polio, measles, mumps, rubella, influenza, meningococcus) and do not (e.g., malaria, tuberculosis, HIV) have highly effective vaccines.

Intentionally allowing the spread of COVID-19 – a novel disease with no cure and few effective treatments that has infected more than 10.8 million people and resulted in almost 245,000 deaths in the U.S. alone – is therefore unsafe and irresponsible. The approach is even more dangerous given how little is known about who is most at risk from serious infection and the long-term health effects of COVID-19. It also has significant potential for overwhelming our health care system, putting further strain on first responders and medical providers, and potentially closing hospital doors to both new COVID-19 patients and other patients with life-threatening medical conditions. We urge the Administration to reject this strategy that is not science-based and instead pursue proven public health measures, including mask-wearing, social distancing, and handwashing to limit viral spread, while immunologists and other scientists continue the race to develop safe, effective vaccines and antiviral therapies.