



STRONGER TOGETHER

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Colleagues –

Much has happened in the past year. One year ago this month we confirmed the first case of COVID-19 in Missouri. Shortly thereafter Governor Parson declared a state of emergency. We activated our State Emergency Operations Center. We established our COVID-19 Fusion Cell. Together across our 16 departments, we began a long, hard campaign to fight COVID-19. You have ensured our communities and fellow citizens received essential State government services. COVID-19 also touched every family in some way. Tragically, more Missourians have lost their lives to the virus than died in all the Twentieth Century's wars.

A year later, though, we can see signs of hope. This is because of your hard work and those of your fellow Missourians. Missouri now is in the top tier of all states in many public health and economic indicators. We have learned to work together in new ways. Many of those lessons will guide us in the future.

We will be secure in our new normal – without fear, without masks, without social distancing – when enough of us get vaccinated. Today, most of the state government workforce is already in a tier eligible for vaccination. Governor Parson and the First Lady received their vaccinations. I was thankful to receive my first dose at a state sponsored event; thanks to the great collaboration between DPS, MoDOT, & OA for making it happen. As [announced by Governor Parson](#), the entire state workforce will be eligible to receive the vaccination starting on March 29, and all Missourians will be eligible on April 9.

Please watch for updates from the Office of Administration and your department as the state's plan progresses. They will explain vaccination events for state government employees. Given demand, you will need to be flexible in scheduling. We want to help every employee who wants the vaccine to get it.

I want to share some history as you consider your options. This story helped me understand better the importance of the vaccination for myself, my family, and my state. Quite simply, our country's founding depended upon a major public health decision by General George Washington – namely, the mass inoculation of the Continental army.

Here was Washington's challenge in 1776: The British Army already had been inoculated in Europe, where the practice was already more common. Inoculation involved infecting people with a less-deadly form of a virus to help them build immunity. The British Army already therefore had "herd immunity." With it, they had an advantage over the Continental Army. Small pox outbreaks wreaked havoc upon

Washington's army. Disease caused around 90% of the deaths in the Continental Army. Still many feared that inoculation would weaken the army at a critical moment. It is also worth emphasizing the crude inoculations of the 1700s were much, much, much, much more risky than vaccinations today. Some feared inoculations could weaken the army at a critical moment.

Facing potential defeat, however, Washington concluded in early 1777 he needed to inoculate his army to keep them in the fight. Amazingly, the American small pox inoculation campaign was conducted secretly. This way the British Army was not able to time an attack to coincide with the Continental Army soldiers recovering from their inoculations.

Washington's small pox inoculation decision was one of the most consequential he ever made. He helped save the Continental Army. Without Washington's decision, the United States might never have achieved our independence. One historian described Washington's decision as probably "the most important strategic decision in his military career."

And without that, then we would not be public servants serving in Missouri state government today!

Let's help our families and communities win our 21st Century fight for independence.

To get answers by some of the best scientists in the country to your questions about the vaccines and the COVID-19 variants, check out the presentations by [Dr. Kim Thomas](#) and [Dr. Bill Powderly](#) of Washington University in St. Louis. Also [get the facts](#) at the state's vaccine website.

Thanks for all you do every day for our state. We still have to focus on the basics until we beat COVID-19. Let's keep pushing to the finish line.

Keep the faith,

Drew Erdmann

Chief Operating Officer

Office of the Governor

P.S. To learn more about Washington's own small pox experience and his inoculation decision, here are some reliable historical sources:

- From the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/GW&smallpoxinoculation.html>
- From Mount Vernon (including a short 2 minute video): <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/smallpox/>
- From The National Geographic: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/2020/04/george-washington-beat-smallpox-epidemic-with-controversial-inoculations/>