

Technology

Studies raise concerns

Parent's guide to help children navigate 'IG'

By Barbara Ortutay and Amanda Seitz

For many parents, revelations last week from whistleblower **Frances Haugen** showing internal Facebook studies of the harms of Instagram for teenagers only intensified concerns about the popular photo sharing app.

"The patterns that children establish as teenagers stay with them for the rest of their lives," Haugen said in Senate testimony Tuesday.

"The kids who are bullied on Instagram, the bullying follows them home. It follows them into their bedrooms. The last thing they see before they go to bed at night is someone being cruel to them," Haugen said. "Kids are learning that their own friends, people who they care about, are cruel to them."



Haugen

So, what can you do to protect your kids? Experts say open lines of communication, age limits and if necessary, activity monitoring are some of the steps parents can take to help kids navigate the dangers of social media while still allowing them to chat with peers on their own terms.

Is 17 the new 13?

Ever wonder why 13 is the age kids can be on Instagram and other social media apps? It's because the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act went into effect in 2000 — before today's teenagers were even born (and when Facebook cofounder Mark Zuckerberg was just a teen himself, for that matter).

The goal was to protect kids' online privacy by requiring websites and online services to disclose clear privacy policies and get parents' consent before gathering personal information on their kids, among other things. To comply, social media companies have generally banned kids under 13 from signing up for their services, although it's been widely documented that kids sign up anyway, either with or without their parents' permission.

But times have changed, and online privacy is no longer the only concern when it comes to kids being online. There's bullying, harassment, and, as Facebook's own research has shown, the risk of developing eating disorders, suicidal thoughts or worse.

In her testimony, Haugen suggested raising the age limit to 16 or even 18. There has been a push among some parents, educators and tech experts to wait to give children phones — and access to social media — until they are older, such as the "Wait Until 8th" pledge that has parents sign a pledge not to give their kids a smartphone until the 8th grade. But neither social media companies nor the government have done anything concrete to increase the age limit.

"There is not necessarily a magical age," said Christine Elgersma, a social media expert at the nonprofit Common Sense Media. But, she added, "13 is probably not the best age for kids to get on social media."

It's still complicated. There's no reliable way to verify a person's age when they sign up for apps and online services. And the apps popular with teens today were created for adults first. Companies have added some safeguards over the years, Elgersma noted, but these piecemeal changes, not fundamental rethinks of the services.

"Developers need to start building apps with kids in mind," she said. And no, she doesn't mean Instagram Kids, the project Facebook paused last week amid a widespread backlash. "We can't trust a company that didn't start with kids' best interests in mind," she said.

Talk, talk, talk

Start early, earlier than you think. Elgersma suggests that parents go through their own social media feeds with their children before they are old enough to be online and have open discussions on what they see. How would your child handle a situation where a friend of a friend asks them to send a photo? Or if they see an article that makes them so angry they just want to share it right away?

For older kids, approach them with curiosity and interest.

"If teens are giving you the grunts or the single word answers, sometimes asking about what their friends are doing or just not asking direct questions like 'what are you doing on Instagram?' but 'hey, I heard this influencer is really popular,'" she suggested. "And even if your kid rolled their eyes it could be a window."

Don't say things like "turn that thing off" when your kid has been scrolling for a long time, says Jean Rogers, the director of Fairplay, a nonprofit that advocates for kids to spend less time on digital devices.

"That's not respectful," Rogers said. "It doesn't respect that they have a whole life and a whole world in that device."

Instead, Rogers suggests asking them questions about what they do on their phone, and see what your child is willing to share.

Kids are also likely to respond to parents and educators "pulling back the curtains" on social media and the sometimes insidious tools companies use to keep people online and engaged, Elgersma said. Watch a documentary like "The Social Dilemma" that explores algorithms, dark patterns and dopamine feedback cycles of social media. Or read up with them how Facebook and TikTok make money.

"Kids love to be in the know about these things, and it will give them a sense of power," she said.

Adjust settings

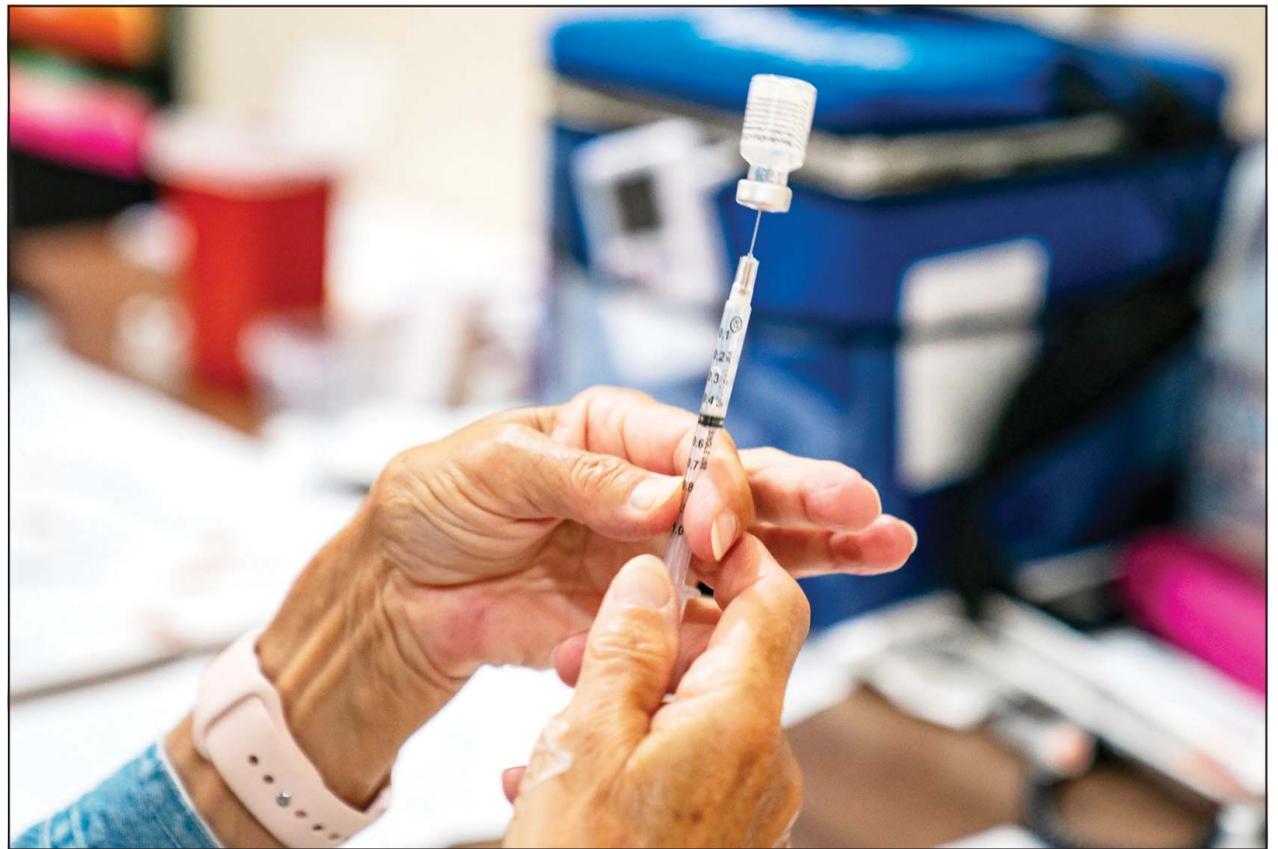
Rogers says most parents have success with taking their kids' phones overnight to limit their scrolling. Occasionally kids might try to sneak the phone back, but it's a strategy that tends to work because kids need a break from the screen. "They need an excuse with their peers to not be on their phone at night," Rogers said. "They can blame their parents."

Parents may need their own limits on phone use. Rogers said it's helpful to explain what you are doing when you do have a phone in hand around your child so they understand you are not aimlessly scrolling through sites like Instagram. Tell your child that you're checking work email, looking up a recipe for dinner or paying a bill so they understand you're not on there just for fun. Then tell them when you plan to put the phone down.

You can't do it alone

Parents should also realize that it's not a fair fight. Social media apps like Instagram are designed to be addictive, says Roxana Marachi, a professor of education at San Jose State University who studies data harms. Without new laws that regulate how tech companies use our data and algorithms to push users toward harmful content, there is only so much parents can do, Marachi said.

"The companies are not interested in children's well being, they're interested in eyes on the screen and maximizing the number of clicks," Marachi said. "Period." (AP)



In this Sept. 14, 2021, file photo, vaccine provider prepares a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine at a clinic run by the Allegheny County Health Department at Casa San Jose, a non-profit serving Latino immigrants in the Beechview neighborhood of Pittsburgh. The number of Americans getting COVID-19 vaccines has steadily increased to a three-month high as seniors and people with medical conditions seek boosters, and government and employer mandates push more workers to take their first doses. (AP)

Coronavirus

A relief for parents

Pfizer requests to OK shots for kids

Colorado woman who won't get vaccinated denied 'transplant'

NEW YORK, Oct. 9, (AP) — Parents tired of worrying about classroom outbreaks and sick of telling their elementary school-age children no to sleepovers and family gatherings felt a wave of relief Thursday when Pfizer asked the US government to authorize its COVID-19 vaccine for youngsters ages 5 to 11.

If regulators give the go-ahead, reduced-dose kids' shots could begin within a matter of weeks.

That could bring many families a step closer to being done with remote learning, virus scares and repeated school shutdowns and quarantines.

"My son asked about playing sports. 'After you're vaccinated.' He asked about seeing his cousins again. 'After you're vaccinated.' A lot of our plans are on hold," said Sarah Staffiere of Waterville, Maine, whose 7-year-old has a rare immune disease that has forced the family to be extra cautious throughout the pandemic.

"When he's vaccinated, it would give our family our lives back," she said.

Expanding vaccine availability to roughly 28 million more US children is seen as another milestone in the fight against the virus and comes amid an alarming rise in serious infections in youngsters because of the extra-contagious delta variant.

It would also push the US vaccination drive further ahead of much of the rest of the world at a time when many poor countries are desperately short of vaccine.

Protection

The Food and Drug Administration must decide whether the shots are safe and effective in younger children.

Many parents and pediatricians are clamoring for protection for youngsters under 12, the current age cutoff for COVID-19 vaccinations in the US.

Nine-year-old Audrey Moulder, who lives in the Philadelphia suburb of Drexel Hill, is looking forward to visiting her grandmother without worrying she will give the older woman COVID-19.

"She's excited because she thinks it's a responsibility," said her father, Justin Moulder. "She wants to keep her friends safe and her family safe."

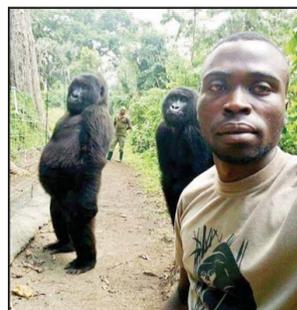
Dr. Amanda Powell, an internist and pediatrician who runs a clinic in Portland, Maine, is eager to set up worry-free play dates and plan a family trip again once her 9-year-old son is vaccinated.

"We want to be able to resume some normal activities," she said.

But there are also plenty of parents who are wary about getting the shot themselves and are in no hurry to have their children vaccinated.

Heather Miller, a mother of four from Dexter, Maine, said she wants to wait for follow-up studies on the vaccine. "I'm not 100% against getting it eventually, but I kind of fall into the 'not right now, wait and see' category," she said.

Cindy Schilling, an elementary school principal in West Virginia, which ranks dead last in the percentage of fully vaccinated residents, said it has been a rough start to the year because so many children are testing positive or quarantining at different



Mathieu Shamavu, a ranger and caretaker at the Senkwekwe Center for Orphaned Mountain Gorillas, poses for a photo with female orphaned gorillas Ndakasi, (left), and Ndeze, (center), at the Senkwekwe Center for Orphaned Mountain Gorillas in Virunga National Park, eastern Congo Thursday, April 18, 2019. The 14-year-old mountain gorilla Ndakasi, made famous in a selfie with her caretaker at the Virunga National Park in Congo, has died Sept. 26, 2021 after a long illness, the park said. (AP)

Discovery

Turkey ratifies Paris agreement: Turkey ratified the Paris climate accord, joining the global fight against climate change weeks before the start of a key summit in Glasgow, Scotland.

Legislators present in parliament unanimously approved the agreement.

Though Turkey was among the first countries to sign the Paris Agreement in 2016, it held off ratifying it as it sought to be reclassified as a developing instead of developed country to avoid harsher emission reduction targets and benefit from financial support. It was among six countries, which include Iran, Iraq, Eritrea, Libya and Yemen to not ratify it.

The approval comes ahead of the climate summit, known as Cop26, which begins on Oct 31 and aims to encourage nations to take stronger action to curb climate change.

It also comes on the heels of a series of natural disasters and extreme weather events that have hit the country and have been largely blamed on climate change, including drought, the worst wildfires in its history and deadly floods. Climate experts have warned that the Mediterranean basin, that includes Turkey, faces the risk of severe drought and desertification.

Opposition parties hailed Wednesday's ratification as a "late but historic step," but warned that Turkey now had to take action to reduce emissions.

"While a new carbon-free order is being established, Turkey could not have been left out of this new order," said **Ozlem Katsioz**, Climate and Energy Policy Coordinator for Turkey at Climate Action Network. (AP)

HK make big smuggling bust: Hong Kong authorities said they have made their largest smuggling bust, seizing goods including endangered species worth an estimated \$26.9 million.

The government said the smuggling ring operated using speedboats and that four trucks were also impounded in the raid.

It said a 34-year-old man was arrested in the operation that began in June and more details were set to be released. A statement said the customs department and the marine police small boat division descended on the smugglers who were operating in the city's New Territories close to mainland China on Sept 23.

"This is the largest smuggling case among all forms of smuggling by air, sea and land detected by Customs on record in terms of the seizure value," the government said. Seized items displayed at a news conference included endangered plants, luxury handbags, cigars and shark's fin, which is prized as a delicacy in southern Chinese cuisine.

The semi-autonomous southern Chinese city has a high demand for luxury items along with abundant air and sea links to world markets. (AP)

Congo's famous gorilla dies: Ndakasi, a mountain gorilla who famously posed for a selfie with a ranger at Congo's Virunga National Park, has died at 14 after a long illness, the park said.

"It is with heartfelt sadness that Virunga announces the death of beloved or-

phaned mountain gorilla, Ndakasi, who had been under the care of the park's Senkwekwe Center for more than a decade," a statement from the park said this week.

"Ndakasi took her final breath in the loving arms of her caretaker and lifelong friend, **Andre Bauma**," said the statement, adding that she died on Sept 26 following a prolonged illness in which her condition rapidly deteriorated.

Ndakasi was just two months old when

While any type of surgery may stress a patient's immune system and leave them vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 later, organ transplant recipients are even more at risk because they have to take a powerful regime of drugs to suppress their immune system to keep their body from rejecting the new organ, which is seen by the body as a foreign object, Nancy Foster, AHA's vice president for quality and patient safety policy said in a statement.

"Further, if patients were to wait to get their vaccine until after the surgery, it is unlikely that their immune system could mount the desired antibody reaction given that they are taking anti-rejection medications," she said.

Transplant centers in Washington, Vermont, Massachusetts and Alabama have policies requiring that recipients be vaccinated, according to news reports.

Cleveland Clinic recently decided to require COVID-19 vaccinations for both transplant recipients and living donors, the organization said in a statement.

Some health care systems recommend or strongly encourage vaccination for transplants, including the Mayo Clinic and Sentara Healthcare, two of the nation's largest. The University of Alabama Birmingham's School of Medicine transplant program only recommends that living donors receive a vaccine, but it does not require it for the donation process.

The best time to get a COVID-19 vaccine is before an organ transplant. If time allows, patients should get their second dose of the available vaccines at least a couple of weeks prior to transplant "so that your body has a good immune response to the vaccine," said Dr. Deepali Kumar, the American Society of Transplantation's president-elect and an infectious disease physician.

While kids are at lower risk of severe illness or death than older people, COVID-19 does sometimes kill children — at least 520 so far in the U.S., according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech said their research shows younger children should get one-third of the dose now given to everyone else. After their second dose, the 5- to 11-year-olds developed virus-fighting antibody levels just as strong as those that teens and young adults get from regular-strength shots.

On Oct. 26, an independent expert panel that advises the FDA will pub-

lily debate the evidence. If the FDA authorizes emergency use of the kid-size doses, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will make a final decision, after hearing from its outside advisers.

To avoid mix-ups, Pfizer is planning to ship the lower-dose vials specially marked for use in children.

It studied the lower dose in 2,268 volunteers ages 5 to 11 and said there were no serious side effects. The study isn't large enough to detect any extremely rare side effects, such as the heart inflammation that sometimes occurs after the second dose of the regular-strength vaccine, mostly in young men.

Moderna has requested FDA permission to use its vaccine in 12- to 17-year-olds and also is studying its shots in elementary school children. Both Pfizer and Moderna are studying even younger children as well, down to 6-month-olds. Results are expected later in the year.



Bauma



Katsioz

rangers found her clinging to the lifeless body of her mother who had been gunned down by armed militia in 2007. Bauma comforted her that first night by holding her to his bare chest and he continued caring for her since then.

She was transferred to the Senkwekwe Center after its creation in 2009 and lived with other orphaned mountain gorillas viewed as too vulnerable to return to the wild. (AP)