

Closing immunization gaps caused by COVID-19

For the last several months, stay at home orders, concerns about COVID-19, adjusting to social distancing guidelines, and other factors have likely contributed to decreased immunization administration for children in Minnesota and across the country.

The New York Times previously reported on a 70% drop in MMR vaccine administration in Minnesota across all ages. This was from comparing a week in April 2020 with the same week in April 2019. Fortunately, MMR administration has rebounded a little bit, now only down about 35% when compared to 2019. We also looked at statewide pneumococcal (PCV) dose administration to children less than 24 months of age. That analysis showed a 31% decrease in the number of shots given in April 2020 compared to April 2019. Further, children in their second year of life (12-15 months) were more apt to be missing recommended doses of PCV when compared with 2-month-olds.

It is critical for clinics to work with their patients to get them in for needed vaccines, especially as more people are starting to return to work and other social activities.

Providers should focus on strategies to reach out to patients with reminders about what vaccines are needed, as well as messages about the safety procedures you have in place to reassure patients that their clinic experience is safe.

Provide a safe space for giving vaccines

Use these resources to create a safe environment for patients bringing their child in for well-child visits.

- *Pediatric Vaccination During COVID-19* fact sheet on the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) Immunization website (www.health.state.mn.us/immunize).
- CDC's Vaccination Guidance During a Pandemic (www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html), which also includes information on flu vaccination planning for the fall.
- Immunization Action Coalition's Repository of Resources for Maintaining Immunization during the COVID-19 Pandemic (www.immunizationcoalitions.org/resource-repository/).
- American Academy of Pediatrics' Guidance on Providing Pediatric Well-Care During COVID-19 (<https://services.aap.org/en/pages/2019-novel-coronavirus-covid-19-infections/clinical-guidance/guidance-on-providing-pediatric-well-care-during-covid-19/>).

Reminder/recall with MIIC

Providers can use reminder/recall to improve clinic immunization rates. The Minnesota Immunization Information Connection (MIIC) has several tools that can help increase immunization rates in patient populations. MIIC's Assessment Reports and Client Follow Up functions are available to all user roles at primary care clinics. Users can track immunization rates for an age group and by vaccine(s), generate a list of due and overdue patients to send reminders, and manage which patients are associated with their clinics. These tools are excellent for helping users develop, target, and execute an immunization improvement project.

Training is available to any MIIC user interested in using MIIC for an immunization improvement project. Contact the MIIC Help Desk (miichelp@state.mn.us) or find contact information on MIIC Regions and Regional Coordinators (www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/miic/participate/regions.html). Find more resources on MIIC User Guidance and Training Resources (www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/miic/train/index.html).

Reassure parents and promote importance of immunization

When sending reminder messages to patients, include messages on the safety procedures you have implemented, such as masks, social distancing, scheduling time frames, etc. This will help reassure parents and let them know what to expect at the clinic.

Share information about the importance of immunizations with parents on social media and other channels. You can post your own messages or share items from the MDH Facebook (www.facebook.com/mnhealth) and Twitter (<https://twitter.com/mnhealth>) accounts throughout the summer and fall. We also have a new 30-second video on YouTube called *Childhood Vaccinations During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (<https://youtu.be/1AqZxjGwWo>) that you can share on social media or your website.

Increased importance of influenza vaccine this fall

Preventing influenza this fall is more important than ever. The CDC expects both influenza and SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, to circulate. Start planning for influenza vaccination and consider how your clinic can improve access to vaccine for your patients.

Reminder postcard for meningococcal booster dose

This July, we will be sending a postcard to parents of 16-year-olds in Minnesota to remind them about the meningococcal (MenACWY) booster dose as well as any other vaccines their teen may need. The postcard also encourages families to get all family members up to date with other vaccines they may have put off due to COVID-19 and to check with their clinic for specific COVID-19 guidance.

School and child care requirements

School and child care immunization requirements are an important strategy to address immunization gaps and help encourage parents to keep children up to date with routine immunizations. However, COVID-19 prevention and mitigation strategies have also impacted schools and child cares. As a result, we will allow schools and child cares extra time to complete immunization reports this year. Reports will now be due Feb. 1, 2021. We will provide more information when schools and child cares should start filling out their annual immunization reports.

2020 Immunization conference cancelled

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and uncertainty about holding large events in the fall, we have decided to cancel the 2020 Got Your Shots? Immunization Conference. We will explore possibly holding the event next year. We will send more information when it is available. Please watch for other virtual opportunities to gather and learn from each other throughout the year.