

Protecting Children's Health Through Life-Saving Vaccines

Immunizations, or vaccines, save children's lives. They help strengthen our natural defenses against diseases like tetanus, HPV, polio, measles, whooping cough, and chicken pox, and keep children safe by decreasing or eliminating the spread of disease. Vaccines are also rigorously tested and evaluated for their safety and effectiveness before ever being considered for widespread use. Millions of lives have been saved thanks to vaccines, and some diseases—like smallpox—have been nearly eliminated as a result.

Unfortunately, childhood vaccination rates have been steadily declining for the past decade. **More kindergartners are now going to school without any recommended vaccines – increasing from 0.6% to 1% between 2010 and 2020.**

This trend has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, as people have delayed their regular doctor visits and have been exposed to false or confusing information about vaccines. Rising distrust in the government's response to COVID-19 and an increase in arguments for personal responsibility have inflamed anti-vaccine sentiment, as well as vaccine fatigue. Several states have introduced bills that limit required vaccinations among school-aged children, including one state law that would end immunization requirements in schools entirely. Additionally, the spread of misinformation and vaccine skepticism has made holding community-based and school-based immunization events more difficult as school administrators and nurses navigate trust issues within their communities.

And the decline in vaccinated children is getting worse. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that among children entering kindergarten in the 2020-2021 school year, vaccine administration for 3 state-required vaccines for public and private schools — measles, mumps and rubella (MMR); diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough (DTaP); and chicken pox (varicella) — fell by about one percentage point to approximately 94%. Nationally, 2.2% of kindergartners had at least one vaccine exemption, and an additional 4% of kindergartners were not up-to-date on their recommended MMR shot during the school year. If these trends continue and more children remain unvaccinated, dangerous diseases will have the opportunity to reemerge, causing outbreaks—and potential deaths—in our communities once again.



Protecting America's Children Through Safe, Effective Vaccines

Every child deserves to be protected from life-threatening illnesses. That is why health insurance providers are stepping up their efforts to encourage parents to ensure children are up to date on routine care and vaccines. By working with physicians, nurses, pharmacists, public health officials, and community-based organizations, health insurance providers are improving vaccine awareness and education. That work includes:

- Using State claims data, State immunization information systems (IIS), health information exchanges, and provider networks to identify children that have not received recommended immunizations. Parents of these children receive mailers, text messages, phone calls, emails, and other reminders to encourage vaccination, assist with scheduling an appointment, and answer patient questions to close gaps in care.
- Offering kids-only appointment hours at doctors' offices and clinics, specifically for well-child and immunization-only appointments.
- Working directly with providers such as pediatricians and family physicians to improve vaccination rates among their patients.
- Prioritizing outreach to parents and guardians of children younger than 18 to provide fact-based information about the importance and value of childhood vaccines.
- Encouraging employers and community partners, such as local pharmacies, barber shops, clinics, and local chapters of national organizations like the YMCA and United Way, to hold vaccine drives and to help overcome barriers to vaccination such as paid time off, transportation, and childcare services.
- Collaborating within the communities they serve to ensure vaccines are delivered in culturally competent, linguistically appropriate, and equitable ways.

Adults are not being left behind. Health insurance providers also are using these approaches to encourage adults to catch up with their recommended vaccines and other preventive care. **Vaccines save lives. Health insurance providers remain committed to educating families and communities about the safety, efficacy, and life-saving importance of vaccines.**