Immunizing Americans to Protect Their Health

Vaccines save lives. They stem the spread of disease and protect the health of Americans and our communities. As vaccination rates against preventable diseases decline, health insurance providers are taking action to increase awareness and access to essential vaccines that every American deserves.

Vaccines are important both for Americans’ health and financial stability. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that vaccines for children born in the U.S. between 1994 and 2018 have prevented approximately 419 million illnesses. The CDC also estimates that these vaccines generated a net savings of $406 billion in direct costs and nearly $1.9 trillion in health care and societal costs, like hospitalizations, missed work, job loss, or resulting disabilities. Further, the CDC estimates that as many as 3.5 million adults suffer from 5 common vaccine-preventable diseases each year— influenza, pneumonia, HPV, hepatitis B, and varicella (chickenpox/shingles)—which can result in hospitalization, cancer, and death.

But as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of routine pediatric and adult immunizations have declined. According to the CDC, vaccines ordered under the Vaccines for Children Program decreased by nearly 4 million doses from January-April 2020, compared to the same period in 2019. As people continue to socially distance and avoid unnecessary exposure to COVID-19, we must work together to ensure that they maintain their vaccinations.

Health insurance providers are working with physicians, nurses, pharmacists, and public health officials to increase vaccination rates in children, adolescents, and adults. Health insurance providers continue to emphasize the importance of vaccinations, educating parents about the need to keep their children’s immunizations current, and connecting with older adults to encourage them to get vaccines such as the influenza and pneumococcal vaccines.
Innovative approaches to increase vaccination rates include:

- **Independence Blue Cross** is mining their claims data daily to identify members that have not received preventive or routine immunizations during the pandemic. Members found to have a care gap will receive a text message, email or phone call from a health coach or a nurse to assist with scheduling appointments, identifying barriers, and closing gaps in care. Independence also informs provider partners about their patients who may have missed screenings or vaccinations so providers can help ensure these patients receive necessary care.

- **Health Care Service Corporation (HCSC)** is using state immunization registries, health information exchanges, their networks of contracted providers, and electronic medical records to gain additional information regarding members’ vaccination status. HCSC also provides specialized training for their care coordinators in vaccination awareness, and delivers direct education and outreach to contracted providers and to the parents and guardians of members younger than 18 years.

- **HealthPartners** has added kids-only appointment hours on Saturdays at several clinics to help make it easy, fast and safe for families to bring kids in for well-child visits and immunization-only appointments. HealthPartners also posted several blogs to remind their members about vaccination schedules including for COVID-19 and childhood vaccinations, and to encourage parents to make appointments online for immunization and well-child visits.

AHIP is a proud partner of the Health Action Alliance, which recently launched a new, coordinated effort by employers, business groups and public health organizations to help families vaccinate their children against COVID-19 and catch up on other routine immunizations. Businesses across the country are organizing on-site vaccination clinics for families, offering paid time off, transportation, childcare and other support to workers who may need help getting their children vaccinated.

Vaccines are essential to everyone’s well-being. Health insurance providers are committed to working together with provider partners, community stakeholders, and providing information direction to keep American families and communities safe from preventable diseases.