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TO: California Vaccines for Children (VFC) Providers

FROM: Sarah Royce, MD, MPH, Chief   
Center for Infectious Diseases  
Division of Communicable Disease Control, Immunization Branch

SUBJECT: Routine Childhood Immunizations during COVID-19 Pandemic



**Key takeaways from this letter include:**

- Maintaining childhood immunizations during pandemic:
  - ✓ Prioritization of immunizations for children 0-24 months
  - ✓ Strategies for modifying clinic operations
  - ✓ Approval for Alternate/Temporary VFC locations
  - ✓ AAP and CDC resources

**BACKGROUND**

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect communities across the United States. Maintaining childhood immunizations during this period may not be feasible due to current impact of COVID-19 community transmission, staffing, and parental concerns. However, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have issued the following recommendations for prioritizing childhood immunizations during this pandemic period, and strategies which can be implemented across pediatric practices to slow the spread of disease.

**PRIORITIZING IMMUNIZATIONS OF YOUNG CHILDREN**

Because of personal, practice, or community circumstances related to COVID-19, some providers may not be able to provide well child visits, including provision of immunizations, for all patients in their practice.

- If a practice can provide only limited well child visits, healthcare providers are encouraged to **prioritize newborn care and vaccination of infants and young children (through 24 months of age) when possible.**
- Reschedule well visits for those in middle childhood and adolescence to a later date. Keep a list of rescheduled appointments to facilitate patient recall later on.



## **STRATEGIES TO MODIFY CLINIC STRUCTURE FOR ENSURING DELIVERY OF PRIORITIZED CARE**

Ensuring the delivery of newborn and well-child care, including childhood immunization, requires different strategies. The following are strategies recommended by AAP:

- Separating well visits from sick visits. Scheduling well visits in the morning and sick visits in the afternoon.
- Separating patients spatially, such as by placing patients with sick visits in different areas of the clinic.
- Clinics with multiple practice sites may consider using one office location to see all well visits (staffed by those in higher risk categories) and another location for sick visits.
- Collaborating with providers in the community to identify separate locations for holding well visits for children.
- If available, pediatricians are encouraged to increase their capacity to deliver telehealth and utilize “drive through” dedicated COVID-19 testing sites.

**IMPORTANT:** Local Health Departments (LHDs) immunization clinics may be impacted by current COVID-19 response activities led by public health staff. As a result, some may have also reduced or closed immunization clinics and may not be able to immunize patients at this time. Please check with your LHDs before any referrals.

## **TEMPORARY RELOCATION OF VFC PARTICIPATING LOCATION**

In order to support practices with the implementation strategies to prioritize immunizations of young children, the VFC program will expedite the enrollment of temporary alternative sites, as well as grant approval of the relocation of immunization services for an enrolled location. Guidance can be found at <https://eziz.org/vfc/enrollment/>.

## **CDC AND AAP GUIDANCE**

- AAP: <https://services.aap.org/en/pages/covid-19-clinical-guidance-q-a/>
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/index.html>.

## **QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions, please call the VFC Customer Service Center at 877-243-8832 (877-2GET-VFC).