

Developing an Immunization Culture in Your Office

Building a pro-vaccination culture in your practice starts at the front desk, reaches into every exam room, and extends to the back office. Team-based strategies can help promote an atmosphere in which complete and timely immunizations are expected and welcomed.

Educate and Motivate Your Staff to Become Vaccine Advocates

- **Provide appropriate training** so that everyone on staff – both clinical and business personnel – understands the importance of immunization and has an awareness of the diseases that vaccines are designed to prevent.
- **Keep staff updated on changes in vaccine recommendations** made by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP).
- Designate a staff member as the **“vaccine champion”** who is responsible for all aspects of vaccination in the office, including administration, record-keeping, and storage.
- Be sure all staff members are knowledgeable and comfortable in serving in the **role of vaccine advocate** in all interactions with parents and patients.
- **Lead by example** – make sure everyone on staff is up to date on his/her own immunizations.

Capture Every Opportunity to Immunize

- **Use state and local immunization registries** and your own record-keeping system to identify patients who are not up to date on their vaccinations.
- **Assess immunization status** at every visit, vaccinate according to the immunization schedule recommended by CDC, AAP, and AAFP, and update records accordingly. Both well and sick visits provide opportunities, as vaccines can be administered safely to almost all children with mild illnesses.
- **Maximize opportunities to vaccinate** not only by reviewing immunization records at every visit, but also by reminding parents of the importance of on-time immunization during parent telephone calls and other points of contact.
- **Schedule annual examinations** for patients, including during the adolescent years. Sports and camp physicals provide additional opportunities to immunize on schedule.
- **Administer all needed (or recommended) eligible vaccines** at the same visit.
- **Train both your clinical and front office staff** to recognize when a needed vaccine is not ordered or administered during a visit and to tell you about it before the patient leaves.
- **Offer additional access** to health care and opportunities for immunization through after-hours and weekend clinics. Catch-up vaccinations also can be administered at “vaccination-only” visits.

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Prioritize Parental Education and Communication

- **Share your practice's pro-immunization philosophy and policies** with every family, from the time of their first visit. Better yet, write it up and hand it out to every patient when they register or during your discussions with them. (A sample vaccine policy statement is available at www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2067.pdf.)
- **Recommend the vaccine!** Studies indicate that a clear, unequivocal recommendation from the provider is the most important factor in a patient or parent agreeing to vaccination.
- During visits when vaccinations are administered, **explain why the vaccine is needed**. Take time to go over the Vaccine Information Statements (VISs), and respond to any questions or concerns parents or patients may have.
- **Reinforce the message that vaccines are safe and effective**. Be sure that parents are well informed regarding the diseases that vaccines help prevent and alert parents to local or regional outbreaks. Consider sharing your staff's (and your own) personal experiences with vaccinating their own children.
- Educate parents and guardians about immunization in a **culturally appropriate manner and in language that is easy to understand**.
 - The CDC's Vaccines & Immunizations web page has educational materials available for both health-care professionals/providers (www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp.htm) and parents (Vaccines for Your Children; www.cdc.gov/vaccines/parents/index.html).
 - Vaccination-related handouts and fact sheets for providers and patients are also available free of charge on the website of the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) at www.immunize.org/handouts. All items, which are reviewed for accuracy by CDC, are ready to print, copy, and distribute.
- Inform parents at each visit **which vaccines their child will receive at the next appointment**; provide handouts with information about these vaccines and the diseases they help prevent. Doing so gives parents time to read and understand the information, allowing them to come prepared to discuss their concerns with their clinician.
- **Maintain ongoing communication** with and education of parents regarding the importance of vaccines, to help maintain a positive perspective on the topic and a strong relationship with the patient.

Put Technology to Work as a Tracking Tool

- **Make use of electronic medical records (EMRs)** as a tracking system for current immunizations as well as a reminder system for upcoming doses. Displaying patients' vaccine records on page 1 of their medical record helps ensure that vaccination status is assessed at every visit.
- EMRs can also generate **regularly scheduled reports** of all children in the practice who have not received 1 or more recommended vaccinations. These reports can be used by office staff to call patients back to update any missing vaccines, or to send text messages or post cards. In addition, a **computerized patient messaging system** can make calls to families of patients who are not up to date, asking them to contact the office and schedule an appointment.
- Password-protected **patient portals** can help parents and guardians determine when an appointment for immunizations should be made.

- **Include the CDC-AAP-AAFP immunization schedules** for younger (birth through 6 years of age) and older (7 to 18 years of age) children, as well as the practice's vaccination philosophy, on your practice's website. Post this information in all exam rooms as well.
- Perform a **chart audit** via your EMR to determine the percentage of patients in your practice who are up to date on their immunizations.
- **Use Facebook and Twitter** to alert parents regarding practice updates and other information, including scheduled appointments, new school immunization requirements, and availability of influenza vaccine.
- Participate in your **state or local immunization information system (IIS or "registry")** to stay abreast of vaccines that may have been delivered elsewhere to your patients. Registries can help eliminate both missed opportunities to immunize and unnecessary repeated immunizations.