

Catch-up to Get Ahead Communications Materials: Key Messages and Talking Points for Parents and Providers August 2020

Key Messages

- COVID-19 disrupted life-saving vaccination at a global level, putting millions of children at risk for catching diseases like measles, meningitis, and whooping cough. In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Surgeon General, and many others are working together to get children caught up on vaccines that have been delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Vaccines save lives. Vaccines are safe and effective at preventing 16 serious and potentially life-threatening diseases in children.
- Vaccine-preventable diseases are still a threat. The best way to keep your child healthy and protected from these diseases is with vaccination.
- Without high immunization levels, children and their families and communities are at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks. We cannot let down our guard when it comes to protecting our children.
- August is National Immunization Awareness Month! This is the time to get your child caught up on routine vaccines.
- This August, HHS is working with diverse partners to drive the importance of catch-up and on-time childhood immunizations to prevent diseases, especially those living in medically underserved areas.

Parents/Decision Makers

Immunization can save your child's life.

- Because of advances in medical science, your child can be protected against more diseases than ever before. Some diseases, that once injured or killed thousands of children, have been eliminated primarily due to vaccines.
- Vaccination is a highly effective, safe, and easy way to help keep your child and family healthy.
- Delaying or missing vaccines leaves your child vulnerable to illness during the pandemic, when healthcare resources may be strained.
- Without vaccines, your child is at risk for getting seriously ill, suffering a disability, or even dying from diseases like measles, meningitis, and whooping cough.

It is important to vaccinate children on time. Do not delay vaccination because of the COVID-19 pandemic. If you or your child has fallen behind on routine immunizations, talk to

a healthcare provider as soon as possible to catch-up.

- Timely vaccination is critical for the health of your children, your family, and your community.
- Scheduling a vaccine appointment is more important than ever. Making sure your child has all recommended vaccines will keep them healthier during this challenging time.
- More parents are scheduling visits with healthcare providers to get their child vaccinated. Don't let your child be left behind because you can't schedule a visit. Talk to your child's healthcare provider about finding another place where vaccines are offered such as a health department or pharmacy.

Well-child visits are safe.

- It's natural to have concerns about visiting a doctor during COVID-19, but you can get your child vaccinated and stay safe.
- Healthcare providers are taking extra steps to keep you and your child safe from COVID-19 during appointments.
- Healthcare providers are using extensive clinical guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and American Academy of Pediatrics to ensure clinics remain safe against the threat of COVID-19.
- When scheduling your child's well-child visit, talk to your healthcare provider about precautions they are taking.
- Getting your child vaccinated now can prevent your child from needing additional medical visits or even hospitalization if your child does get sick.

Vaccines are safe and effective at preventing serious diseases.

- Vaccines work with your child's natural defenses to help your child develop protection from diseases.
- Vaccines are given to children after careful and detailed reviews by scientists, doctors, and other healthcare professionals. Vaccines are continuously monitored for safety and effectiveness after they are recommended for use.
- Like all medical products, vaccines can sometimes have side effects. The most common side effects are mild pain, swelling, or redness at the site of injection and they generally go away quickly. Serious side effects such as severe allergic reactions are extremely rare.
- The disease-prevention benefits of vaccines overwhelmingly outweigh possible side effects for almost all children.
- Visit [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov) to learn more about the safety of vaccines.

Your child can get vaccines even if you do not have health insurance and cannot pay.

- Many families are facing financial difficulties during the pandemic. If you lost your health insurance or your plan's copays or other out-of-pocket costs are too much, your child can still get vaccinated.
- If you need help, free vaccines may be available through a program called Vaccines for Children. Ask your child's healthcare provider about it.
- If you qualify, free vaccines are available through the Vaccines for Children program at your state or local health department immunization clinics, federally qualified health centers, and many private healthcare provider offices and pharmacies.
- Learn more on [Vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov).

Getting your child vaccinated can work with your schedule.

- As parents juggle work, childcare, and more during the pandemic, you may need to schedule your child's vaccination visit at a more convenient location or time.
- In many states, children can get vaccines at a pharmacy. Talk to your pharmacist about vaccines they can provide for your child.
- During August, many healthcare providers, community clinics, and pharmacies will extend their hours to help more children get caught up on vaccines. Ask your healthcare provider if they offer extended hours.
- Getting your child vaccinated at a place other than your usual healthcare provider does not replace well-child visits with that healthcare provider. Be sure to get your child caught up on well-child visits as well as vaccinations. Take your child's updated vaccination record with you for well-child visits.

Vaccine-preventable diseases are still a threat. Vaccination is the best protection from them.

- Some vaccine-preventable diseases, like chickenpox and whooping cough, remain common in the United States. For example, since 2010, between 10,000 and 50,000 cases of whooping cough are reported each year in the United States.
- When vaccination rates fall even just a little, vaccine-preventable diseases can spread easily. The recent large measles outbreaks in New York City and Washington state are a stark reminder of how quickly diseases can spread when children are not vaccinated.
- Protect your child from these and other potentially serious diseases that are preventable with vaccines. Get your child caught up and stay caught up on vaccines.

It is important to work with your healthcare provider to keep you child up-to-date on vaccines.

- This August, talk to your child's healthcare provider about whether your child needs to catch up on any routine vaccines.

- During the National Immunization Awareness Month, your state or local health department immunization clinic, health center, healthcare provider office, and pharmacy may provide vaccination services during extended hours or additional locations to help your child get caught up on vaccines.

Provider Messages

Now is the time to get children caught up on their vaccinations so they are ahead for the future.

- Many children have fallen behind on recommended vaccines due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While, there are indications that well-child checks and vaccinations are returning to their pre-pandemic levels, because of the extraordinary commitment of these children's healthcare providers, it is critical to catch-up all children on their routine vaccines as soon as possible.
- Because of the delay of in-person appointments, many parents continue to have difficulty accessing services such as physical examinations and vaccinations their children need.
- With the flu season beginning in just a few weeks and the unfortunate prospect that the flu and COVID-19 viruses will circulate at the same time, now is the time to ensure that all children are caught up on their vaccines.
- Getting children up-to-date on vaccines now will prevent illnesses that lead to unnecessary medical visits, hospitalizations, and additional strain on the healthcare system.

Protecting children and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases is one of the most important things you can do to keep children and their families healthy and prevent outbreaks. A strong recommendation from a trusted healthcare provider is the best predictor of children getting vaccinated.

- It is now more important than ever to assess vaccination status of all children under your care at every medical visit, whether the visit is in-person or remote (telephone, online, etc.).
- As the most trusted source of information on vaccines, healthcare providers have always borne the responsibility to strongly recommend vaccines to children's parents and parlayed their concerns and questions into action.
- Parents sometimes need reassurance from the healthcare provider that vaccines are indeed safe and effective for their child. It is no secret that taking the time to listen, understand, and address concerns expressed by parents who are hesitant about certain vaccines or the schedule of vaccines builds trust and proves to be the difference with that parent choosing to vaccinate the child.

- Healthcare providers have the knowledge, experience, and authority to make a strong case for vaccination with parents.
- When recommending vaccination, assume that most parents will choose to vaccinate their child. This presumptive approach to recommending vaccination has been proven to be effective. For more information on how to make a strong vaccination recommendation, visit [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov) and search for #HowIRecommend vaccines.

We need your help with communicating the importance of vaccination with parents and bringing children up-to-date on their vaccinations.

- During National Immunization Awareness Month, we are asking for your help in promoting vaccination and get every child up-to-date on recommended vaccines.
- You can champion vaccination in your practice by ensuring all staff be up-to-date on their vaccinations and sharing frequent and consistent messages with parents about the importance of childhood vaccines.
- Assess vaccination status for each child at every visit, whether in-person or remotely (telephone, online, etc.), and talk to parents about missed vaccines. Promptly schedule in-person appointments for catch-up vaccinations.
- Use the clout you have with parents to get their children get caught up on vaccines. You can implement the following tactics to get parents to follow through on their commitment to get their children up-to-date on vaccinations.
 - Extend your service hours (evenings and weekends) during the month of August for vaccination services or to accommodate more well-child appointments with vaccinations.
 - Use your patient reminder-recall system and notifications to parents to reach children who have fallen behind on their vaccinations.
 - If you are not able to accommodate the needs of all parent whose children have fallen behind on their vaccinations, provide referrals to another place where vaccines are available such as pharmacies or state or local health department immunization clinics.
 - Partner with the health department or community groups to host a vaccination clinic or event. This strategy could be repeated for flu vaccines during flu season in October. CDC provides guidance on planning satellite vaccination clinics.