



URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED

To Address COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Declines in Routine Immunization Rates among Vulnerable Children

Vaccines for Children (VFC) is a federally funded program that **provides vaccines at no cost to uninsured and underinsured children** who otherwise might not be vaccinated due to inability to pay

Vaccine doses administered by the VFC program have **dropped significantly since March 2020**

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) buys vaccines at a discount and distributes them to grantees—e.g., state health departments and certain local and territorial public health agencies—which, in turn, distribute them at no charge to private physicians' offices and public health clinics registered as VFC providers
- Individuals are eligible for the VFC program if they are younger than age 19 years and are one of the following: Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, underinsured, or American Indian/Alaska Native
- VFC covers vaccines that are approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and recommended by the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)
- Childhood immunization rates declined broadly during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the most significant drop occurred among those receiving vaccines through the VFC program
- Data show that for children, having private insurance is the biggest determinant in whether they receive recommended vaccines¹
- A May 2020 study found that immunization rates in each age cohort were lower for Medicaid-enrolled children than for those children not enrolled in Medicaid²
- Analysis of data by county shows that 5-month-old children in rural areas may experience more disruption to immunization services than 5-month-old children in urban areas³

VFC performance is vitally important to childhood health

- CDC estimates approximately 50 percent of US children from birth to age 18 years are eligible for VFC⁴
- Enrollment of children in Medicaid increased more than 12 percent between February 2020 and September 2021 (by 4.3 million) to 40 million children, meaning a growing number of children in the US rely on VFC vaccines^{5,6}
- Uninsured children, as a percentage of all US children, increased from 4.9 percent to 5.6 percent between 2016 and 2020⁷ but have the lowest and most disparate vaccination rates of any group covered for VFC vaccines⁸

Addressing the childhood vaccination crisis will require **collaboration by all stakeholders**, including advocates, healthcare professionals, public health officials, and policymakers

- There is an urgent need for timely and accurate data on US immunization rates—routine publication of VFC data would allow stakeholders to tailor messages and measure progress toward closing the gap in immunizations missed
- An ongoing dialogue among stakeholders would enable leaders to share lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and best practices to increase vaccination rates among underserved children
- Stakeholders should examine existing incentives, disincentives, and barriers (in state and federal policy) to ensuring full vaccination of VFC-eligible children
- We must increase awareness of the VFC program to ensure that all eligible children are protected by receiving all recommended vaccines

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- US Vaccine Recommendations: www.nfid.org/immunization/us-vaccination-recommendations/
- 10 Reasons To Get Vaccinated: www.nfid.org/immunization/10-reasons-to-get-vaccinated/
- Vaccines for Children Program: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/vfc/index.html
- About the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases (NFID): www.nfid.org/about

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3. Nuzhath T, Ajayi KV, Fan Q, et al. Childhood immunization during the COVID-19 pandemic in Texas. Vaccine. 2021;39(25):3333-3337. Available from URL: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8078904/>
4. Santoli JM, Lindley MC, DeSilva MB, et al. Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Routine Pediatric Vaccine Ordering and Administration – United States, 2020. MMWR, 2020;69:591–593. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6919e2>
5. Corallo, Bradley, Moreno, Sophia, "Analysis of Recent Trends in Medicaid and CHIP Enrollment," Kaiser Family Foundation, March 3, 2022, available at: <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/analysis-of-recent-national-trends-in-medicaid-and-chip-enrollment/>
6. Kaiser Family Foundation, "Monthly Child Enrollment in Medicaid and CHIP," reviewed March 9, 2022, available at: <https://www.kff.org/medicaid/state-indicator/total-medicaid-and-chip-child-enrollment/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>
7. Kaiser Family Foundation, "Uninsured Rates for the Non-Elderly by Age (CPS)," reviewed March 9, 2022, available at: <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/uninsured-rates-for-the-nonelderly-by-age-cps/?currentTimeframe=2&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>
8. Hill HA, Yankey D, Elam-Evans LD, Singleton JA, Sterrett N. Vaccination Coverage by Age 24 Months Among Children Born in 2017 and 2018 – National Immunization Survey-Child, United States, 2018–2020. MMWR, 2021;70:1435–1440. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7041a1>