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# Provider Health Advisory August 28, 2020

# Maintaining Immunizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

#### **SUMMARY:**

- Childhood immunization rates in Contra Costa County have fallen dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Safely immunizing children and pregnant women remain a priority during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Immunization of infants and children up to 24 months of age should be prioritized if your practice can only offer a limited number of well-child visits. All vaccines that are due should be administered.
- Immunizations required for school admission per California School Immunization Law remain unchanged. All students must obtain required vaccines even if engaged only in distance learning.
- Although not a school-required vaccine, all community members 6 months and older should receive age-appropriate seasonal influenza vaccine as soon as it is available.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have released guidance for vaccination during a pandemic which emphasizes administration of vaccines as an essential service.

#### **CURRENT RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Ensuring that routine vaccination is maintained or reinitiated during the COVID-19 pandemic is paramount for protecting individuals and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases and outbreaks. Routine vaccination prevents illnesses that lead to unnecessary medical visits, hospitalizations and further strain to the healthcare system. To prevent the resurgence of morbidity and mortality from vaccine preventable infectious diseases, it is critical that childhood immunization, as well as core adult immunization services, are provided.

### **BACKGROUND:**

Efforts to reduce transmission of COVID-19 such as shelter-in-place orders have led to decreased use of routine preventive medical services, including immunization services. Compared with May 2019, childhood immunization rates in May 2020 in Contra Costa County dropped more than 45% according to the California Immunization Registry (CAIR). CDC data also show nationwide decreases in the ordering and administering of childhood vaccines during the beginning of 2020, indicating that many children may be vulnerable to serious but preventable disease.



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#### **CLINICAL NOTES:**

- Healthcare providers should identify children who have missed well-child visits and/or recommended vaccinations and contact them to schedule in person appointments, starting with newborns and infants up to 24 months, then extending to young children and adolescents. Refer to the CDC catch-up immunization schedule (<a href="www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/catchup.html">www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/catchup.html</a>) for appropriate intervals between doses. All vaccines that are due can be safely administered in one visit. "Spacing out" vaccines that are due delays optimal protection and increases the number of health care visits.
- Children in childcare or TK/K-12 grades should be scheduled to receive immunizations required for school, even if school is attended via distance learning, in order to avoid school exclusion and prevent cases of vaccine preventable diseases in the community (per state immunization law).
- Although not a school-required vaccine, age-appropriate influenza vaccine should be administered to all community members 6 months and older as soon as vaccine is available. Influenza vaccine should be administered along with other vaccines that are due.

# **INFECTION CONTROL:**

Per CDC, primary care practices in communities affected by COVID-19 should continue to use strategies to separate well visits from sick visits. Examples include:

- Scheduling sick visits and well-child visits during different times of the day;
- Reducing crowding in waiting rooms by asking patients to remain outside (e.g., stay in their vehicles, if applicable) until they are called into the facility for their appointment; or
- Setting up triage booths to screen patients safely; or
- Collaborating with healthcare providers in the community to identify separate locations for providing well visits for children.

## **ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS:**

The Contra Costa Public Health, Communicable Disease Programs can be reached 8:00 AM-5:00 PM Monday-Friday at: 925-313-6740 (phone) or 925-313-6465 (fax).

More information may be found at: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html