



LAC DPH Health Advisory: Maintaining Immunizations During COVID-19 Pandemic and Resuming Deferred Preventive Care



May 8, 2020

*This message is intended for all healthcare providers in Los Angeles County.
Please distribute as appropriate.*

Key Messages

- Childhood immunization rates in LA County have plummeted since COVID-19.
- Safely immunizing children and pregnant women remains 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.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), and California Department of Public Health (CDPH) have all recently released guidance on immunizations during the pandemic.

Update

- Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (LAC DPH) has released *Resuming Deferred and Preventive Health Care in Los Angeles County* [recommendations and FAQs](#) to accompany the California Department of Public Health [guidance](#) for the resumption of postponed healthcare services including preventive care.

Situation Update

In March, as COVID-19 cases increased dramatically and personal protective equipment (PPE) supplies were constrained, LAC DPH recommended the cancellation of all non-essential medical appointments that required PPE *with the exception of appointments for routine immunization*. Not surprisingly, however, with stay at home orders and widespread fear and anxiety regarding COVID-19, patient visits across LA County fell substantially, even for immunizations. Compared with April 2019, last month's childhood immunization rates in LA County dropped more than 50%. National [data released today](#) by the CDC 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 disease.

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. The CDC has issued [guidance](#) on continuing immunizations in children, adolescents, and adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, CDPH [Immunization Branch](#) and [AAP](#) have also provided recommendations to support immunizations and preventive health services during the pandemic.

We recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruption to medical practices and has taken a toll on the well-being and economic stability of healthcare providers and support personnel. As your practices increase in-person visits and preventive services, we ask that you prioritize immunizations. LAC DPH will be messaging the community about the

importance of immunizations and the steps people can take to stay safe when visiting doctors' offices for well-child and immunization appointments.

Actions Requested of Providers

General

- **Make modifications as needed to patient flow systems and infection control precautions** in order to comply with the CDPH *Resuming California's Deferred and Preventive Health Care* [guidance](#).
- **Practice universal source control** including requiring the use of cloth face coverings for all patients and essential visitors (a cloth face covering should not be used in children under the age of 2, those who are unable to remove it without assistance, and persons having trouble breathing). Children between the ages of 2 and 8 should use them but under adult supervision to ensure that the child can breathe safely and avoid choking or suffocation. See LAC DPH *Cloth Face Coverings* [guidance](#) for more information.

Infants, Children and Adolescents

- **Address patient's and/or family's concerns about COVID-19 infection risk.** Proactively communicate information and provide reassurance about [steps your practice is taking to keep patients and clinic staff safe](#).
- **Remind parents that vaccine-preventable diseases remain a threat to their child and to their community.** It is important to protect their child against serious diseases which have not gone away during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Consider non-traditional or innovative approaches to providing immunizations.** Examples of strategies shared by professional medical organizations include:
 - Provide vaccines in a different location. This may require collaborating with providers in the community to identify separate locations for holding well visits for children.
 - Use hybrid telehealth/in-person models for immunization visits to reduce the length of face-to-face time required, such that telehealth appointments are followed by a brief immunization visit.
 - Partner with school districts to leverage school clinics and nurses who may not be working to hold childhood immunization clinics in familiar and separate locations
- **Prioritize newborn care and vaccination of infants and children up to 24 months of age, if your practice is not yet able to provide well-child visits and immunizations for all patients.** These patients are at highest risk for complications from vaccine preventable disease.
- **Refer patients for needed immunizations, if your practice is unable to provide them.** Consider referring patients to a pharmacy or other immunization resource. Some patients may be eligible to receive immunizations at a LA County facility – see below for contact information.
- **Use [catch-up immunizations schedules](#) where indicated and follow the [CDC recommendations](#) that children with mild illnesses receive [vaccines on schedule](#).**

Adults

- **Ensure pregnant women receive a pertussis immunization and when available, an influenza immunization.** Immunize as part of routine prenatal care and do not defer wherever possible. Both of these diseases are associated with increased morbidity and mortality during pregnancy and in newborns.
- **Immunize patients when there is a need for protection against prevalent illnesses e.g. bacterial pneumonia.** This should be based on an assessment that the potential benefit of the immunization outweighs the risk of possible exposure to COVID-19.
- **Provide immunizations opportunistically** when the patient is in clinic for other reasons. Actively review adult patient records to assess their need for immunizations (e.g. pneumococcus, *Haemophilus influenzae*, MMR, influenza, Tdap, and zoster).

Additional Resources

Vaccination During the COVID-19 pandemic

- LAC DPH [Guidance for Maintaining Childhood Immunizations During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- LAC DPH [Guidance on Maintaining Adult Immunizations and Immunizations for Pregnant Women During COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- CDC Vaccination Recommendations for [adults and children](#) during COVID-19
- AAP [Critical Updates on COVID-19](#)
- ACP [COVID-19: An ACP Physician's Guide + Resources](#)
- AAFP [Guidance for Family Physicians on Preventive and Non Urgent Care](#)
- ACOG [Clinical Guidance During COVID-19](#)

General Vaccine Guidance

Assessment tool for patients (including those who are or who are intending to become pregnant) to determine, in consultation with their provider, which immunizations they might need: <https://www2.cdc.gov/nip/adultimmsched/>

No-cost and Low-cost Immunization Clinics

Patients may be referred to the following resources for immunizations in Los Angeles County but should call first to confirm if they are eligible and that services are available:

- LAC DPH clinics <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chs/phcenters.htm>
- No-cost and low-cost immunization providers:
http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip/IZclinics/PROVIDERS_REFERAL_LIST_06_07_2018.pdf
- Dial 2-1-1 (Los Angeles County Information Line) or visit www.211la.org

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