

Discussing Vaccines with Parents and Caregivers

Maintaining Strong Recommendations for AI/AN Children

Even as national guidance evolves, American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) children should continue to be offered protection with all available childhood vaccines.

- Staying on schedule with vaccines that fall under HHS's routine, high-risk, and Shared Clinical Decision-Making (SCDM) recommendation groups ensures children are protected as early as possible and during the periods when they are most vulnerable.
- Clinicians and other health workers should continue to recommend vaccines in all three groups for AI/AN children. This is because AI/AN infants and children are at increased risk for illness, hospitalization, and complications from many vaccine-preventable diseases.
- Informed consent and the concept of SCDM are established practices within IHS/THP/UIO, and healthcare personnel should continue to support families in making informed choices.
 - In the context of SCDM, a healthcare provider includes anyone who provides or administers vaccines, including primary care physicians, specialists, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, nurses, and pharmacists.
 - Standing orders can still be used to implement these vaccinations, provided the required consultation between vaccinator and patient has occurred to determine if the vaccine is appropriate.

General Communication Tips:

- Present vaccination as the recommended medical standard of care. Consider using a standard script following a direct approach for vaccine conversations:
 - “Because [child is age _] + I strongly recommend [vaccine] today + why”
 - *Because TJ is 2 months old, he is due for his routine infant shots that protect against several serious illnesses. I strongly recommend that we give those today to keep him healthy. What questions can I answer before we prepare the vaccines?*
 - *Because Sara is 5 years old, I strongly recommend that she get her MMR vaccine today to protect her from getting sick with measles given the active cases in our state.*
- Emphasize that vaccines for children protect other family members and the larger community.
 - *Vaccination is an important way that we keep our whole community healthy. When children are vaccinated, this helps protect siblings, parents, grandparents, and other family members who could get very sick from these diseases, including those with chronic conditions or weakened immune systems.*
- Emphasize community-specific risks when relevant (e.g., local measles cases).
- Use active listening: repeat back parents’ concerns before responding (e.g., “It sounds like you’re worried about X. Is that right?”). Try to repeat general concerns without repeating false information.
- Listen to concerns and acknowledge them in a non-confrontational manner.
- If caregivers are hesitant about vaccinating, ask for permission before sharing information.
 - *“I can tell you want the best for your child, which is why you brought them in today. Is it ok if I share some information about vaccines and how they help protect your child?”*
- Be empathetic, offer credible resources, and maintain trust.

Discussion Points for Vaccinators

General Vaccine Information

- Vaccines train our warrior cells to be able to recognize and fight off germs that can cause serious illness.
- Vaccines help protect children at an early age, before they are exposed and when they are most vulnerable to serious infections.
- The vaccines recommended for children in the U.S. go through extensive review before approval. After approval, vaccine safety is monitored in millions of children nationwide. Serious vaccine side effects are very rare but the diseases vaccines prevent can cause long-term health problems or death.

Higher Risk

- Conditions such as pneumonia, influenza, and bloodstream infections can be very serious, especially in remote communities where access to care may be limited.
- Vaccines help the immune system recognize and fight serious diseases before exposure happens. Vaccines won't necessarily prevent mild cases of a disease, but they work very well to prevent more serious outcomes requiring emergency care or hospitalization.

Protecting the Whole Family and Community

- Vaccination doesn't just protect the child. It also helps protect siblings, parents, grandparents, and other members of the household and community who could get very sick from these diseases, including those with chronic conditions or weakened immune systems.
- Preventing disease helps reduce missed school, missed work, and travel for emergency care, which can be especially hard in our rural area.
- Vaccines have helped generations of children grow up healthier and stronger and they help the entire community to stay healthy.

Safety and Monitoring

- The vaccines we recommend have been carefully studied to ensure they are very safe and work well to prevent serious disease. After approval, vaccine safety is continuously monitored in millions of people nationwide.
- Serious vaccine side effects are very rare but the diseases that vaccines prevent can cause long-term health problems or death.

Respect for Family Values and Informed Decisions

- Parents and caregivers want to make the best decisions for their children's health, so it is understandable that there is some confusion with recent changes in vaccine recommendations.
- We are here to listen to concerns, answer questions, and provide clear information so families can make informed choices, especially in our communities that are often affected more severely by certain diseases.
- My role is to share information and support you in making the best decision for your child. What questions do you have today?

Importance of Staying on Schedule

- The vaccine schedule is designed to give protection at the ages when children need it most. Delaying vaccines can leave children unprotected during a critical time.
- Because of vaccination, many diseases that once caused serious illness, disability, or death in children are now rare. If vaccination rates drop, these diseases can return quickly, putting children at risk. For example, vaccination rates declined during the pandemic when there were challenges accessing care. Now there have been outbreaks of measles and pertussis in parts of the U.S. measles and pertussis can both lead to serious health problems, including hospitalization and death.
- Every pediatrician I know who has kids vaccinates them on the recommended schedule because we are so confident in their safety and their importance.

Reinforcing Trusted Care

- Choosing vaccination is a way many families protect their children today while honoring their hope for a healthy future.
- Vaccines are available through IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian health programs, which are committed providing safe, respectful, family-centered care.
- Our clinic is here to support your family. We provide vaccines as part of caring for your child's health and well-being.

Closing the Conversation

- Vaccines are one of the most effective ways we can protect your child now and help keep them healthy as they grow. I recommended we give these vaccines today.