



Indian Health Service
National Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee
Formulary Brief: Routine Vaccination during COVID-19
-November 2020-



Background:

Safe and effective immunization for a myriad of vaccine-preventable illnesses is the hallmark of the current era of contemporary medicine. For over a century, scientific advances resulting in the development of vaccines against epidemic infectious diseases have substantially reduced the toll of these diseases in global communities, including among American Indian and Alaska Native people. The threat of a resurgence of vaccine-preventable diseases can result from **vaccine non-acceptance and lack of access**. The global pandemic resulting from the SARS-CoV-2 virus increases this threat.

Discussion:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the delivery of healthcare and public health services globally, nationally, and in Indian Country. Physical distancing and other public health measures which are imperative to controlling the pandemic can potentially have the unintended consequence of reducing access to routine vaccination services. This risk has been borne out by data indicating a decline in vaccination rates, including among the highest risk pediatric and adult populations.

From the earliest stages of the pandemic, public health organizations have been advocating the importance of [prioritizing routine vaccinations during COVID-19, especially among children](#).¹ Ensuring regular, if not heightened, access to all ACIP-recommended vaccinations is critical, especially during the pandemic, to preventing disease outbreaks and reducing burden on the healthcare infrastructure.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued [Guidance on Providing Pediatric Well-Care During COVID-19](#).² It points out that concern exists that delays in vaccinations may result in secondary outbreaks with vaccine preventable illness. It recommends that all primary care providers ensure all newborns, infants, children, and adolescents are up to date on their comprehensive well-child care, inclusive of vaccines.

Similarly, the American College of Physicians has issued guidance on [Workflows to Promote Immunizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).³

The CDC recently updated its [interim guidance](#) on the provision of immunizations services during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ It includes;

- Administration of vaccines as an essential medical service;
- Assessment of the vaccination status of all patients across the lifespan at every healthcare visit;
- Administration of routinely recommended vaccines in children, adolescents, and adults including the encouragement of vaccination in the home, and;
- Implementation of effective strategies for catch-up vaccination.

Findings:

We must re-double our efforts to promote and ensure routine vaccination, including all ACIP-recommended vaccines, which have notably been long represented on the [IHS National Core Formulary](#). With particular focus on our most vulnerable populations, including infants and the elderly, **this effort should ensure safe access to all recommended immunizations for members of American Indian and Alaska Native communities across the age spectrum**. This requires a pro-active strategy and consistent messaging to reinforce the priority of routine vaccination, especially in the midst of this pandemic.

If you have any questions regarding this document, please contact the NPTC at IHSNPTC1@ihs.gov. For more information about the NPTC, please visit the [NPTC website](#).

References:

1. Indian Health Service. [NPTC Pharmacovigilance Drug Safety Alert](#), Prioritizing Vaccinations for Young Children During COVID-19, March 27, 2020.
2. American Academy of Pediatrics. [Guidance on Providing Pediatric Well-Care During COVID-19](#).
3. American College of Physicians. [Workflows to Promote Immunizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).
4. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Interim Guidance for Routine and Influenza Immunization Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pandemic-guidance/index.html>.